Transforming LGBTQ Lives

QUEER KINSHIP ON THE EDGE? FAMILIES OF CHOICE IN POLAND

Joanna Mizielińska

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Queer Kinship on the Edge? Families of Choice in Poland explores ways in which queer families from Central and Eastern Europe complicate the mainstream picture of queer kinship and families researched in the Anglo-American contexts.

The book presents findings from under-represented localities as a starting point to query some of the expectations about queer kinship and to provide insights on the scale and nature of queer kinship in diverse geopolitical locations and the complexities of lived experiences of queer families. Drawing on a rich qualitative multi-method study to address the gap in queer kinship studies which tend to exclude Polish or wider Central and Eastern perspectives, it offers a multi-dimensional picture of 'families of choice' improving sensitivity towards differences in queer kinship studies. Through case studies and interviews with diverse members of queer families (i.e., queer parents, their children) and their families of origin (parents and siblings), the book looks at queer domesticity, practices of care, defining and displaying families, queer parenthood familial homophobia, and interpersonal relationships through the life course.

This study is suitable for those interested in LGBT studies, sexuality studies, and kinship and Eastern European studies.

Joanna Mizielińska holds DSs (habilitation) in Sociology, University of Warsaw, and a PhD in Women's Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of Polish Academy of Sciences. She was a Fulbright scholar at Princeton University working under the mentoring of Professor Judith Butler, CIMO researcher at the Christina Institute, University of Helsinki, and visiting scholar at the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, Södertörn University and the Department of Gender Studies at Rutgers University. She currently works as Associate Professor at the Institute of Psychology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her interests concentrate on queer theory, queer kinship, and sociology of gender, sexuality, and families. Recently, she was a Principal Investigator of the project "Families of Choice in Poland" (2013–2016) and Co-Investigator in "Doing Right(s): Innovative Tools for Professionals Working With LGBT Families" (2016–2020) and "Queer(y)ing Kinship in the Baltic Region" (2016–2021). She is the author of *Different or Ordinary? Families of Choice in Poland* (2017), *Sex/Body/Sexuality* (2007), and *(De)Constructions of Femininity* (2004) and co-author of *In Different Voices. Families of Choice in Poland* (2017) and *Families of Choice in Poland. Family Life of Nonheterosexual Persons* (2015). She is co-editor of *De-Centring Western Sexualities* (Ashgate, 2011 and Routledge, 2016).

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To all my informants and chosen families everywhere

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1 Introduction

When I titled my project *Families of Choice in Poland*, I did not foresee the difficulties and confusion the simple name might evoke both in Poland and abroad, mainly in the Anglo-American academic environment.[1] In both contexts, the whole term "families of choice" was perceived as controversial, although for different reasons. On the one hand, during presentations at international conferences, I was repeatedly asked why I did not use other terminology. Kinship? Intimacy? Personal life? Why did I decide to keep alive such a heteronormative and useless concept? Consequently, I had to explain over and over again why despite doubts concerning the usefulness of the term "family" within the Anglo-American queer theory (Edelman 2004; Halberstam 2005; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; Warner 2000; May 2011; Wilkinson and Bell 2012),[2] in my project, I decided to use such a *passé* term and more importantly, I claimed its political importance in given (Polish) context. I argued that different ideas worked differently in other circumstances and pointed out that precisely because the term "family" was so mythologised and overloaded with heteronormative assumptions in Poland, using it becomes an act of resistance.

On the other hand, in Poland, the term was perceived as provocative: "aren't all families created by choice?", I was asked several times during interviews, after conference presentations and academic lectures. Critics suggested using other names such as relationships, intimacies, and couples as more suitable – for a different reason than in the West, however. In the Polish mainstream discourse, LGBTIQ+ persons are perceived as family outlaws, and their relationships are not called families, even if they raise children. Once, at a Polish conference, when I talked about "families of choice", I was asked: "How many of THESE have we got in Poland?" It was as if the person who asked this question could not even utter the word "family" in the context of non-heterosexual relationships (and he was/is not the only one). Precisely because of this, I undertook this project believing in the politics of naming and aiming to show diverse familial experiences hidden behind numbers. I have believed that it is essential to retain the term, stick with/to it even. In a country where "family" is reserved exclusively for the nuclear model, and other configurations are refused the name of families, daring to reach for such a sacred word, using it in the context of same-sex

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relational life was a conscious political (and queer?) act with a clear objective to change the mainstream discourse as well as the self-perception of LGBTIQ communities.

The above controversy over the simple naming reflects some of the key arguments of this book, namely the need to go beyond Anglo-American hegemony in queer kinship (with its taken-for-granted conceptual framework) to fully understand the diversity of queer kinning elsewhere and create a new conceptual framework capacious enough to grasp them. In this book, I show that the suggestion that we should abandon the term family as fundamentally heteronormative (and not queer) is inadequate in the Polish context. The meaning of kinship/family is firmly linked with the geo-temporal specificity of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region (Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011). Consequently, instead of thinking about family and queerness in opposition (which is the dominant paradigm in conservative media in Poland curiously resembling the arguments of some queer critics; see Mizielińska and Stasińska 2017), I want to ask what could there be queer about family/kinship in the post-communist locality? Is it possible to think of queerness and family, not in opposition but in conjunction? What lesson could Anglo-American/Western queer scholars draw by recognising non-Western geo-temporal differences in this subject? My empirical findings reflect the above-described tussles and illuminate the in-betweenness of West/non-West or, better on the West's ground, between "West" and CEE. Therefore, any resemblance or consistency with Western findings might be justified and simultaneously delusive, as I explain later, complicating the West/East divide and strict boundaries between the core and the periphery.

Nowadays, global academic knowledge production on (queer) kinship and families is mostly based on Anglo-American/Western ways of experiencing sexuality, kinship/families strengthening the "Western perspective" as the normative "zero-point",[3] placed at the very centre of all narratives, and used as an obligatory reference for all comparisons, leaving other geopolitical locations under-researched. Many feminist and queer scholars from around the world have already criticised Anglo-American hegemonies demonstrating how scholars from the peripheries are never considered providers of theoretical frameworks and a part of the canon but rather informants, data miners, and/or "poor relatives" whose role is to reproduce the knowledge produced by their more advanced Western colleagues (Silva, Ornat, and Mason-Deese 2020; Kulpa and Silva 2016; Ramon, Simonsen, and Vaiou 2006; Browne and Ferreira 2015). They have indicated the urgent need to decolonise queer epistemologies not only by the simple inclusion of hitherto excluded voices but the deeper deconstruction of knowledge foundations and greater sensitivity to the geopolitics of knowledge production. This book joins their criticism and aims to address the lack of knowledge on queer kinship in so far marginalised regions of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). It is based on extensive mixed and multi-method study of non-heterosexual families (Families of Choice in

Poland/FOCIP) and explores their experiences, family practices, ways of displaying and sustaining family ties, and queer bonding. In focusing on queer kinship on the margin/on the edge yet in the close and still under-explored proximity of the "West", the book examines how current theoretical work rooted in research about queer families and kinship in Anglo-American contexts gets undermined, questioned, and/or destabilised in other geopolitical locations with different history and constructs of gender and sexuality. It contributes to theoretical discussions on ethnocentrism as the presented findings often contest Western theories of same-sex intimacies, relationships, and kinship, pointing towards the need for a more significant "localisation" of knowledge production and demonstrating how theoretical tools need to be tailored to the experience of queer people living "beyond the pink curtain" (Kuhar and Takács 2007).

My main goal in this book is to demonstrate that while studying queer families on the Western edge, we cannot merely employ models and concepts developed in geopolitical locations with much more inclusive legislation and accepting social attitudes because they might work differently there. We need to look for other epistemological, theoretical, and conceptual tools to embrace diverse ways of queer kinning (Howell 2003) worldwide and challenge contemporary Anglo-American dominance. A look from the edge might sharpen our way of seeing, allowing us to change the scale and perspective on (queer) kinship phenomena, and imagine new forms of thinking about kinship that challenges contemporary Anglo-American hegemony. Instead of looking at queer ways of relating in other localities as a mere derivate of those already described in the West but only more traditional, underdeveloped, and/or premodern, the book reverses the perspective and aims to create a new conceptual framework and more inclusive paradigms that embrace complexities of doing queer families/kinship all over the world.

This introductory chapter presents the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of the book and its key themes, as well as crucial and inspiring analytical concepts. In the first part, I critically assess the current state of knowledge on queer kinship, particularly engaging with current debates and voices criticising the all-pervasive hegemonic framings of the "West". I reflect on the key concepts developed in the Anglo-American contexts and their potential (un)translatability into other non-Western localities. I also engage with the work written on queer kinship and sexualities from CEE perspectives to problematise and pluralise the notion of Western kinship and sexuality and indicate its "con-temporal periphery" – that is, the mechanisms of "othering" CEE by rendering it as "permanently transitional"/"post-communist" and in the constant need of catching up (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011; Stella 2015). In the second part, I situate my work within a larger framework and writings about the "CEE" as the Western Other (e.g., Wolff 1994; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Todorova 1997; Forrester, Zaborowska, and Gapova 2004; Melegh 2006). Works on sexuality and queer studies in and of CEE often question some of the Western

ways of analysing queer sexualities and the universality of the dominant theoretical perspectives (i.e., public/private, invisibility/visibility dichotomies, the simplistic polarisation of closet/coming out paradigm, see Stella 2015).

Consequently, they show the urgent need to de-centre Western perspective (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011; Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011). Works from other geo-locations, with their primary focus on postcolonial regions and "global queering" (Boellstorff 2004; Binnie 2004, 2013; Engebretsen 2013), help me strengthen the critical arguments about othering and orientalisation of same-sex relationships from non-Western locations. Through dialogue with these works, the present book pushes their critical stance further, moving the attention from queer sexualities *per se*, to queer relationships and ways of kinning in the so-far under-explored region of CEE. In the reminder part of the chapter, I intend to describe the Polish context focusing on living situations and the legal framework of queer families in Poland. First, I present Polish familialism, its main features, and roots. Then drawing on research and public opinion polls, I unveil Polish heteronormativity and its influence on the development of the LGBTIQ+ community and lived experience of queer families. In the final part, I will briefly present the content of the following chapters.

Queer kinship/family theoretical framework

In my approach to queer kinship and families, I am inspired by the British "new family studies" (NFS) and its practice-based approach (Morgan 1996, 2011a, 2011b; Bernardes 1997; Cheal 1993; Levin 1993; Gabb 2008) but also indebted to the relational/personal turn in researching families (Smart 2007b; Roseneil and Ketokivi 2016; Wall et al. 2019). NFS postulate the rejection of the "universality" and "naturalness" of families (especially the nuclear family, put at the centre by the "traditional" sociology of the family), and the traditional concept of family as ideologically burdened. Instead, they propose investigating how social actors understand family and stress the importance of real and everyday practices in family life (Cheal 1993; Levin 1993; Morgan 1996; Bernardes 1997). This approach offers a new perspective on social reality by identifying family configurations that have hitherto been invisible or perceived as a deviation from the norm (Levin and Trost 1992). NFS calls for a more complex and dynamic understanding of underlying actuality and everyday familial practices (focusing on the family members' point of view). This approach offers new accounts on social reality by recognising family variations that have been invisible for sociology or have been perceived as "deviant" (Levin 1993; Trost 1993).

In the sociology of family, the emergence of NFS marks the transition from analysing the family structure and its functions to exploring the ways in which relationships (family, intimacy) are experienced and materialised in everyday practices. The foundations for this type of thinking were given by the works of David Morgan (1996, 2011a, 2011b), who coined the

concept of "family practices", shifting the researchers' attention from thinking about the family as an unchanging being to its processual character – "doing families" vs. being family. In his opinion, in families, we do not deal with pre-conceptualised permanent reality but with something that is always happening and is built in relationships with others through various everyday practices. Emphasising the importance of family-forming practices instead of static shots, he introduced its dynamic understanding. His approach puts at the centre relationality and a variety of ways of doing families, which on the one hand are individual and, on the other hand, always bear the hallmarks of the influence of predefined forms, depending on the socio-cultural-legal context.

In her "displaying families" concept, Janet Finch refers to Morgan's family practices (Morgan 2011a, 2011b). However, she develops further his idea by introducing an additional element, emphasising that "families need to be displayed as well as done" (Finch 2007, 66). In her opinion, displaying families means all the efforts to present one's relationships as a family, combined with the need to be recognised in other people's eyes. She distinguishes three essential elements of this display. First of all, it means a direct meeting of those who create a family together. Secondly, to be effective, it must contain an element of reciprocity. Thirdly, external others play a significant role in confirming this self-presentation, that is, performing the necessary function of an exterior auditorium, watching and accepting (or not) a given performance.

Finch believes that everyday presentation practices as a family are always associated with the desire to have the status of their relationship adequately recognised by more or less significant others. This last element is especially crucial for this book because it demonstrates how private dimensions of family life always already intersect with the public ones. For the manifestation of one's relationships as a family to be effective, it must be "properly" read by other social actors (close and distant family, friends, institutions, etc.). As I will try to show, this external auditorium regularly assesses, rejects, reads in accordance with or inconsistent with the intention, and continuously compares with the taken-for-granted heteronormative standards. Its presence forces same-sex couples in Poland to make a constant effort and work out strategies to combat the possibility of being misread and to (re) negotiate their position as a family.

Although I deliberately chose the concept of "family", as I described earlier, I find Carol Smart's (2007b) idea of "personal life" a significant sociological intervention offering a broader conceptual frame to capture diverse ways of people's relationships. Smart agrees with Morgan that family is something we do (Morgan 1996) but underlines the need to describe the families and relationships existing in our imagination, emotions, and memory, as they are just as essential and fundamental as our daily family practices. Not only does she go beyond conventionally understood families and opens up to new family forms, but she opposes the thesis on individualisation and detraditionalisation, as executed by Anthony Giddens,

Urlich Beck, and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (i.e., family as a zombie category). In contrast, Smart shows the importance of embeddedness and relationality and their sometimes-sticky nature. She believes that "poor relationships are a part of family life and family members just have to live with them" (Smart 2007b, 135). If lives are interrelated and interdependent (materially, emotionally, or metaphorically), it is not easy to end a relationship when it does not meet one's expectations. Relationships often do not end even with the death of a loved one or when the person runs away from the family (e.g., after coming out) because they persist in our memory and affect us. So even after a practical break of family ties, people continue to engage in imaginary conversations with its members and experience strong emotions when they think about their family. In this context, Smart develops her concept of the stickiness of family ties. She writes,

> these relationships are very "sticky"; it is hard to shake free from them at an emotional level, and their existence can continue to influence our practices and not just thoughts […] Blood relationships, in particular, seem to be unique in possessing these haunting powers.
>
> (Smart 2007b, 45)

In the chapter devoted to relations with families of origin (Chapter 4), I will discuss how Smart's idea of stickiness resonates in the Polish context where kin bonding is perceived as particularly important.

Undoubtedly, the practices approach validated the status of families of choice as fully fledged, recognised research entities, which was particularly valuable for the Polish sociology of family, which has been very heteronormative until recently (Adamski 2002; Tyszka 2005; Szlendak 2010; Sikorska 2019). From the perspective of the committed researcher of LGBTQ families who has been researching the LGBTIQ+ community for many years, I must say that the practices approach has become my greatest ally. It created spaces for scientific alliances, joint research projects and creative discussions on similarities and differences between various "alternative family constellations" and heteronormative families (Mizielińska et al. 2018; Schmidt et al. 2018; Żadkowska, Olcoń-Kubicka et al. 2018; Żadkowska, Jasińska et al. 2018). This approach made it possible to see how similar challenges, needs, and desires are present in different family configurations. However, huge differences emerge when we look at doing and displaying families in the Polish context compared to the Anglo-American one, as shown in the following chapters. In Poland, the possibilities of doing and displaying families are dramatically different from those in the US or UK. Poland is nowadays the biggest country in the EU that does not recognise and protect LGBTQ families in any form. As long as increasingly right-wing and homophobic government rules in Poland, nothing will change for LGBTQ families, and their welfare will be compromised again and again.

Family practices are of great importance for building familial and intimate bonds (Mizielińska 2017; Mizielińska and Stasińska 2018, 2020; Stasińska 2018, 2020). Nevertheless, it must be noted that when families of choice display their family life, that is, by practising family openly, they put themselves in a very vulnerable position and risk their emotional, familial, and social well-being. Therefore, the act of displaying family is always marked by possible failures and being closeted over and over again. Moreover, what families perceive as an "obvious" display is often misread and not recognised as such. Whereas their family practices might work in their private sphere/bubble, they are blocked by institutional and mental ignorance and misrecognition in public. Furthermore, while families of choice are now gradually recognised by critical family sociology, the right-wing government proposes to develop a new academic discipline called "family studies", based on ultra-conservative values, prejudices and the ideology of a heteronormative family, aiming to promote the only correct model of family life. This turn shows the split between progressiveness and regressiveness that mark our lives as academics and the life of LGBTIQ+ families that function in this limbo, in-betweenness.

Acknowledging these "Western" inspirations and/or using some of their concepts does not mean I apply them uncritically. Some of them are more suitable than others. Some might function differently in different locations, as I demonstrate in the following chapters. For instance, what doing and displaying families means in Poland might be completely illegible from the UK perspective, where queer families are recognised, legally protected, and have become a part of the social landscape (in terms of their visibility, among other things). Therefore, I find beneficial concepts and ideas from non-Western contexts, notably coined by academics working in the CEE, which often much better explain the complexity of queer family life.

Here, the notions of "transparent closet" and "family closet", developed by Slovenian scholars Roman Kuhar and Alenka Švab, are particularly useful. They introduced them to describe a particular type of reaction of the family of origin to coming out/disclosing a non-heterosexual person (Švab and Kuhar 2014). Often, unable to deal with this information, the family of origin chooses a strategy to pass over this fact, ignoring it (transparent closet) and not mentioning it to other family members and friends (family closet). Nevertheless, this reaction has an impact on the revealing person him/herself. According to the researchers, the transparent closet refers to situations, mainly in the family, when coming out has the effect of a partial disclosure only: parents know that their child is gay, but they do not have the will to recognise it in any way. The child leaves the closet, but the parents' reaction and expectations push them back into the closet, which is now transparent because the parents are aware of the "new identity" but still refuse to accept it.

The authors reject the most popular perception of coming out as a one-sided and single act, after which everything changes for the better. Instead, they propose to read it as a relational and never-ending process. In their

interpretation, disclosure might be noted by others, but without being the subject of further discussion or reflection, instead of working through it, the "problem" is silent; it becomes a "family secret" (Švab and Kuhar 2014). Although Kuhar and Švab mostly describe the reaction to information about individual sexual identity, I expand their range of meaning and refer to the response to coming out of a relationship, that is, informing the family of origin that a person is in a same-sex relationship. The relationship makes the eventual individual coming out to the family irreversible as if confirming its finality (previously, parents could still delude themselves that their child would change). Besides, it reveals a "problem" that is harder to hide or pass over, mainly if it concerns a same-sex couple who raises a child because it shows the "otherness" of the family to a greater extent than ever before. The arrival of a child redefines the whole family as different, confronting the family of origin with prejudices and heterosexual oppression that it may not have been aware of before. Family of origin might experience similar dilemmas concerning friends or neighbours as family of choice does, unable to easily hide the nature of their children's relationship.

In my theoretical inspiration, I also find helpful postcolonial scholarship on marginalised queer families in the US (Acosta 2013; Decena 2011; Moore 2011). For instance, in her work on Latino lesbians, Katie L. Acosta criticises the taken-for-granted metaphor of coming out of the closet (with all its premises and consequences). She underlies the necessity for non-white Latino lesbians to maintain and engage in personal work and care with families of origin, which often stands in strong opposition with an open declaration of one's sexuality (i.e., see her concept of nepantla and nepantlera in Acosta 2013).

In other postcolonial works, there is also a tendency to question Western dominant explanatory models of queer lives that do not capture the experienced realities of Non-Western locations (Decena 2011; Horton 2017; Pai 2017). Many resist the validity of identity categories and coming out imperative, showing that in other places where the meaning of family is different, people find other ways to negotiate their sexualities. For instance, in Decena's ethnographic study of Dominican gay men, he shows their tacit negotiations of the closet. In their attempts to sustain kinship bonds that they find particularly important, they develop tacit ways to express their gayness, making the Western coming out imperative redundant (Decena 2011). Criticising the script of the oppressed third-world gays in need of saving, Brian Horton shows the interplay of inventiveness, care, and even violence that foreground the experiences of queers in India. This interplay of forces conditions how and whether queers choose to reveal their sexual desires and revolves around respectability ideas – both for the self and the family – and a commitment to queer forms of pleasure and desire. As an alternative to the universalising (Western) narrative of what it means to be queer, Horton claims the importance of nondisclosure (Horton 2017). In the recently published book, Iris Erh-Ya Pai shows how coming out might put family ties at risk and that "sometimes, coming out is not only a

conceptual opposition between lying and honesty but also a matter of life and death" (Pai 2017, 48). Support and acceptance are often more important in the family than in the broader society, particularly in cultural contexts, emphasising kinship/relational ties rather than individualism.

Their ideas are in accordance with some research done in CEE. Francesca Stella's book (2015) is a long-needed empirical intervention that challenges mainstream Western conceptualisation of sexual identity from the CEE perspective. She bases her analysis on extensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Moscow and Ulyanovsk and focuses on the experiences, practices, and identities of non-heterosexual women. Throughout her monograph, she critically engages with some taken-for-granted notions and paradigms in Western sexuality studies, such as the closet/coming out dichotomy. Focusing on non-heterosexual women's accounts on negotiations of their sexuality across different everyday settings (home, workplace and the street) she problematises ahistorical aspatial notions of the closet and the notion of coming out as an individual choice. Thereby, she joins the critical debates on the dominance of Western/Anglo-American perspectives within sexuality studies that point out that sexual practices are understood, lived by, and conceptualised differently in different socio-cultural locations (Stella 2015).

It is interesting to see how different voices from the skirts of the Anglo-American world, when heard together, question taken-for-granted concepts, analyses, and ideas, showing their incompatibilities and insensitivities with local conditions beyond the West. Perceived from that marginal angle, they become very particular, problematic with their empowering/subversive power depending on time and space. As Michal Pitoňák, Czech queer geographer, rightly argues, we need to be very vigilant about seeing local contexts through theoretical lenses and concepts developed elsewhere (Pitoňák 2019, 8). This is precisely one of the intentions throughout this book to question the normative conceptual framework defined through the Anglo-American context and instead develop a new, more inclusive one.

Current Dilemma? Assimilation vs. Subversion Is not the Same Everywhere

While writing about queer families in CEE, it is impossible not to refer to the Western debates about whether families created by non-heterosexual people are radically different from heterosexual ones, or on the contrary, they are the same, inscribing into the dominant heteronormative vision of family life. As I claim, this Western oppositional thinking about queer families and relationships might look completely different in the CEE context.

Anglo-American queer commentators often oppose the struggle for LGBT family legitimacy as an attempt to assimilate to the heteronormative status quo, which they perceive as a repudiation of distinctive queer culture. Ken Plummer believes that the actual value of queer kinship lies beyond blood ties in its rejection of conventional understandings of the family

(Plummer 1995). Michel Warner places "gayness" out of normality, outside the institutions and ordinary social duties. He equalises non-heterosexual (queer) identity with non-normative sexual behaviour and choices related to a specific lifestyle outside of socially recognised forms. He considers gays and lesbians who demand universal recognition and respect as maliciously defensive, humble, asking for forgiveness, while the real queer people, according to him, build their lives bravely regardless of the society, without looking at norms and conventions (Warner 2000). Other (queer) theorists also believe that genuinely queer existence always means resistance and subversion of social norms. For example, Judith Halberstam opposes being queer to the family, writing that "queer use of time and place develops, at least in part, in opposition to family institutions, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (Halberstam 2005, 1).

Discussion on this subject has become particularly stormy in the face of acceptance of same-sex marriages by an increasing number of countries, which for many researchers and theorists, meant that, in a sense, the same model of relationship for everyone was beginning to apply. Many of them are afraid that marriage will domesticate and normalise lesbians and gays. The most problematic aspect of this process is, in their opinion, turning away from fundamental resistance to heteronormativity, seen as a hallmark of queer cultural sensitivity. Some see marriage recognition as assimilation to heteronormative ideals, their maintenance, and imposing normative behaviour, desires, one model of life for all non-heterosexual people. They call such aspirations homonormative. Lisa Duggan defines homonormative politics as such, "which does not question dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but on the contrary, upholds and supports them by promises to demobilize gay voters and privatize depoliticized gay culture by anchoring it in domestication and consumption" (Duggan 2002, 190). According to Duggan, the demand for the right to marriage limits LGBT activities to the private sphere, leaving the public sphere with its homophobia intact. In this way, privacy claims in the public sphere and the loud demand for rights are rejected in favour of public recognition of domesticated, depoliticised privacy. The democratic diversity and proliferation of sexual otherness are being supplanted in favour of a naturalised version of one and permanent minority constructed around state-approved heterosexual primacy. According to Duggan and others (Bell and Binnie 2000; Halberstam 2005; Polikoff and Bronski 2008), demanding same-sex marriage is part of the advanced process of stripping queer policy of its progressive potential.

This discussion took on an incredibly vivid character with the publication of Lee Edelman's *No Future. Queer Theory and the Death Drive* aimed to oppose excessive fixation on the family (and having children) as part of the LGBT movement. Edelman criticises the "reproductive futurism", whose symbol is a child, thereby questioning the desire of many gays and lesbians to be parents. In his opinion, these desires are contrary to what constitutes the essence of queer and "death drive". As he writes, "queer

defines those who do not fight for children" (Edelman 2004, 3). He postulates the need to accept that queer represents the negation of society's future, always associated with the child.

In my opinion, Edelman and other theoreticians related to the anti-social turn might maintain the immutability and authenticity of a certain form of "family", without noticing the efforts of those who build them with the genuine belief creating some new value. They also present a very restrictive reading of what queer is and what it should not be. They think of family in a normative way, evaluating every effort to build it as a copy of the ideal, and forgetting what Judith Butler, one of the leading queer theorists, said a long time ago, that any repetition could carry the possibility of subversion and thus undermine the existence of the original (Butler 2006). As a result, they might even maintain heterosexuality as a norm, describing lesbian and gay families as predetermined, having a specific essence (Hicks 2011, 41). They also cease to remember that in reality, we deal with a strictly defined, socially constructed, and variable (in time and space) family form for which no original has ever existed. Neither do they notice the difference between what should exist in their opinion, that is, that queer people should be always life rebels, rejecting all normality/normativity, and what real, ordinary queer people really care about in their lives (e.g., creating relationships, caring for others, fighting for their rights to have a child, etc.).

Edelman and other authors are also not attentive to specific local contexts, taking for granted Anglo-American privileged perspective and forgetting that queer families in other geo-political locations are still considered a threat to the traditional family, and their demands for recognition are excluded from the national imaginary (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2014, 2017). Thus, by rejecting the family, giving up the dreams of having it, the field is given to homophobic opponents, those who have always denied this right and thought, like Edelman, that the concept "no future" best describes the destiny of a queer person – lonely, childless, etc. For instance, in the Polish mainstream, the term family is still reserved exclusively for a heterosexual nuclear family, and queers are perceived as family outlaws. It shows that Edelman's criticism is quite limited to a particular location and privileges that non-heterosexual persons from outside the Anglo-American cultural context do not have (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011).

More and more researchers question the dichotomy between resistance and subversion and show its potential harm for queer people in their reality (Hequembourg 2007; Lewin 2009; Ryan-Flood 2009; Hicks 2011). For example, while researching gay fatherhood, Ellen Lewin shows that they are somewhat between a rock and a hard place. They are not only bombarded with sexist and homophobic opinions about themselves in the public sphere as "inappropriate parents" but also fed with no less ideologically unfair views of queer critics, who think they know their motives, values, and actions better. She rightly writes,

> perhaps paradoxically, both queer critics of demands for family-related entitlements and opponents who ground their positions in conservative and religious rhetoric draw on substantially the same images of lesbian and gay people as profoundly different from the mainstream in ways that embody subversion, disorder, and license. If being gay or lesbian is always assumed to be defined as self-conscious resistance against the mainstream, as a daring challenge to the status quo, then both conservative and queer critiques of family desires can be seen as rooted in the same set of ideas.
>
> (Lewin 2009, 12)

A call for going beyond the subversion/transgression dilemma and avoiding such simplifications in discussing queer family lives is obvious in empirical studies that question mainly theoretically developed assumptions (i.e., Edelman never researched queer families). Particularly useful in this respect is the category of ordinariness described by British researchers (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013; Browne and Bakshi 2016). In their book on young same-sex couples (about 30 years old) married in the UK: Brian Heaphy, Carol Smart, and Anna Einarsdottir noticed that their interlocutors often described their relationships as ordinary, not remarkably different from their heterosexual peers. It prompted them to reflect on the importance of this belief in ordinariness that is not normalising. First of all, they point out that there has been an apparent generational change among non-heterosexual people. Unlike the previous generation, deprived of much social support (as well as legitimacy in the form of partnerships or marriages), having no other option but the necessity to engage in life experiments, the generation of their interlocutors did not want to be the exemplification of Gidensian "avant-garde of radically relational life" or "the prime everyday experimenters". However, this did not mean that their relationships were not radical in practice. As the authors succinctly claim,

> in some situations, they clearly were [radical], especially where their visibility as a "married" couple disrupted the heterosexual assumptions and where their very ordinariness troubled constructions of homosexual pathology and depravity. Nevertheless, the ways in which most modelled their relationship on the ordinary was linked to the broader ways in which they saw their lives as ordinary. This is not because they are unthinking victims of heterosexual ideologies (cf. Warner 2000), but because their generational circumstances made it possible to feel relatively ordinary compared to the previous generation of lesbians and gay men.
>
> (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013, 23)

Researchers do not want to read this right of young same-sex couples to the ordinariness within the framework of the different/the same dilemma and/or as a confirmation of queer criticism that same-sex partnerships are

merely assimilationist to the existing status quo. They consider such reading as simplifying. In their view, "claims to ordinariness are sometimes explicit, and more often an implicit, recognition that 'all' marriages are the same and different to the extent that they are vital in terms of interpersonal affect, and the meanings and practices they involve" (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013, 34). Kath Browne and Leela Bakshi push their critical stance even further, arguing for politics of ordinariness and the power of being ordinary which is different to assimilationists. As they show, the conceptualisation of ordinariness through becoming commonplace allows transcending the binaries of marginalisation/inclusion, normalisation/queer. They powerfully demonstrate that LGBT people might seek ordinariness (but not normalisation) because in their daily lives they still experience exclusion, marginalisations, and homophobia despite the LGBT legislative inclusion (Browne and Bakshi 2016).

In the book, I demonstrate the usefulness of the concept of "ordinariness" in a completely different cultural and social context, where there are no forms of socio-legal recognition of same-sex couples. Is the ordinariness category justifying one's right to be a family in Poland similar or different to the demand for the ordinariness of British legally recognised couples? Where does this argument matter and become a more effective strategy in the fight for recognition? What is it like to claim to be ordinary in a less LGBTQ friendly locality? I argue that in the context of Poland, aspirations to ordinariness have more radical potential.

In my approach, I complicate this dichotomist thinking in relation to the Polish context, which gives another dimension to the dilemma of what is considered queer and/or (homo)normative. I argue that without understanding how geo-temporal locations influence queer ways of doing families, we cannot judge and/or assume that any choices are homonormative or revolutionary. Other researchers from CEE show that cultural context influences what counts as assimilation and subversion, homonormative, and homonational.[4] For instance, in his analysis of the heteronormative panopticon of the public space in Slovenia, Roman Kuhar demonstrates that in such context, even the smallest form of queer visibility might be subversive (Kuhar 2011). Polish researchers, Łukasz Szulc and Agata Stasińska, among others, show that in the Polish homophobic context, any queer-like and more subversive strategies might be counterproductive (Szulc 2018; Stasińska 2020). Szulc also draws our attention to how the concept of rainbow LGBT friendly (Western) Europe is used against its peripheries, disciplining them, erasing them, presenting them as more homophobic than homonationalist (Szulc 2018).

In general, the very concept of homonormativity and the dilemma subversive/assimilationist describe processes that mainly concern the Anglo-American context, where LGBT rights and visibility issues are presented differently. LGBT families there, at least the most privileged and selected one (white, wealthy, educated, middle-class, married), receive state-sanctioned benefits and recognition, alongside and in relation to growing racial

and economic inequalities and violence (Montegary 2018).[5] In Poland, homonormativity is hardly imaginable. Instead, there is open disapproval of non-heterosexual relationships and LGBTQ people in general (now called "LGBT ideology"), presented in the dominant discourse as an antithesis or a threat to the family. Tolerance is higher when non-heterosexual people fit into the social stereotypes of either a lonely and unhappy person or a promiscuous, non-monogamous one, unable to create a lasting relationship. Thus as the embodiment of subversion and disorder. Consequently, disapproval increases when non-heterosexual people emphasise their right to form a family and demand recognition. The most significant controversy after the publication of our project survey results was aroused by the fact that its queer respondents are in happy and long-lasting relationships (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). In the third part of this chapter, I describe the Polish context and return to the question of its fundamental heteronormativity.

When East Meets West: CEE and Anglo-American hegemonies

The position where/from which I speak and write should be understood as always already situated – both spatially and temporally. Therefore, capturing it means locating it first. In thinking of my "politics of location" (Rich 1986), I am indebted to many scholars who have written about standpoint epistemology, geopolitics, and body-politics of knowledge[6] – starting with feminists of colour, through materialist feminists and situated knowledge by Donna Haraway to the recent post/decolonial thinkers who develop the critique of Western hegemony and increasing asymmetry in knowledge production, and emphasise the value of subaltern perspective and thinking from the margins (Haraway 1988; Harding 1988; Hull 1982; Mignolo 2011; Rodríguez, Boatcă, and Costa 2010; Spivak 2007; Tlostanova 2015; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). Walter Mignolo's paraphrase of Cartesian "Cogito ergo sum" into "I am where I think" is the perfect exemplification of the decolonial approach to the geopolitics of knowledge production, and it explains my understanding of knowledge as always already located (Mignolo 2011). My situated embodied position is characterised by being at the crossroads, at the borderland that implies "crazy quilting, dirty blending, and creolizing" (Kulawik and Kravchenko 2019, 85). It is a site of skirmishes between hegemonic discourses in a transnational context (i.e., being a part of what might be called global queer academia, competing to publish in well-ranked journals in English) and my position as a queer/sexuality researcher whose interest is strictly connected with CEE geopolitical location in-between, as a contemporary "close periphery" (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011) or semi-periphery (to use a concept developed by the Serbian philosopher Marina Blagojević), always trying to catch up with the more advanced "centre"/West.

This in-betweenness and/or "borderlands" position (Kulawik and Kravchenko 2019) is particularly visible when academics from CEE try to

develop their critical stance towards concepts and theories born in the Anglo-American contexts (and as queer academics in global queer academia, we are expected to know and use them) that fail to grasp their CEE experience. Their criticism is uncomfortable for Western researchers and some CEE ones, who often sustain their orientalisation in the Western academia, believing in Western progressivist taxonomy and respecting the Western position of theory/knowledge producer. Before describing the postcolonial and decolonial stance, I first return to the question of the "impossible" location of the CEE on the world's map.

Where and When Is CEE? Space and Time Revisited

To understand the idea of CEE means locating it first. However, bringing back the awareness of CEE as a particular locality with its specificity is not an easy task when even simple naming might cause a problem.[7] It has been argued that "CEE" is a place of limbo, of "in-betweenness", semi-developed, semi-colonial, semi-civilised, and semi-oriental (Todorova 1997). It differs from the designated loci of the "core" and the "colony", which concern most postcolonial thinkers. In their writing, they refer to the process of self-essentialisation of "West"/"Europe" at the expense of the "East", pointing out ethnocentrism and limitations of Western theories on sexuality in particular (Boellstorff 2004; Manalansan 2003), and the power asymmetry in the production and distribution of any knowledge in general.

However, "CEE" functions more as a marker of ambiguity, fluidity, porous character of "East-West slopes" (Melegh 2006, 36). It represents a separate transitional category between the "real West" and "East", between "civilization" and "barbarism" (Melegh 2006). Todorova calls it "the dark side within" (Todorova 1997, 188). CEE marks its ambiguity and continuity and shows possibilities of its subversiveness. As Tlostanova rightly claims,

> By introducing it [CEE] into the dichotomous scheme of West/vs. East or North/vs. South we immediately complicate and disrupt the binarity through a strange and disturbing agent which acts simultaneously as the colonizer and the colonized, unable to join any of the extremes, and generating oxymoronic subcategories instead, such as the poor North which does not equal the poor or global South, or the South of the poor North.
>
> (Tlostanova 2012, 130)

Its intermediary position complicates the East/West dichotomy and has the potential to undermine its mutuality by "messing around (with)" the homogenous and "transparent" categories of the "West" and the "East" (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011, 30).

A lot of has been written already about the specificity of CEE position as Western internal Other, the placelessness of the whole region, and/or its appearance as a "void" or "a non-region" (see, for example, Boatcă 2006;

Kulawik and Kravchenko 2019; Sušová-Salminen 2012; Tlostanova 2012; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). After the dissolution of the bipolar world in 1989, once genuine and concrete Second World with clear geographical boundaries and the unquestioned political and economic entity was included into the Global North, closed in one bag and named "West and the rest" (Kulawik and Kravchenko 2019) in opposition to the Global South. Immediately after this "return to normality" sometimes presented as "a return to Europe" (which *de facto* means West), all countries which once belonged to the Soviet bloc became "former-socialist". Their apparent difference has been presented in temporal rather than spatial terms, that is, they became transitional democracies always in the process of catching up with the more advanced West. In this respect, Tlostanowa notices,

> the almost overnight vanishing of the second world led to a typical Western understanding of the post-Soviet as a time, not as space. It is the time after socialism and not the dozens of millions of rendered irrelevant lives of those who inhabit the post-communist space.
>
> (Tlostanova 2012, 132)

The fall of the Iron Curtain and the vanishing of the Second World caused the rebirth of old/new discourses on a descending slope of regional cultures and CEE (internal/cultural?) backwardness (Wolff 1994; Melegh 2006). This kind of approach means that the specificity of the East European position and the post-socialist conditions tend to disappear (Kulawik and Kravchenko 2019, 9). The whole region starts to be perceived as dislodged, a semi-periphery similar to the West but not similar enough. Not completely Other, but not the same either. As a consequence of such disappearance, CEE functions as "western's Europe incomplete self" (Boatcă 2006, 100), delayed but slowly catching up with the more advanced "centre", particularly regarding its sexual politics and LGBT activism (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011).

The perception of CEE/Eastern Europe as Western incomplete Other, whose differences are explained in temporal rather than spatial terms, has consequences in the "omissions" and blindness concerning CEE sexuality and (queer) kinship studies in particular, and any other valuable knowledge production in general. It might also explain a lack of articles on CEE in edited volumes discussing sexuality or queer families (Mizielińska 2011, 2020). Western (queer/sexuality) scholars often overlook differences rooted in specific geopolitical locations because they think about their own developmental path of LGBT politics as a universal and original one. The West is imagined as advanced and progressive. In contrast, CEE is always lagging behind but in the process of slowly catching up, "in transition", but generally following the same developmental trajectory of LGBT+ recognition and rights.

Thinking in terms of "been there, done that" enables Western scholars not only to dictate the current issues worth debating but also to establish

themselves as the more advanced producers of cutting-edge knowledge and push CEE academics to the margins of knowledge production. They are perceived as Western "poorer relatives", knowledge consumers, case-study providers. Problems that might be important from the CEE perspective seem remnants of the past where there was no recognition of queer marriages and queer parenting. As such, the CEE academics are not so interesting anymore because the "world" has progressed. For instance, now when the West is in its post-marriage phase, and the scholarly debates focus on homonormativity of queer reproduction, it is tough to raise the question of fighting for recognition of queer families in Poland or even raising the issue of lack of queer reproductive choice without running the risk of being immediately overlooked as someone who brings up "an old parochial problem" which the West has already solved (Mizielińska 2020). Consequently, possibilities of profound articulation of the specificity of the East European position are minimal when even the remark that the so-called old Western problems might function differently elsewhere, resulting in different resistance practices, etc., meets with distrust.

De-Centring Western Sexualities – Revisited

The logic described above and its consequences bring back some of the problems related to Western and Eastern geo-temporal modalities from the book I co-edited with Robert Kulpa entitled *De-Centring Western Sexualities* (2011). The book claims that time and space cannot be separated as space is always already temporal. We coined concepts of the "temporal disjunction" and "knotted temporality" (but also "time of sequence" vs. "time of coincidence") to describe the underlying mechanisms of the "Western" appropriation of the discourses of "progress", "civilisation", "gay rights", and "secularism", while attaching a stigma to CEE through its denotation as "backward", "homophobic", and "nationalistic". We noticed that the "Western" logic assumes only one (its own) possible line of teleological development and uses the time/temporality as one of the tools of its hegemonic discourse. In 1989, CEE witnessed the "end of own history" and opening of a new narrative, which could be represented as a constant "knotting" and "looping" of time(s). However, when in 1989 CEE was "thrown into" Western capitalist time(s) (time of sequence), it was far from linear and progressively accumulative narration but instead could be defined as "time of coincidence", in which all happens (almost) at once.[8]

In popular historiographical accounts of the sexual liberation in the West, the narration starts from the 1950s' and the 1960s' homophile days, through the 1970s' gay liberation, the 1980s' AIDS crisis, to the 1990s' queer times, and anti-social turn, etc. But for CEE, the "new" Western history (which from now on is supposed to be a universal one) happened almost "overnight". In the context of some criticism regarding our book (Navickaitė 2015; Szulc 2018), I must clarify that we did not mean that there had not been a genuine development or change of "events" in the

sexual politics in CEE, or that it does not have its past. Quite the contrary, we demonstrate that in order to fully understand the local context, we need to treat its historical background seriously, in this case, its communist past. Although our main focus was on the criticism towards the Western teleological narrative of CEE's transition after 1989 (and the claim of the end of history), we also asked what kind of particularities in the development of sexual politics in CEE it forecloses, what sort of voices does it silence? And we encouraged a genuine acknowledgement of local specificities, including the local history of sexual politics, as "emancipation/s go/es its// their own way/s in various countries" (Mizielińska 2011, 102). In fact, the continuous presence of the past discourses combined with the new ones consists of/assembles what we call "time of coincidence".

Recent interests in the post-socialist past and attempts to debunk the myth of the near-total isolation of CEE during the Cold War bring back some of the forgotten histories of homosexuality in the Eastern bloc and might be read as a further step of this de-centralisation we asked for. For instance, Łukasz Szulc rightly shows that only by dehistoricising homosexuality in CEE it was possible to present the whole region as homogenous, essentially homophobic, and in need of transition after 1989 (Szulc 2018, 7). He traces the development of homosexual activism across the Eastern Bloc (with particular focus on Poland) and reverses the question of who is lagging behind whom in regards to the legal status of homosexuality since some Eastern bloc countries like Poland decriminalised same-sex acts (or in fact never criminalised) before many allegedly progressive West countries, including Denmark (1933), Sweden (1944), England (1967), Canada (1969), West Germany (1969), Austria (1971), Finland (1971), Norway (1972), and the US (entirely in 2001) (Szulc 2018, 8). This reversed gaze questions the teleological development of sexual politics and its taken-for-granted progressiveness. It also challenges the genealogies of origins as always already located in the West. I hope that the analysis presented in this book will further contribute to the necessary provincialisation of Western knowledge production regarding queer kinship and families. Only when we see it as situated and one of many, the real dialogue might begin.

Semi-Peripheral Position of CEE and Postcolonial/Decolonial Discourses

Although the postcolonial and decolonial scholarship is one of the most crucial potential references for *Queer Kinship at the Edge*, studies on queer postcolonial subjects (e.g., Decena 2011), sexuality and globalisation (Binnie 2004), and same-sex relationships from non-Western locations (Boellstorff 2004; Binnie 2004, 2013; Engebretsen 2013) still tend to bi-polarise the centre-periphery relations. They often unintentionally construct "centre" as more or less unified, coherent, and homogenous (i.e., "the rest" of the world sinks in the West) against which the pluralisation and diversification of "periphery" are done. However, the no longer existing communist "Second World", situated somewhere between the "Developed Countries"

of the "First World", and "developing countries" of the "Third World", complicates and disrupts the binary centre-periphery and might help to put an end to the postcolonial reproduction of West/East divide.

Consequently, exploring queer kinship in the CEE/Poland ("close or semi-periphery" to the West) might encourage going beyond this dichotomic simplification. Queer kinship practices in CEE/Poland sometimes look more like those performed in non-Western contexts, that is, postcolonial ones. Simultaneously, they might be relatively consistent with the Western description of marginalised queer families. Therefore, CEE might function similarly as proposed by Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010), who uses Asia as "an imaginary anchoring point" from which we can grasp our sociocultural subjectivities across histories and challenge the East-West binary in postcolonial studies. Instead of focusing on criticising notions of Eurocentrism and Western modernity Chen proposes a self-reflective mode on locating intellectual inquiries through understanding the porous and relational histories of Asian countries, their intra-cultural similarities and differences, "their shared-ness", local and international characters. Such a move, followed by other Asian scholars, might help to de-essentialise Asia and provincialise Euro-American discourse (Chen 2010; Tang, Khor, and Chen 2020). Using CEE as "an imaginary anchoring point" helps to contextualise inquiries on queer kinship and families and recognise "similarity-in-difference" (Tang, Khor, and Chen 2020) and "difference-in-similarity".

A growing interest in decolonial thinking among CEE scholars (Sušová-Salminen 2012; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012) might be explained by the fact that decolonialism questions binary thinking about the power relations between centre and periphery, colony and coloniser. Instead, it shows that coloniality – understood as the complexity of colonial hegemonies and hierarchies in the complementing linkage with modernity (Quijano 2007) – concerns knowledge productions and distribution and tries to subvert its power asymmetry on the zero-point epistemology.[9] If we agree with decolonial thinkers that

> the epistemic forms of knowledge (the geopolitics of knowledge) are linked to the time and location *from* which they are pronounced, then we cannot perceive colonialism and its legacies as relevant only for those who have been formally colonies or colonizers, but for the entire structures of capitalist world-system including its knowledge-system. In this sense, nations and countries labelled as Eastern Europe have been epistemologically integrated into this world-system also by means of Eastern Europe's idea.
>
> (Sušová-Salminen 2012, 5)

The usefulness of the postcolonial and decolonial perspective in research concerning CEE or post-Soviet sexualities has already been demonstrated (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011; Sušová-Salminen 2012; Stella 2015), so my current work joins this body of scholarship. Following this perspective,

Queer Kinship at the Edge joins broader debates on decolonising sexualities and power asymmetry in the production and distribution of knowledge discussed in relation to different European imperial histories and the construction of internal multiple European Others (Mignolo 2011; Rodríguez, Boatcă, and Costa 2010; Tlostanova 2012; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). With this book, I hope to support their efforts to empower other thinking types, thinking from the edge, borders, and margins.

Polish Context and the Question of Queer Families

Polish Familism

In her 1993 essay "Why I Am Not a Feminist", Mirosława Marody (Marody 1993), a well-known Polish sociologist, wrote:

> Since the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989, the East and the West have been facing each other with growing confusion and disappointment. Both the hopes of the East for a quick "return to Europe" and the expectations of the West for equally fast "occidentalization" of post-communist societies have not been fulfilled. (…) When dealing with apparently similar institutions in Western and post-communist societies it is easy to assume the existence of similar attitudes, values, norms (…) This tendency is reinforced by the perception of the communist period (…) as incidental and inconsequential for the societies that now, liberated from the constraints of the communist system, can just return to "normal" (…) The problem, however, is that what is "normal" for the East is not usually taken for granted by the West; and vice versa. This problem becomes evident when we meet each other in everyday situations and talk about ordinary things [such as family – J.M.].

This quotation points out that social processes are much more complicated than political ones. The way we talk about family/kinship/love (and how we understand them) differs and is deeply rooted in particular geo-temporal conditions. Marody underlies the significance of culture and local context in constructing family forms, gender norms, and values and says that they do not disappear quickly. The fall of the Iron Curtain marked the change of the political system, but it was not as blunt and definitive as some political leaders wanted to think (Buchowski 2006). Elements of the old system have remained deeply embedded in the ways people think and/or feel about their communities, bonds with others, kinship, etc. After 1989, the expectations that the West had about the East were not fulfilled precisely because what was perceived as the same but on a different level of development (delayed and in need to catch up with the more progressive West) was revealed as not the same. Worse, as something that does not want to become one. Consequently, instead of a radical

break (with the post-communist past) in Poland and the whole CEE region, we rather deal with continuities and even hybridisation of thinking about diverse social entities, and elements from the past overlap and coincide with the new ideas, concepts, and values (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011; Mizielińska 2011). Therefore, the constitutive relations between time and space/locality are essential to understand what families mean to people who build them particularly if we want to capture queer ways of practising family life.

Many Polish researchers point out that in the Polish context, the social and political significance of (traditional) family is very high (Giza-Poleszczuk 2002; Mirosława Marody 1991; Schmidt 2015; Titkow 2007; Titkow and Duch 2004). Even in comparison with other EU countries where the familial life is also put in the first place in the hierarchy of importance, Poland (and Hungary) is distinguished by the fact that people place the highest emphasis on family (Titkow 2007, 182). Comparative research also shows that whereas in the Northwest-European cultural area and in the New World countries descending from them (such as the US or Australia), the importance of kin ties is in decline, in the South and CEE countries (e.g., Italy, Portugal, Hungary, Lithuania), kin ties are found to be predominant, and there is a tendency to perceive significant relations as family (Höllinger and Haller 1990; Wall et al. 2019). Historical and contemporary data collected in Polish sociological surveys corroborate this orientation towards family. According to various opinion polls, for the vast majority of Poles, family is the focal point of life and a fundamental value. Family was also the most essential value in life for 80% of Poles in 2019, and for 78% in 2008 and 2013 and a necessary condition of happiness for 87% of Poles in 2019, 92% in 2008, and 85% in 2013 (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2019).

The meaning of kinship/family is intrinsic to Polish geo-temporality and its socio-historical background (i.e., the impact of historical, social welfare on personal networks; different historical, social, and normative pathways, etc.), which means that in order to understand it we need to comprehend its context and specificity of its social processes. There are several explanations of Polish family-centrism. Researchers point out that it has its roots in Polish history, particularly in the communist legacies and in the earlier period of partitions (1795–1918), when Poland was divided between Russia, Prussia, and Austria-Hungary[10] (Giza-Poleszczuk 2002; Marody 1991; Schmidt 2015; Tarkowska and Tarkowski 1990). These historical processes led to the particular importance of family as a primary social entity responsible for the survival of the nation and/or Polish culture, with the perception of family as the leading site of resistance against foreign oppression.

The Communist times only strengthened this already established tendency.[11] During the Communist era (1945–1989), family and the private/public dichotomy were understood in a specific manner that still influences the current meaning of the former. Due to the weakness of the public sphere

and the permanent "economy of lack", family ties and close cooperation between family-like groups were significant and enabled people to obtain goods and/or services but also access to institutional resources (such as housing) impossible to get otherwise (Giza-Poleszczuk 2002; Marody 1991; Schmidt 2015; Tarkowska and Tarkowski 1990).

The marital relationship was at the centre of a broader microstructure consisting of relatives, friends, or acquaintances[12] who could be considered useful. Also, the totalitarian past undermined mutual trust and commitment to the state, making people rely more on personal networks, mostly comprised of family members. In their article, Elżbieta Tarkowska and Jacek Tarkowski even used the term "amoral familism"[13] in reference to the Polish social disintegration in the 1980s. As the public sphere was seen as either discredited and/or exclusive because it did not offer enough self-fulfilment opportunities, people tended to retreat to the family-related world, trying to regain control over one's life trajectory there. Family was also perceived as a refuge and "safe haven" from state control.[14] As a result of the narrowing of the living space to the family and family/friends-like groups, which separated the circle of "one's own kind" from "strangers", there was also a narrowing of time to the present, "priority of *ad hoc*", not thinking in terms of distant aims. It led to investing in reproduction instead of other time-distant goals (Giza-Poleszczuk 2002; Tarkowska and Tarkowski 1990). Moreover, as researchers show, the transition to a market economy has strengthened the institution of family as an important source of material and psychological support (Titkow and Duch 2004). These legacies have resulted in a very particular understanding of the private/public dichotomy, still present nowadays. While in the West, society is seen as composed of individuals, in Poland, families or family-like groups are at its core and the formation of social identity in collectivist rather than individualistic terms is still promoted (Dunn 2004; Graff 1996; Marody 1993).

In 1979, Polish sociologist Stefan Nowak formulated the thesis that Polish society is characterised by a "sociological vacuum", which he perceived as a true obstacle to the desired development of civil society in Poland (Nowak 1979). According to Nowak, only two dimensions organise social life in Poland – the abstract national community and the private sphere organised around family. Between these two levels, there is a lack of spontaneous social behaviour, civic initiatives, and strong social movements. Although much has happened since Nowak formulated this reflection, the validity of his idea has not been questioned much. Many authors repeatedly point to a sociological vacuum as an obstacle to the development of civil society, social capital, and democracy in Poland. The concept has been used as proof of strong bonding capital (identification with the family and friendship-based groups) and of weak bridging capital (lack of identification with the intermediary, mainly formal, organisations or groups), which is usually considered as worrying (Pawlak 2015). Janusz Czapiński complains that the sociological vacuum has not been filled since the 1970s. To support his arguments, he refers to the findings of the *Social Diagnosis* (a

research project carried out in the years 2000–2015 aiming at studying the quality of life in Poland) on the low levels of engagement in civil life, generalised trust, and social capital in Poland. Czapiński calls it a state without a society (2006). Other social surveys show that Poles identify with their place of residence but seldom with political parties and social organisations (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2013e). Only 14% of respondents believe that Poles are more united than divided. From a long list of possible uniting factors, they choose "disasters, catastrophes, misfortunes, great tragedies, threats, cataclysms, crises"; "religion, faith, Catholicism"; "history, past and patriotism and love for the homeland". Immediately after these issues, they chose "family, attachment to the family, concern for the good of the family, family ties" (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2013e).

Polish Heteronormativity and Conservatism

When we try to unpack the Polish understanding of family and its highly ideologised role, we must note that it is built on at least two foundations. First of all, it is based on heteronormative assumptions and strictly defined complementary gender roles, strongly influenced by the Roman Catholic teaching, where man is perceived as the breadwinner and woman as the homemaker and primary caretaker of children; her social identity is defined through motherhood, understood as "natural" and "inevitable" (Titkow, Duch-Krzysztoszek, and Budrowska 2004). Krzysztof Arcimowicz, a researcher of changes in contemporary masculinity, rightly states that Poland "is a country in which women's emancipation is perceived in terms of a threat to the social order" (Arcimowicz 2003, 245). Poles declare their support for the traditional family and gender division of tasks (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2017). For instance, 77% of Poles think that the most crucial role for women is to take care of the home and family (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2006, 2013a, 2013b).

Secondly, this public ideal of family is constructed on the exclusions and/or invisibility of any other family configurations (non-cisgender and non-heteronormative). They are treated in the public discourse openly as a threat (interestingly often external, coming from the West[15]), but a concealed, omitted, and silenced one (see Mizielińska and Stasińska 2017). The state's "technologies of kinship"[16] (Franklin 2013; Riggs and Peel 2016) succeed only if they naturalise particular desired forms of relationships (heterosexual couple with the child), constantly pushing any other alternative forms of kinship to the margin, outside the realms of kinship proper, unlikely to be given any recognition.

Heteronormativity is enshrined in the Polish Constitution. Its Article 18 states that "marriage, being a union of a man and a woman, as well as the family, motherhood, and parenthood, shall be placed under the protection and care of the Republic of Poland" ("The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997", 1997). This very rigid definition of marriage as a relationship between a woman and man (but in the context of the state's

protection, not as such) was introduced in this form due to the pressure from the Catholic Church, very concerned already back then and long before this issue had been discussed publicly by Polish LGBT movement about legislation in other countries allowing marriages for same-sex couples. Since then, this article has been evoked in the discussions on any form of legal recognition of queer relationships by its proponents and opponents. The opponents claim that it would be unconstitutional, whereas proponents say that the article does not concern the definition of marriage but its protection; therefore, it does not foreclose the possibility of legal recognition of other types of relationships (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2017).

Teachings of the Roman Catholic Church strongly influence Polish nationalistic discourse, promoting the traditional ideal of a family with women's role as mothers and wives (see Mizielińska 2001) and often intersects with politics. State Catholicism is perceived as a declaration of cultural and national identity, which means that it becomes intensely politicised, and the boundary between state and church is blurred (Bielik-Robson and Bartoś 2013). This is particularly visible nowadays when under *Law and Justice* ruling, the politics is contaminated with Catholic dogmas, that is, recent attempts to introduce new restrictions on access to abortion (which resulted in women's protests all over the country), the proposal of a ban on sexual and anti-discriminatory education in schools, and declarations of the so-called "LGBT free zones" (i.e., passing anti-LGBT resolutions with the purpose to defend the Polish family) by many Polish local governments. In the latter case, right-wing local politicians claim to protect the traditional family, nation, and, ultimately, Christian civilization, as it is believed that the so-called "LGBT ideology" "targets religion and endangers the Polish nation" (Korolczuk 2020, 166).

Other examples of public heteronormativity could be provided by close analysis of national censuses and public opinion polls (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2017). In both sources, the existence of other than heterosexual families is not taken into account, and heteronormativity of all respondents is assumed. For example, in polls carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej/CBOS), the biggest publicly funded independent research centre in Poland, non-heterosexual persons are often treated as citizens who could not create their own families. Questions are formulated in such a way that those in same-sex relationships simply do not fit in. In the CBOS poll called *There Is Nothing Like Family*, respondents were asked what form of the family they would like to live in and live in practice. Until 2019, they could only choose answers which assumed heterosexuality as the foundation of any family formation. Even cohabitation was specified as a relationship (permanent or temporary) with a member of the opposite sex (CBOS 2008), and those living in non-heterosexual cohabitation could only tick "in other forms". This changed in 2019 when for the first time, "same-sex partnership" appeared as an option,

interestingly chosen only by 1% of respondents (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2019).

The research on the meaning of family and its preferred model done by CBOS, repeated in 2006 and 2013, is particularly interesting. For the respondents in 2013, family meant above all married couples with children (99%). A father/mother raising children alone was a family for 91%, heterosexual couples in an informal relationship raising children together were a family for 78%, childless married couples for 71%, a childless informal heterosexual relationship for merely 33%, a same-sex couple raising children together for 23%, and finally, a childless same-sex relationship was a family for 14% of the respondents. This last question was repeated in 2019 in the poll called *Family and Its Meanings* with very similar results (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2019).

Poles' traditional and heteronormative perception of family is evident in their attitudes towards non-heterosexual family constellations. According to various polls, when asked about the possibility of introducing the registration of partnerships for same-sex couples, support for such a law increased from 18% (2002) to around 35% (2013). In 2017, in an IPSOS poll done for OKO.press[17] for the first time, over half of Poles (52%) was in favour of introducing the institution of partnerships for same-sex couples, while 38% were in favour of marriage. In 2019, in the OKO.press poll, already 56% supported the idea of legalising gay and lesbian partnership while 41% was in favour of their marriage (Ambroziak 2019). Usually, Poles showed much more significant support when asked about the specific legal regulations, for example, having joint property, tax breaks, the possibility of statutory inheritance, the right to burial, obtaining information on the state of health, or access to the health insurance of a partner. Support for such provisions has exceeded 45% since 2005.

Poles have a rather negative opinion about the adoption of children by same-sex couples, although, in most surveys, the method of formulating this question generally suggests external adoption. However, support for adoption has increased from 6% to 22% in the last 15 years (*LGBT Social Support in Poland – LGBT Encyclopedia*). In other studies, where the difference between the right to adopt a partner's biological child and joint external adoption was clearly explained, the support differed and was 33% and 22%, respectively (Mulak 2015). These figures might signify a slowly growing social tolerance towards such families, which could be related to more activities from the LGBT people who regain their own voice/visibility and fight for their rights in the public space, even more so in recent years. It happens despite the fact that in the conservative press and parliamentary discourses, both strongly influenced by the teaching of the Catholic Church, one can observe stagnation if not regression and non-heterosexual families are excluded from the concept of family at all (Arcimowicz, Wasiak-Radoszewski, and Dębska 2014; Mizielińska and Stasińska 2014).

Since *Law and Justice* came again to power in 2015, the situation has worsened. Attacks on the LGBT community have become more common,

and homophobic violence is much higher (Winiewski and Bulska 2020). A 2019 opinion poll published by OKO.Press showed that when asked about the biggest threats to Poland in the 21st century, the majority of young men and older people declared that for them, it is the threat of the "gender ideology and LGBT movement" (Korolczuk 2020, 167). Simultaneously, the percentage of people with right-wing convictions increased in Poland from 43% in 2014 to 48% in 2016, and the level of acceptance of gays and lesbians in 2017 decreased as compared to 2013 (Górska 2018, 109). As Agata Stasińska rightly states,

> This means that public discourse on non-heterosexual families is currently extremely polarized. In consequence, when diagnosing Polish society from the point of view of non-heterosexual families, excluded and discriminated community, one can conclude that social changes that would contribute to the LGBT emancipation are still superficial, hardly noticeable, and certainly do not contribute to a real change in their legal and social status.
>
> (Stasińska 2018, 75)

The Process of Emancipation of Non-Heterosexual People in Poland

The conviction that the collapse of the Iron Curtain marked the beginning of the introduction of LGBT rights and the emergence of LGBT activism in CEE in general and in Poland, in particular, has prevailed until very recently. It was assumed that only after 1989, the whole process of catching up with the West, perceived as more advanced not only politically and economically but also ethically in terms of its progressiveness regarding gender and sexuality issues, began (Szulc 2018). However, work on the communist past, particularly by local researchers, has demonstrated the differences in state laws and practices regarding homosexuality across the Eastern Bloc as well as the existence of informal gay and lesbian organisations already in the 1980s (Buyantueva and Shevtsova 2020; Mizielińska 2009; Struzik 2020; Szulc 2018). Their works bring back the forgotten history of sexuality in the CEE and debunk persistent myths about the whole region regarding its homogeneity and essential difference from the West, its teleological transition after 1989, and near-total isolation during the Cold War (Szulc 2018). For instance, Łukasz Szulc, in his analysis of Polish gay and lesbian magazines from the 1980s, provides accounts of homosexual self-identification and self-organisations as well as traces of the transnational contacts with gay and lesbian organisations abroad already before 1989 (Szulc 2018). As Szulc rightly states, "only by dehistorizing homosexuality in CEE it is possible to view the region as homogenous, essentially homophobic and in need of transition after 1989" (Szulc 2018, 7).

One explanation of the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the CEE regarding the absence of LGBT activism might be connected with the

false equation of the gay and lesbian movement with its legal formalisation and state recognition. The first documented self-organising attempts by gay men in the 1980s were not recognised by the state and mainly had informal character. Since the Communist government was against any civil organisations at that time, the first Polish gay and lesbian self-organising consisted of informal groups, primarily gay men (e.g., the Warsaw Homosexual Movement), whose role enabled people to meet, help one another, and find partners. In the late 1980s, the first gay magazines were published: *Filo* in Gdansk and *Efebos* in Warsaw. Their distribution was still unofficial. Moreover, Polish communist authorities tried to put the gay community under state surveillance. In 1985, police launched a secret operation called "Hyacynt" in several Polish cities to collect all gay men's records. The collected data served to threaten and blackmail the gay community into collaboration with the communist regime. The result of this action was that many gay men left the country.

The transition to democracy in 1989 helped build the LGBT community and movement that finally could leave the underground and enter the public space. Also, instead of small informal marginal groups, many LGBT non-governmental organisations have been created with concrete targets and diverse aims.[18] The first LGBT organisation formally recognised and registered by the court in 1990 was LAMBDA. It has brought together smaller organisations operating throughout Poland and aims for widespread social tolerance towards homosexuality and builds a positive consciousness among gays and lesbians. It also leads AIDS/HIV prevention campaigns. One of the most influential organisations is the Campaign against Homophobia (KPH), established in 2000. Since the beginning of its existence, it has aimed at introducing the registered same-sex partnership in Poland.

From the perspective of the last three decades, the emancipation of non-heterosexual communities can be divided into two phases. The first one had an integrating and supporting nature – sometimes it is called "institutionalization without mobilization" (Gruszczyńska 2009) because diverse organisations focused more on community development and self-help activism than direct actions to change the discriminatory policies in Poland. The second phase is related to legal and political demands, primarily focused on registering partnerships and introducing legislation penalising hate speech against non-heterosexual communities (Majka-Rostek 2008, 71). The postulate of introducing the registration of same-sex partnerships still raises social and political controversy. However, for many years, the LGBT movement in Poland has preferably avoided "provocation" in its activities and formulated its postulates using the "polite" rhetoric referring to the need to implement fundamental human and civil rights (Kochanowski 2002).

There has been a shift in the activists' strategies in recent years as the whole movement has become more fragmented and professionalised. Some organisations decided to focus on civil partnership for same-sex couples or even expanded their goals to postulate marital equality, for example, the

Love Does Not Exclude (Miłość Nie Wyklucza) organisation established in 2009 has prepared an appropriate bill in this matter. At the same time, other organisations specialise in transgender rights and diversity education. In her research on the main frameworks of LGBTQ activism in Poland, Justyna Struzik shows a recent shift and transformations of the frames: from "old" frames that focused on visibility, diversity, and equality to the recently emerging ones – specifically a family frame ("we are family") and a solidarity frame. She discusses them, pointing out that this emergence of new frames marks an essential change of perspectives and goals of the queer struggle, from one focused on liberal values and individualism to ones built on the importance of solidarity, queer kinship, and social relations (Struzik 2020, 284–85).

It is also vital to notice that the Polish LGBTQ movement has been described as not very strong. Its scale of activities and the group of people actively working for the LGBTQ community are relatively small. Some even accuse the movement of lack of direct, mass, and militant actions (Kochanowski 2013; Krzemiński 2009). Support for postulates and actual involvement in the activities of LGBTQ organisations are somewhat limited (Krzemiński 2009; Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). For instance, in the *FOCIP* survey, only 38% of respondents declared their involvement in various LGBT-related activities, understood very broadly as any participation in the Equality Parades or other demonstrations, signing a petition, working as a volunteer for an LGBT organisation, providing financial support to such an organisation or any kind of action aimed at changing the current situation of non-heterosexual and transgender persons. The remaining 62% did not declare any activism in this matter (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015, 37). This situation is far from unusual, because as I have shown, Polish society is generally disinclined to personal involvement in associations and community activism, even if they value such activities (Czapiński 2006, 2013; Krzemiński 2009). Simultaneously, awareness of legal and social changes regarding LGBT issues that have occurred in recent decades in other countries has caused increasing frustration among the LGBT people, visible in such activities as Stop Bzdurom (Stop the Rubbish) collective and a new form of guerrilla resistance activism.[19] The new generation has realised that they live in the largest country in Europe with no legislation on same-sex partnerships or pro-equality regulations regarding sexual orientation and gender identity (i.e., protection against hate speech). This frustration manifests itself in the increasing number of individual struggles and legal cases undertaken by non-heterosexual individuals who enter the court or use other strategies for obtaining social and legal recognition of their relationships, for example, the case of Kozak v. Poland at the European Court of Human Rights (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2014). It is also worth mentioning that these individual lawsuits have recently become more organised on the institutional level. For instance, strategic litigation regarding the lack of marital equality. More than ten same-sex couples in Poland are currently suiting

Poland at the European Court of Human Rights, jointly using legal assistance from the Campaign Against Homophobia.

Legal Situation of Queer Families

Unlike some other post-communist and Western countries, Poland has had a long tradition of not criminalising non-heterosexual activities. This practice dates back to the Napoleonic Code that was in force in Poland from 1808 and prevailed when Poland regained its independence in 1918 (i.e., the first Polish independent criminal code of 1932 did not refer to homosexuality in any way). Meanwhile, under Russian Rule, the imperial law was introduced according to which homosexuality (but only between men) was illegal. The same was the case in other parts of Poland that belonged to Prussia and Austro-Hungary.

During communist Poland (1945–1989), homosexual activity was not criminalised. However, police kept files on non-heterosexual persons, and there were no official gay and lesbian organisations and no legal meeting places or press. After returning to democracy in 1989, the freedom of speech and association allowed the LGBT community an institutional form for the fight for their rights. Many gay and lesbian organisations were immediately established. However, in terms of the state's anti-discriminatory policy, very little has changed since then. For instance, there are no anti-discrimination regulations based on sexual orientation, which by necessity, is very often stressed by LGBT organisations. The only exception is the Polish Labour Code from 1 January 2004. While joining the EU in 2004, Poland was obliged to implement the EU legislation on discrimination, including a ban on discrimination of an employee based on sexual orientation.

In the new Polish Constitution from 1997 onwards, sexual orientation is not mentioned among the factors that demand special protection from the state (contrary to gender or ethnicity, for example). However, the equality of all citizens before the law is guaranteed by article 32, stating that "nobody can be discriminated against in political, social, and economic life for any reason". Simultaneously, the Constitution can serve as an example of discrimination because of its very exclusionary protection of marriage defined as heterosexual in article 18, which was also repeated in the Family and Care Code later on. As a consequence, marriage between same-sex partners is claimed to be formally precluded by law in Poland (i.e., tax law, administrative law, succession law), and one of the main aims of the Polish gay and lesbian movement remains to fight for legal recognition of same-sex relationships either in the form of partnership law or marriage.

Efforts to pass the bill on registered same-sex partnership date back to the beginning of the millennium, to the discussion that took place in 2003. Then, the Senator, Professor Maria Szyszkowska publicly presented (for the first time in Poland) her motion on the registered same-sex partnership, prepared in cooperation with gay and lesbian representatives. Her motion was signed by 36 senators, mostly from left-wing and central parties but the

bill was never discussed in the Parliament. The discussion on same-sex partnership regulation returned to the political agenda when the neo-liberal party called Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska) gained power (2007–2011 and then again in 2011–2015). Three bills were then prepared by different parties, including Civic Platform (P.O.). Finally, in January 2013, all three drafts were read and discussed during a plenary session of the lower house of the parliament and rejected. Since then, there have been no further parliamentary discussions on same-sex registered partnerships despite the efforts of non-governmental organisations and the creation of the "Partnership for Unions" coalition, which includes about 32 NGOs, organisations and associations. The lack of such a law significantly impacts Polish LGBT families and same-sex parenting (i.e., a social parent raising the child is formally a stranger and cannot make any decisions regarding the child).

Regarding the state's policy on assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), they can only be performed in licensed clinics. There was no coherent legal and logistical regulations for a long time, which meant that many lesbians could use this opportunity to become mothers. However, in June 2015 Polish government (and the former neo-liberal ruling party) adopted new legislation which allows the use of ARTs only in married and unwed heterosexual couples. Same-sex couples cannot also be assessed as suitable adoptive and foster parents. Formally, people can adopt as single, but in practice, all adoption centres claim their concern for the "wellbeing of the child" in defence of their preference for married couples and admit that they would give a small child to a single person only in extreme situations (i.e., ill, disabled children). It means that non-heterosexual people might adopt if they hide their sexual orientation and pretend to be single, but even then, chances are small.

To sum up, there is no legal recognition of same-sex partnership as well as queer parenting. Moreover, there are no chances for such legislation nowadays as the ruling conservative *Law and Justice* party (PiS) has begun the crusade against so-called "gender and LGBT ideology" (Korolczuk 2020) and based its latest parliamentary campaign in 2019 (both to the EU and the Polish parliaments) on the discursive attacks on the LGBT community which in consequence has contributed to the rise of homophobia and homophobic violence (Winiewski and Bulska 2020). These attacks often target openly queer families presented in the public discourse as a threat to traditional Polish family values and children. The use of such arguments galvanises actions that target undermining LGBT rights to form a family. For instance, Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the PiS, insinuated that same-sex couples wanted the right to adopt children out of the desire for sexual gratification. During one of the election rallies, he condemned attempts to introduce sex education in schools by saying: "This has nothing to do with tolerance, it is about the affirmation of same-sex relationships, to which we say no, especially when it concerns our children, hands off our kids!" (Onet.pl 2019). LGBTQ people have become for the current

government a suitable scapegoat, a way of uniting its electorate against a common enemy and distracting attention away from other issues, such as paedophilia in the Catholic Church, the government's failure to deal with the pandemic in 2020, a growing budget deficit, etc.

My introduction to the Polish specificity, its familism, and the importance of the communist past serves here as an essential background necessary to understand the lived experience of queer families within concrete geopolitical frameworks. Lack of legal recognition, limited access to ARTs (only for heterosexual couples, either married or unwed)(Mizielińska 2020), and adoption (again limited to married heterosexual couples), force them into searching trickster-like ways to be intelligible as family, become parents, and/or be recognised as such. They also make their daily life incredibly hard and precarious, which the following chapters demonstrate. They are significantly distant from those mostly portrayed in the Western/Anglo-American discussions on queer kinship and happy queer families, which either focus on equality, choice, and successes (see Sullivan 2004) or stratified reproduction and injustice where the choice is still the leading motive (Smietana, Thompson, and Twine 2018). Moreover, whereas the recent body of research focuses mostly on the queer choice of parenthood via ARTs, little attention is given to other forms of becoming parents through adoption and/or through bearing a child as a result of sexual intercourse with a person of the opposite sex (either in a previous marital or cohabiting union, or a one-night stand) which is the most popular form among Polish LGBTQ people as the project survey has demonstrated (see Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). Also, families without children are marginalised in these publications and often not considered as families at all. In this sense, my broad definitions of queer families and a focus on how queer people reconcile their family lives with normative social pressure will offer a unique opportunity to capture complexities of lived experiences of queer families in a very specific and marginalised location.

Structure of the Book

Because of the CEE marginalisation in Anglo-American discussions on queer kinship, the whole region is often homogenised and presented in the mainstream discourse there as homophobic, in need of Western help (see more on the concept of "Western leveraged pedagogy" in Kulpa 2014, and without prospects for the development of diverse types of queer families (see Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011). This book intends to question such a picture, showing many configurations of queer families and highlighting their agency. It reveals how despite lack of state recognition and other constraints, queer families are done, practised, and displayed, mitigating obstacles and mobilising help. By doing so, it highlights how geo-temporal conditions shape queer experience and contest the normative assumptions defined through the Anglo-American perspective. Each chapter explores different dimensions of forming, practising, and displaying queer families in

Poland, starting from presenting queer relational trajectories and exploring the role of the common household in queer couples' lives through their ways of defining families and maintaining relations with important others to queer experience of parenthood and the perception of children brought up by queer parents. Throughout, I draw on differences and similarities between my own findings and those done mainly in the Anglophone contexts, emphasising what is distinctive about queer kinship in Poland. The aim is not to demonise the question of difference or point towards similarities but rather explore the complicated and less polarised boundaries between Western/non-Western as always already blurred. By changing the perspective and looking at the complexities of lived experiences of queer families in Poland, this book might unveil what we can learn about queer ways of (de)kinning (Howell 2003; Fonseca 2011) and help to create a new conceptual framework. Moreover, drawing on findings is not intended to deliver case studies to test Western theories on queer kinship (something that is often expected from non-Western queer scholars) but to re-conceptualise what we already know about queer kinship in general.

Chapter 2, "Polishing Queer Relational Trajectory", is devoted to the relational trajectory of queer people in Poland. Using a life-course perspective (Gabb 2008) and drawing on biographical interviews with queer couples, I intend to show how the reconstruction of the main life stages is deeply embedded in the geopolitical context that defines and regulates the right life trajectory, excluding non-normative ways of doing families and relationships. I describe queer ways of either adapting or transforming heteronormative life milestones and searching for such rites of passage that might facilitate recognition of their relational status in the eyes of significant others, particularly families of origin (i.e., diverse family contracts, financial decisions, planning a child, etc.). In countries such as Poland, where there is no recognition of same-sex relationships of any kind, moving in with one's partner signifies for many queer couples the key turning point in the trajectory of family life – a shift from being just a couple to being a family. Therefore, different meanings given to home/household are also investigated more closely. Even though for LGBTIQ people, the home retains normative implications and remains a site of familial/parental homophobia (Schulman 2012; Stella 2015), it is also a significant space to resist heteronormativity and affirm their sexual difference (Elwood 2000). Particularly in Poland, where the public sphere is perceived as hostile, resulting in daily practices of (non)displaying affection (Stasińska 2018, 2020). In this context, home-making practices and the notion of a shared household become particularly important as a way to create a safe haven and escape public and familial homophobia. Consequently, home manifests itself as a crucial site for practising intimacy and an essential element of kin work concerning families of origin.

Chapter 3, titled "Ain't We a Family?", explores ways of self-defining and displaying families by queer people in Poland. Particular attention is given to the analysis of interviews around family maps done during the

ethnographical part of the research. Questions such as "who is considered a family member", "in what hierarchy", "who is included and who is excluded" become the starting point to understand the often painful struggle between the taken-for-granted notion of family and one's particular way of experiencing family bonds. Strategies of conceptualising family identified during the analysis focus more on practices of care, giving support, sharing daily concerns, emotional closeness (called by participants "practical family") than the normative and idealised notion of family (called "theoretical family"). Family/kinship in informants' definitions becomes a set of relational practices with often ritualised, ordinary, but also chosen characters.

I draw on the self-definition of families of choice in the context of particular value given to families in Poland. I argue that calling oneself a family is deeply embedded in local constructs of gender, sexuality, and family. As such, it often becomes a political strategy to gain recognition and disrupt the heteronormative notion prevalent in public discourse. Thus, the need to stick to the very term is deeply embedded in the experience of lack of social and legal recognition. I argue to read this move towards embracing the term "family" as deeply rooted in their daily experiences, emotions, and needs, strongly disagreeing with binarism between queer and homo/heteronormativity (Duggan 2002) inherent to some of the Anglo-American scholarship. By doing so, I want to provide new critical insight into the Anglo-American debate on the normativity of queer families and its role in producing neoliberal apolitical queer subjects (Duggan 2002; Puar 2007).

Chapter 4, "Communicating Vessels", is devoted to analysing relationships between families of choice and origin (natal families). Relationships with families of origin are sticky (Smart 2007b), particularly in Poland, where queer families experience homophobia and lack of recognition in their daily lives. This makes them see their families of origin as a refuge and a source of potential acceptance while also being a source of experienced familial homophobia. My findings show that Polish non-heterosexual families very often cannot afford to choose to cut themselves off from their families of origin and build their chosen families on their own as in the division described by Kath Weston in her influential book (Weston 1997). I argue that having good relationships with families of origin is often a necessary strategy for survival (particularly families with children). Polish queer families do not build their chosen families in (complete) separation from families of origin, but quite conversely, they try to integrate them, expressing a strong desire to be accepted in a familial kin structure.

In this chapter, I also compare the perspective of families of choice with that of families of origin, drawing on focus groups done with parents and siblings of queer couples. Even though these focus groups consisted of accepting family members, many highlighted personal work they had undertaken to make peace with having a queer child/sibling. They discussed dealing with internalised homophobia, a change in an expected life trajectory, and the fear of not being able to protect a family member from ostracism and homophobia. By claiming their co-dependence and solidarity

in the daily struggle for survival and recognition, captured in the title metaphor of "communicating vessels", I wish to contribute to a further reconceptualisation of the aspatial dichotomy families of origin/families of choice, and to create a new empirical and theoretical framework that moves beyond the dominant Anglo-American perspective and gives credit to complexities of (queer) family relations.

Chapter 5, "Queer(ing) Parenthood", presents diverse configurations of families with children. Drawing on interviews, ethnographic observations, and focus groups with lesbian mothers and gay fathers, this chapter aims to present what it means to attempt queer parenthood in Poland, where there is no recognition of social/co-parents, and second-parent adoption is not available. Among the issues explored in this chapter, more closely are tactics undertaken by queer parents to deal with homophobia and lack of legal recognition of their families and family/parental passing. Drawing on parents' narratives, a social/co-parent's unstable, precarious, and fragile position is given particular attention. The chapter reveals various attempts to legitimate a social/co-parent in the Polish context with its particular traditional vision of a family based on nuclear, heteronormative, bionormative, and monomaternal/monopaternal characteristics. They range from strategies already described in the Western literature to those very particular and tied to the Polish cultural context like queering baptism.

In this chapter, I want to critically join the Anglo-American debate on queering parenthood mostly conducted in the context of assimilation/conformity vs. transgression/subversion paradigm (Bell and Binnie 2000; Duggan 2002; Warner 1993). Instead of seeing queer parenthood through these binary and more or less normative discussions, I propose concentrating on actual daily practices of sustaining and legitimising parenthood. I intend to show that those practices are deeply rooted in social and cultural contexts that shape queer experiences of doing families. In the final section, I want to demonstrate that "what queer(ing) parenthood is" and "what it is not" depend on the same context. Sometimes, what seems to be very (homo) normative from the Anglo-American perspective might be a radical transgression of norms in particular geopolitical locations.

Chapter 6, "Queer Spawn Talks Back", examines perspectives of children born and/or brought up in families of choice in Poland. Drawing on findings from four focus groups with children of different ages as well as data from the ethnographic part (interviews with children and their observation), I present their views on their families and their evaluation of bonds with queer parents. In general, their narratives reveal warm and close family relations. However, distinguished two paths regarding their reactions to the disclosure of parents (*a trajectory of unnamed experience* and *a trajectory of unexpected change*) have a huge impact on their future relations with queer parents. The analysis reveals that teenagers and young adults carefully navigate the disclosure process concerning their families' queerness, both towards their peers as well as in relation to their relatives. Facing familial homophobia (i.e., the homophobia of their grandparents or the other

biological parent), they develop diverse ways of dealing with it. Moreover, they complain about the lack of recognition of their family constellations, paying particular attention to the broken ties with a social/co-parent in case of separation of their queer parents. Through the chapter, I argue to perceive queer children as an essential agent within queer families whose role complicates the dichotomic picture between choice and blood described in the Anglo-American classic book on queer kinship (Weston 1997).

In the **concluding chapter**, I summarise the key threads and concentrate on different readings of queer resistance and subversion beyond the Anglo-American framework. I introduce the concept of tactics inspired by Michel de Certeau's work (Certeau 2008) to show that assimilation is a double-edged idea and it might be used tactically in daily queer fights for the liveable life, particularly in geopolitical locations where LGBTQ people are still deprived of their rights.

To sum up, *Queer Kinship on the Edge?* joins current vibrant debates within queer studies and queer kinship studies, which unfortunately seldom go beyond Anglo-American perspectives and interests. Even the recent shift in queer studies towards embracing the margins, outskirts, and de-centring geo-location politics is mostly about postcolonial regions (Asia, Africa), with is still noticeably less work done about the "neighbour" Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, *Queer Kinship at the Edge* corresponds with a growing need for an insight into queer sexuality and kinship in the CEE region. It reconstitutes how we think about queer kinship and problematises some concepts and premises based on the Anglo-American perspective. It is a timely proposition as there is a growing need to broaden the "Western" perspective and access the realities of queer families elsewhere.

Voices from the margins/the edges are valuable for many reasons. They enable us to look from new angles on queer ways of kinning and doing families, and go beyond the concepts and ideas (i.e., (homo)normativity among others) usually taken for granted, acknowledging limits, particularism, or even "provinciality" of Western knowledge production (Chen 2010; Tang, Khor, and Chen 2020). By going beyond the Western gaze and highlighting how geo-temporal conditions shape queer family experience, this book provides new arguments in discussing what might constitute queer kinship and helps to unsettle the dominant Western perspectives. As such, it contributes to theoretical and empirical discussions contesting Anglo-American dominance and ethnocentrism. Hopefully, it will help to break new and more inclusive theoretical ground for conceptualising queer kinship.

Notes

1 Throughout the book, I use the term "west/western" mostly referring to Anglo-American/Anglophone contexts; therefore, it should always be read as if it were put between inverted commas.
2 Some scholars claim that family is an exclusionary concept *per se* (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004; May 2011; Wilkinson and Bell 2012) and there is a fundamental opposition between "queerness" and "family" (Edelman 2004; Halberstam 2005).

In the Anglo-American context, there is ongoing discussion between "queer fundamentalists" (Ellen Lewin's term 2009) and those rejecting the either/or model (Hicks 2011; Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy 2001; Gabb 2008, etc.). The latter position is very close to my own. I will return to this issue in the latter part of this chapter.

3 In addressing the question of Anglo-American hegemony, I follow Santiago Castro-Gomez, Columbian philosopher and one of the most influential decolonial thinkers, who called the Western epistemological dominance "the hubris of the zero-point" by which he means that the Western knowledge producers (no matter their disciplines) always already occupy the specific position of observers exempt from reality (and one who cannot be observed) and define their starting point as neutral and objective. Therefore, everything they announce functions as an emanation of pure and universal Truth, and measurement for others, "the zero-point" on an epistemological scale. In consequence of this concealment of Western particular epistemological position, every other knowledge is not only hierarchically ordered but also excluded when differs or does not comply with its parameters, that is, uses concepts unknown to the West (see Sušová-Salminen 2012, 6; M. Tlostanova 2015, 40).

4 During the 5th conference of European Geographies of Sexualities in Prague in 2019, a very crowded session on homonationalism was held. Its participants showed the importance of critique of its applicability in non-Anglo-American/non-western contexts. Instead of working with homonormativity, they perceive the concept of heteronormativity as having more potential beyond the Anglo-American contexts but they also wonder how homonationalism as a super structure affects (LGBT) politics in different locations.

5 In her book, *Familial Perversion*, Liz Montegary situates the recent successes of LGBT family politics and expansion of rights for the same-sex couples within the broader context of other US-specific processes such as the continued dismantling of the welfare state; the ongoing Islamophobic wars on terror; the perpetuation of national and global health insecurities; the intensified policing of poor, non-white, and immigrant communities; and the expansion of racial profiling, mass incarceration, and detention and deportation efforts (Montegary 2018, 2). These processes look entirely differently in different contexts. As I have written, in Poland, instead of a gradual incorporation of certain LGBT families into the imagined nation, we deal with their ongoing repudiation and growing homophobia.

6 According to Madina Tlostanova, "the geopolitics of knowledge refers to the local, spatial and temporal grounds of knowledge. The body-politics refers to individual and collective biographical grounds of understanding and thinking rooted in particular local histories and trajectories of origination and dispersion. Locality here is understood not merely as a geo-historical location but also as an epistemic correlation with the sensing body, perceiving the world from a particular local history" (M. Tlostanova 2015, 48).

7 For more comprehensive analysis about labels in use and analysis of CEE in relation to the West, see Melegh (2006); Mizielińska and Kulpa (2011); Pitoňák (2019); Sušová-Salminen (2012).

8 We used the term "time of coincidence" after Boelstorff (2004) however, in a slightly different sense. Whereas he had applied it to the discourse on marriage within queer theory, we wanted to stress out the fact that things can happen without the logic of sequence; this undermines the notion of the origin/copy, priority, and precedence/procedure, going beyond such false dichotomies.

9 The zero-point epistemology disavows the spatial and bodily embeddedness of any knowledge production. When Mignolo affirmatively states "I am where I think", it implies that we all speak from a very specific position, we are where we think. But only the European system of knowledge was built on the belief that the basic premise is "I think, therefore I am" (Mignolo 2011, 169).

10 Poland regained its independence in 1918.
11 Some scholars added to the list of these key factors the agrarian/peasant roots of the majority of Polish post-war society and the Roman Catholic tradition.
12 In her work on Poland, Elisabeth Dunne underlies the fact that the English equivalent of the Polish world "znajomości" (acquaintances) impoverishes its Polish meaning. In Poland "znajomości" mark horizontal relationships and exchanges that unite people and are the foundation for ideological division between "we" and "they", society vs. state power. In fact, "znajomości", according to her, determine the model of human being and social relations in Poland (Dunn 2004).
13 "Amoral familism" was a term first used by Edward Banfield who, in his work on the poor region of Southern Italy, observed a self-centred clan system promoting the well-being of their inner group at the expense of the other ones. Banfield postulated that the backwardness of such a society could be explained largely but not entirely by the inability of the villagers to act together for their common good or any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family. According to him, they did not have what he termed "social capital" – that is, the habits, norms, attitudes, and networks that motivate folk to work for the common good. This stress on the nuclear family over the interest of the citizenry, he called the ethos of "amoral familism" (Banfield 1967).
14 It does not mean, however, that family was free from the state ideology. In fact, the state was interested in promoting only certain types of families, privileging the conjugal, procreative heterosexual couples. It is particularly visible when we compare different levels of state pronatalism in the CEE region. For instance, some countries like Poland allowed abortion whereas some forbade them and/or put strong restrictions on it (Roseneil and Stoilova 2011). Also, in its promotion of female employment and gender equality, the communist state influenced the family structure and its functioning on the daily basis. However, in practice, women's engagement in paid work did not bring any change in the domestic division of labour. It mostly meant that women were doubly burdened and had to combine the roles of housewives, mothers, and workers. Although the communist states provided some amount of state child support, it was not sufficient and it was necessary to relegate the childcare to the retired grandparents (mostly grandmothers).
15 For instance, the problem of recognition of same-sex marriage is presented as a deed against the saintly and natural notion of (Christian) marriage, and is seen as a Western extravagance in opposition to Polish traditional values.
16 In my understanding of human kinship as technology, I draw upon the work of Sarah Franklin, Damian Riggs, and Elisabeth Peel (2016). They argue that Western kinship practices produce particular ontologies, and thus desired forms of personhood. For instance, Franklin in her work on in vitro fertilisation shows how the IVF industry is involved in a very particular kinship logic and serves to normalise only very specific ways of conceptualisation of reproduction. It privileges genetically related kinship and heterosexual family units (Franklin 2013; Riggs and Peel 2016).
17 OKO.press is a non-profit investigative journalism and fact-checking project, created to preserve freedom of speech and secure access to information in Poland. For more see https://oko.press/about-oko-press/
18 About B and T presence/absence back then, see Mizielińska (2011).
19 For instance, Stop Bzdurom hung the rainbow flags on famous statues in Warsaw, including one of Christ. These actions were condemned by the politicians of the ruling *Law and Justice* party and activists were called aggressors and charged with insulting monuments and offending religious feelings.

2 Polishing Queer Relational Trajectory

Introduction

The growing interest in the perspective of the life course of LGBTQ people in various historical contexts and regions can be explained by the desire to fill gaps in the existing knowledge on this subject based exclusively on experiences of heterosexual people and heteronormative models of family life (Erikson 1997; Lenz 2006; Żadkowska 2016; Żadkowska, Olcoń-Kubicka et al. 2018; Żadkowska, Jasińska et al. 2018). However, most of the research focuses more on the LGBTQ individual life course (Hammack and Cohler 2009) than on same-sex couples and/or LGBTQ families that have their own dynamics and particular trajectories. It might be caused by thinking about the queer trajectory of life (i.e., queer time as Halberstam called it) in opposition to family life, as "unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance and child-rearing" (Halberstam 2005, 2). In my opinion, this type of thinking is the remnants of the depiction of queer within dichotomy assimilation/subversion, which I have already critically written about in the *Introduction*.

I claim that LGBTQ relational trajectory should be seen at the intersection of the three modes of temporality: biographical/individual time, queer time, and historical/LGBTQ community time, and never as an isolated phenomenon. Moreover, it is dependent both on time and space, interwoven within social, cultural and historical changes. On the one hand, queer relational trajectory, similarly to queer time, might challenge the conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility (Halberstam 2005). On the other hand, as I aim to show in this chapter, it is not radically independent from paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely birth, marriage, reproduction, and death as queer researchers claim (Halberstam 2005, 13). LGBTIQ people remain in weds of interdependent relations with important others as well as are deeply immersed in the culture and its markers of individual maturity (Schneider 1997). Therefore, their relational trajectory is both unique and conventional; their ways of thinking about their own relational life reflect cultural and familial scripts and disrupt them. Moreover, queer relational trajectory is also geopolitically variable and might be pursued quite differently in an ex-socialist country such as

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Poland than in Anglo-American contexts because of different queer temporalities and histories of the LGBTQ movement or the recognition of LGBT rights (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011).

The experiences of people in same-sex relationships, often struggling with unrecognition and discrimination, clearly show that the socially recognisable and heteronormative rites of passage have not disappeared due to the progressive postmodernisation of the family, the democratisation of its forms, or the weakening of the role of external authorities. Quite on the contrary, they are firmly rooted in social awareness and still affect LGBTQ people's lives in the form of expectations, ideas, representations, and discourses they deal with daily (Schneider 1997; Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013). They also leave their mark on their course of life, confronting them with certain normative expectations. Concurrently, their own "fateful moments" (Smart 2008, 2007a), different from social or family expectations, remain unrecognised and/or not read as such.

Researchers emphasise the challenges that non-heterosexual people face every day when dealing with heteronormative social conventions regarding their life and moments of transitions (Slater and Mencher 1991; Slater 1999; Goldberg 2010). Susanne Slater, who researched lesbian families in the 1980s and 1990s, shows that different norms organise the lives of heterosexual and non-heterosexual families. The life of a family formed by two women diverges from the life course of heterosexual couples with its key foundational belief that family ties are created by kinship or affinity. This model had no counterpart in the lives of lesbian families who were at that time unable to marry and, for that reason, less embedded in broader family structures. Therefore, their family concept was made more of friends or ex-partners, which other studies have also confirmed (Weston 1997; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001).

Due to the lack of clear patterns rooted in mainstream social consciousness and popular culture, which could help recognise the stages of relationships of non-heterosexual people, virtually every step of such a relationship might be burdened with social liminality. Consequently, same-sex couples have to struggle with numerous obstacles: taking on maladjusted roles, dealing with the lack of reading their needs, numerous misunderstandings in interactions, stress related to the constant need to disclose and uncertainty of the other party's reaction. For instance, lesbians researched by Slater, not only had to deal with lack of recognition of their families/relationships but also with repudiation/omission of crucial events and "fateful moments" (Smart 2007a), which did not have their equivalents in heterosexual couples' lives such as a multi-step coming out, diverse efforts to be recognised as a couple, redefinition of their relationships with the family of origin, and building a community with other lesbian couples (Slater 1999). Studies on LGBTQ parenthood have also shown differences in the normative stages associated with heterosexual persons' parenting and demonstrated that many important decisions regarding planning a child by non-heterosexual couples are socially illegible (deBoer 2009; Goldberg 2010; Nordqvist and Smart 2014).

Currently, when more and more countries legalise same-sex marriage, marriage increasingly becomes a factor organising the life course of non-heterosexual couples. It turns into a determinant of their maturity and a breakthrough point, expected and inscribed in the queer relational trajectory, not only by the couples themselves, but also by the environment (friends or family of origin) (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013; Jones and DeFilippis 2018). Similarly, current broader opportunities of having a child by non-heterosexual couples (primary thanks to ARTs) change their ways of thinking about their relational trajectory and social expectations regarding their fertility plans (Mamo 2007), based so far on the limitations of non-heteronormative reproduction.

This chapter describes the critical dimensions of shaping possibilities or limitations of same-sex coupledom and its relational trajectories. I discuss the conditions in which their everyday life is built, paying particular attention to events/ordinary moments that respondents mentioned as significant for the subjective sense of being a family. Similarly to the interlocutors of Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir, people in my research often describe their important key life transitions in terms of "life stages" although contemporary sociologists are reluctant to use this concept because of criticism against its universalising and normative nature (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013). For my informants, forming the current committed relationships and moving in together marks their progress towards maturity, a significant stage in self-perception as family and perception of the others. Throughout the chapter, I will be interested in describing the phenomena determining the turning points in the same-sex couple's life, the "rites of passage" (Gennep 2006), legitimising the transition from one stage of the relationship to another.[1] First, I describe the formative stage of same-sex relationships paying particular attention to the partner's role as a friend and biographical caretaker. Then, I take a closer look at the so-called stabilisation phase and various motivations regarding moving in together. I claim that in the absence of legal recognition of non-heterosexual relationships in Poland, living together and/or making the decision regarding common property (i.e., buying a house and/or apartment together, writing a will, etc.) seem to be the most crucial turning points and "fateful moments" (Giddens 1991; Smart 2007) in the relational trajectory. They also constitute one of few available means of displaying family that non-heterosexual people in Poland are left with. They often mark the transition from being regarded disrespectfully just as a couple or even friends to being considered a family. I also analyse the meanings of cohabitation given by informants and demonstrate the role of home in becoming a family. In the final parts of this chapter, I analyse queer people's decisions about the formalisation of their relationships (which involves various tactics, including going abroad to get married and/or performing commitment ceremonies) and having a child even though such a move does not secure their legal recognition in Poland or even leaves them l in a more precarious situation as the status of co-parent is not protected by law. I claim that these seemingly "conventional" steps that could be described

as assimilationist within the hegemonic Anglo-American discussion on homonormativity transcends the binary normalisation/queer and cannot be read as such without considering their local specific meanings. In the analysis of the collected stories, the symbolic meaning of such acts, such as repairing broken kin ties, being finally accepted by the family of origin as a fully fledged family and included within a broader kinship network is often evoked.

The Formative Phase and Contexts for Entering into Relationships

In the stories of the early, formative stages of intimate relationships and the contexts of getting to know each other, two-generational narratives are clearly marked: narratives of the generation before the communication revolution and narratives of the virtual generation. They illustrate different socio-institutional conditions, determining the accessibility to LGBTQ networks as well as patterns of getting to know each other. Stories told by the older generation of gays and lesbians (over 40 years of age) deal with the period when access to the internet was limited. Their first meetings, dates, and seeking partners took place until the second half of the 1990s. Their common feature is almost a complete lack of gay and lesbian community in Poland and/or lack of individual access to it, difficulties, and fears.

Informants often describe the moment of meeting a partner in terms of "luck", underlining the sense of secrecy associated with their search. They often mention putting ads in the "secret" few (primarily gay) magazines without the possibility of publishing photos because of fear of recognition, then meetings following weeks/months of correspondence, accompanied by worries whether the partner would be physically attractive. All of the concerns of this generation are reflected in the narration of 45-year-old Marek. He describes the context of getting to know a partner with whom he has been in a relationship for 20 years, through the lenses of the non-heterosexual environment of the 1990s:

> In the 90s, this [LGBT] monthly called Inaczej ['Differently'] served as a contact box. There was the Main Post Office in [name of the city of origin] with a separate entrance to the hall with postboxes across the street from the fire-station. Whenever you went there, there was always someone nervously reading some letters, and these letters were, most often, from *Inaczej*. And everybody knew it […], so I placed my advertisement in this monthly.
>
> [Marek]

In his reflections, Marek refers to the differences in generations (biographical, queer, and LGBT community time), which, in his opinion, impact people's experiences. He believes that, although the formative period for the young generation, characterised by a relative openness, access to the virtual networks and reality, began relatively recently, they no longer remember and understand these "undercover" experiences. He also points to lack of

variety of models of gay relationships in the environment of non-heterosexual persons of his age:

> It is probably inconceivable for young people now, but I am a child of the 70s, I am still happy that now one can finally live normally in the society. […] In the 90s, when we met, we did it in secrecy, undercover […] It was difficult to imagine oneself in a relationship and then compare one's relationship to other relationships.
>
> [Marek]

The narratives of the "generation of digital age", usually younger gays and lesbians (over 20 years of age) or people who decided to form a same-sex relationship in the period of (late) adulthood, are completely different. Their first meetings, dates, and the time of seeking partners took place after the year 2000 or even in the second half of that decade, at the time of the spread of internet access, social media in Poland, and LGBTQ clubs. A common feature of these narratives is the accessibility, visibility, and openness of the gay–lesbian community. However, what clearly distinguishes these narratives from the earlier ones is that they do not devote as much space to describing contexts of getting to know each other. Areas, where one can meet someone alike are no longer marginal, secret but have become a part of their everyday world. Social media have become the most popular meeting place for this generation (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015) who describe them as just ordinary and accessible. They are no longer unique, different, separated. The interviewees do not see them as embarrassing in any way nor describe them in detail.

From "Friend" to "Lover": Pathways to Enter into Non-Heterosexual Relationships

An analysis of how non-heterosexual people describe their partners in the early stages of a relationship reveals the type of relationship they seek. In their stories, we will not find descriptions of the potential partners' personalities but instead, refer to the desired connection and the partners' attitude during the first stages of the relationship. None of the informants described a new partner in status categories related to their economic position, social roles, and social status. Their narratives differ from descriptions, often present in narratives of heterosexual persons who stick to the traditional marriage and family pattern. Their search for a partner is rather accompanied by the goal of acquiring the socially desirable status of a wife or a husband and fulfilling the roles assigned to them traditionally (Schmidt 2011, 2016). In a sense, the discourse of the first phase of forming a same-sex relationship resembles the Giddensian pure relation (Giddens 2007). It is dominated by relationships described in non-economic categories: friendship, authentic connection, the community of interests, based on mutual understanding. It often involves the discourse of utopian love (Gdula 2009;

Illouz 2013, 2016), that is, seeking love for itself for a genuine feeling. Also, the desire for committed relationships is framed as a natural desire for love associated with a more mature redefinition of oneself. The need to look for someone with whom one can build a lasting relationship and trust is also important. In this way, entering committed and lasting relationships becomes the relational project directed into a mutual future and a way to construct a more mature picture of oneself (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013).

Secondly, the analysis of the repertoires of features describing the relationship and the prospective partner in the first phase of the relationship and its subsequent steps clearly shows that the critical path to enter the relationship is the model "from a friend to lover". Research on relational scripts shows that gays more often emphasise the sexual side of dating, while lesbians tend to build friendly relationships before entering into a romantic sexual relationship (Rose and Frieze 1993; Rose and Zand 2000). It even reaches the point that young women often confuse their first love with friendship (Diamond 2002). In the case of Polish couples, I did not observe such differences. One can even get the impression that male couples significantly often emphasise the romantic aspects of their relationships to refute the negative stereotypes about gay promiscuity (Stasińska 2018).

Przemysław, who met his future partner Witold through an ad placed on a website for non-heterosexual people, says that at the beginning, the most important issue for them was an intellectual understanding. It is worth noting that the relationship of Przemysław and Witold, like many others, developed over a long time, about half a year, before they decided on their first meeting and the inclusion of the erotic component:

> We went through this phase which lasted for about half a year that we called each other every day. We talked for hours, and I was mainly trying to convince him to give it all up. And then we met, and we got on like a house on fire. I mean, we had clicked earlier because of a kind of intellectual understanding, which I think is kind of essential and, in fact, it is the most important thing.
>
> [Przemysław]

When women talk about the beginning of their relationship, they also emphasise the long periods of writing to each other, talking on the phone and/or Skype, and getting to know each other better, building their friendships. For example, Sonia and Przybysława first exchanged letters for 3 years because they lived in different cities and did not have mobiles. Sonia talks about the first period of her relationship in terms of deep friendship, understanding of souls, and intellectual community:

> Definitely, in the beginning, it was just an intellectual understanding […] Then more personal motives began to appear, we stated to trust each other
>
> [Sonia]

In other narratives, the category of romantic love, described as "love at first sight" often appears. The partner is presented as the one, chosen and awaited, with whom plans for the rest of their lives can be implemented:

> Ever since we decided that we were in love with each other, that we wanted to be a couple somehow, I have known that for me, it would be once and for all, that this would be a relationship meant to last. […] It will be a relationship for life, and she claims the same.
>
> [Przybysława]

> His resoluteness took me in. Even though he was so much younger, he knew exactly why he wanted to meet me (…). We both wanted a long-term relationship.
>
> [Michał]

The other pattern: "from lover to friend", although present, does not dominate the collected narratives, which is contrary to the homophobic stereotypes still prevailing in Poland about non-heterosexual people, gays mostly, who are seen as incapable of long-lasting relationships, only looking for sexual fulfilment. It seems that emphasising the emotional side of their relationships might also be tactics to gain social respect and fight harmful stereotypes.

Partner as a Biographical Caretaker

When discussing the first, formative phase of an intimate relationship, it is worth looking at who supports the subjects in their experiences, becomes their biographical caretaker (Strauss 2013), helps to solve problems, offers support or advice, and reaches out in difficult situations moments. In the case of Polish non-heterosexual persons, they often cannot rely on close relatives, parents, LGBTQ communities (partly because of their weakness in Poland), institutional guardians, and/or LGBTQ experts. In the majority of cases, partners become the source of support and care for each other. Respondents of the survey pointed out their special significance and priority. A happy relationship was for them at the forefront of life values – 91% of people in relationships considered themselves happy compared to only 50% of non-heterosexual singles. Partner was also the primary provider of any support (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). Similar to other findings, partners represented the most suffused relationships – being lovers, family, and friends, all at once. Together they build self-reliant "capsule coupledom" (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013, 79). However, their situation differs in comparison with Anglo-American same-sex couples because they could not register their relationship and/or get married. Living in a hostile social (and sometimes familial) reality and facing the lack of a friendly "invincible community" (Nardi 1999),

makes the role of intimate partners in the Polish context even more indispensable.

Many informants talk about mutual support and a sense of security as an essential dimension of friendship and love. Partners help each other deal with the painful past, often marked by the experience of violence from the family of origin and/or social discrimination. It often happens that partners from the very beginning of their relationship discuss their problems resulting from a lack of acceptance by their families of origin and a difficult childhood experience. It can be said that in the very first phase of the relationship, they become their mutual biographical caretakers (Strauss 2013), helping each other work through complex, traumatic experiences from the past.

In the case of Damian and his partner Tacyt, the couple had to deal with Tacyt's overbearing father and Damian's discrimination by his parents, who, in response to his coming out, made him use separate cutlery, identifying being gay with AIDS:

> We talked a lot, we are both the kind of people who went through quite a lot in life, we had to work out problems from childhood, with parents, and other disasters. I think it made us understand each other very well.
>
> [Damian]

One of the partners may be more knowledgeable due to the previous experiences of coming out to the family or having been in non-heterosexual relationships. Therefore, such knowledge is not necessarily in sync with chronological age but rather depends on queer time, in terms of how long each of the partners has been out. In this way, 27-year-old Tymon, who came out and was accepted by his family in his early youth, guides through this process the married 37-year-old Ireneusz, for whom Tymon is the first permanent partner. He helped his partner during divorce, advising him on openness strategies and living in harmony with himself:

> Maybe I was something of a therapist for him. I'm younger but still, I have more experience in this particular area. I'd already told my mother, my friends and family knew. I live with it, I came to terms with it. And it all came a little later with him. And he complained to me but I told him that he should not lie to anyone.
>
> [Tymon]

Due to generational differences and the experience of growing up in a less discriminatory social world, it is often the younger partners who play the role of the guide for the older ones, leading them through the process of leaving a heterosexual relationship/marriage and/or through the process of coming out, often intertwined with the period of getting to know each other. In the absence of patterns of being in a non-heterosexual relationship

in public space, the closest partners and their experience become essential reference points and models for their behaviour.

Stabilisation Phase. Multiple Paths and Dimensions of Stabilisation

Moving in Together as Doing Family

As I have written in the introduction to this chapter, the life course of non-heterosexual families often differs from these taken-for-granted in the case of heterosexual couples and scripted by the normative scheduling of the couple's life (i.e., marriage, the birth of a child, child-rearing). It is often marked by different stages and milestones, socially illegible and/or unrecognised. This experience of non-recognition and illegibility as a (non-heterosexual) family due to the lack of critical heteronormative moments of transition and familiar status changes is reflected in the collected narratives and frequently takes a form of searching for their equivalents in their own family life, sometimes following internalised expectations or ideals. Due to the inability to meet these expectations because of socio-legal restrictions (e.g., lack of registered partnerships or marriages) and scripts associated with them, the families strive to give special meaning to other seemingly more ordinary moments of their relationship and family trajectory. Thus, the distinction introduced by Giddens between the routine of life and fateful moments is different for them. The ordinary moment such as moving in together becomes fateful in the absence of socially recognised markers of their relational commitment (Giddens 1991; Smart 2007a).

Informants in my research recognise moving in together as a crucial family life transition, a fateful moment when they feel they are forming a family. Importantly, this decision helps them to be recognised as a family in the eyes of others. The consequences of the decision in the form of daily family practices associated with it, such as arranging home space, preparing meals, shopping together, rest, become a kind of "proof of the family nature" of a relationship.

During the ethnographic research, one of the techniques was an interview around photos and objects relevant to the relationship. It turned out that the most often selected objects and photos concern building a house together and creating a common household. Jarek and Mateusz, for instance, chose a coffee cup because they like to go out with friends for coffee and like coffee in general. However, a much more critical factor was that this cup set was a gift from Mateusz's mother, who always tries to buy them useful household items. Such gifts can serve as evidence of recognition of a couple as a family living together:

M: The cup will probably have several meanings. The first one is that we like coffee and collect coffee equipment: a regular coffee maker, an electric coffee maker, cups, teaspoons, and so on. The second one, more general, coffee is an essential social element.

J: Going out for coffee.
M: The second issue is that my mother bought it for us because she probably also wants to buy something useful for the household. In this sense that well, she is also aware of the fact that we live together.

[Jarek] [Mateusz]

Interestingly enough, such items/photos were more often chosen by men, for example, they pointed to the first sofa they bought together, chairs made to order, keys to the apartment, a cup donated to a shared house. It seems they felt a greater need to mark a change in their status due to the social stereotypes about gays still common in Poland, such as their promiscuity and the lack of stabilisation in intimate life.

Both men and women believe that practices of living together and sharing a common household are related to the definition of their relationship as a family. In their eyes, these practices constitute a peculiar transition, a change of status from being just a relationship to being a family, although unsanctioned and unrecognised socially. In this sense, living together resembles unregulated status transitions described by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser and Strauss 1971) or better the liminal phase in Turner's approach, characterised by ambivalence and being "between" (Turner 1995) due to the lack of social recognition of the status change (they become family in their own eyes, but not necessarily in those of the others). By moving in together and forming a joint household, partners are no longer part of the community of people living alone or in a "frivolous", "fleeting" relationship as the others often perceive them. However, they have not yet been included in the social structure because it is fundamentally heteronormative.

The following quote from an interview with Joanna and Marta shows that cohabitation can be for same-sex couples the equivalent of marriage in conditions where they do not have such a right:

J: Well, I believe that if one is to form a relationship with someone, one must do it seriously, and if you do it seriously, it must end in marriage.
M: Well, well, but if there are no same-sex marriages, you do what you do, which means you live together, right?

[Joanna], [Marta]

It is interesting that couples with children often mentioned living together, and not the arrival of a child in their relationship as a crucial moment of forming a family:

R: OK, so when did you realise that you are a family? Was there a moment when you started to feel this way?
P: Actually, I don't know; maybe when we moved in together. Certainly it was not connected with the birth of our son.[…] He completed us somehow, but we had felt this way before

[Researcher], [Pola]

Living together is also a moment in biographies of many couples when they send a strong message to the outer world about the intimate nature of the relationship, hoping that it will be received as an intended display of family (Finch 2007). It is particularly essential due to the lack of formal legalisation of same-sex union and the impossibility of revoking socially valid "rites", which limits the recognition of subsequent stages and statuses of relationships by others. Moreover, non-heterosexual couples are not only unrecognised but also encounter practices of diminishing the importance of their relationship or even invalidating its intimate, romantic component (Slater and Mencher 1991). This is particularly evident in the narratives referring to the reductionist perception of their relationships, for example, in terms of friendship or sisterhood, a temporary whim, an emotional aberration which goes away with puberty or after contact with members of the opposite sex, or in connection with the crisis in another relationship.

In such a context, the decision to live together becomes a unique point on the relationship history map. It forces others to revise their opinions about the relationship's nature and reconsider its identity, regardless of whether this process will end in recognition, non-acceptance, or denial. Consequently, living together determines the moment when the process of naming as a family can begin (Strauss 2013).

How moving in together becomes a significant turning point in the process of recognition by loved ones might be illustrated by the story of Bożena and Marzena. After many years of living in heterosexual marriages, they quickly moved in together and raise three biological children of Bożena and one biological child of Marzena. When they told their families and husbands about the decision to leave their marriages and be together, the others' reactions ranged from disbelief in the seriousness of these declarations to treating women's feelings and decisions as a temporary disorder. As Bożena reports, this applied primarily to Marzena's parents:

> When we got together, her mother kept saying that "it was just a whim" or "she lost her mind". Even though she had already known that she [Marzena, Bożena's partner] had previously been in a relationship with another woman. Marzena told her again and again […] her mother just could not take it.
>
> [Bożena]

However, when Marzena and her son moved in with Bożena, who live in another city, it was a breakthrough for Marzena's parents. Although they could hardly accept their daughter's choice, they recognised the importance of her relationship. They asked Marzena's husband to move out from the apartment they bought for her and sold the flat. Later, they bought out a share in Bożena's apartment from her ex-husband.

Home, Sweet Home? The Different Meaning of (Queer) Domesticity

Home is impregnated with normative meanings. As a "heteronormative space", it offers material security and support, often on the condition that queer identities will be not performed (Bell 1991; Valentine 1993; Lynda Johnston and Valentine 1994). As such, it might be perceived by people with non-normative identities as a place of oppression, lack of acceptance, where they either hide their identity or leave. Nevertheless, in some situations, for people from minority groups, home offers the opportunity to shelter from oppression, becoming a place of refuge and resistance against the racist and sexist public sphere (Hooks 1999). For non-heterosexual people, home can become the only space of freedom where they can resist heteronormativity, affirm sexual differences, and build identity and mutual support (Elwood 2000, 17). Non-heterosexual people strategically use the home space to create their identity because it is often the only safe place where they can connect their sexual identity with other dimensions of their identity and thus recognise themselves as a holistic entity. They can reveal their sexuality through home practices, influencing their content and course. Nevertheless, home is not excluded from social relations. Its presentation to other people becomes an opportunity to confirm the hosts' specific identity, including aspects that are hidden in public space, often hostile to all manifestations of non-normativity (Gorman-Murray 2007). Andrew Gorman-Murray warns against the romanticisation of home, stating that "home is not a matter of belonging or alienation, resistance or conformity, but negotiations between these two different arrangements" (Gorman-Murray 2012, 2). Home might offer refuge, but it is also a place of social surveillance and scrutiny, which might not end when one leaves parental home (Johnston and Valentine 1994; Scicluna 2017).

Rachel Scicluna shows that through different homemaking practices, heteronormativity might be challenged. Still, home is loaded with core values of how it should look like, and the impact of heteronormativity (as a yardstick for normality, belonging, and intimacy) is always already there (Scicluna 2017). Therefore, exploring queer domesticity through the similarity/difference dilemma is misleading. For queer people, home is both the place where they can stand out and be different and the way to fit in. As Matt Cook rightly states, "there is no queer monopoly on familial and domestic difference and no straight monopoly on conformity" (Cook 2014, 18). In the case of Polish non-heterosexual couples who decided to move in together processes related to creating a common household are burdened with diverse meanings. In the previous part, I showed their importance as a marker of life trajectory and changing the social status (from the couple to family); in this part, I look at practices of making home together in the context of building a safe space where the couple hopes to escape familial/social homophobia and fully experience their intimacy. At the same time,

social/familial homophobia might be still experienced through the refusal of entering their home by members of a family of origin or other practices of (self) surveillance.

The Importance of Home in Strategies of Becoming a Couple

Informants often indicate that the accommodation they live in is an important place where not only their everyday life goes on but they can also "practice" their relationship and doing family. In Poland, where non-heterosexual couples experience homophobia as a result of spatial exclusion and the elimination of all manifestations of abnormal sexuality from the public space (the famous homophobic slogan: "Do this at home, in secret"), home and domesticity become particularly important. They create a safe space for a relationship, offering the possibility of showing affection explicitly and safely.

Let's look at an illustration of this problem from the beginning of Marcin and Lucjan's relationship. In their case, living together can also be considered a form of caring for the partner:

> Lucjan's situation at home was quite unpleasant because his mother was continually nagging him that either he would change or start therapy […]. My own situation was also quite depressing as I lived with my sister and her husband, which means we didn't have much opportunity to meet. We often met at my house when they were at work.
>
> [Marcin]

For Marcin, his partner's departure from the family home was a form of escape from familial violence. Here, their home means a safe space in a dual sense – it liberated the couple from domestic violence and offered them the opportunity to experience closeness and intimacy:

> I mean, as I said before, he was beaten up. And he was afraid to stay home. And the decision about HIS departure had to be made as soon as possible. […]The opportunity arose when my father died. Now we could live together in his flat.
>
> [Marcin]

The decision to share a flat also plays the role of "patching the partner together", becoming a formalisation of stability that is supposed to guarantee certainty and predictability of relationships, as it was in Przemysław's case:

> We wanted to have a real home from the beginning – to have cats, a dog, friends, and just HAVE OUR HOME.
>
> [Przemysław]

Moving in together sometimes becomes a specific rite of passage that allows not only to clarify the status of the relationship, give it a clear, more stable framework, and set boundaries, but often also end the stage of one's own internal struggles with identity. It also allows defining the relationship's framework, which is essential, particularly when one person (or both) enters into a same-sex relationship for the first time. Then the process of becoming a partner, entering into a relationship overlaps with another process – recognition and gradual acceptance of one's non-normative identity. It is particularly important when the issue of residence affects the process of specifying the type of family configuration one wants to create. In many cases, entering into a relationship and living together overlaps with searching for a relationship model that each person in the couple wants to create and on the forms of future home integration (Kaufmann 1993). Living together at the beginning of a relationship allows partners to look at themselves and their expectations, find a compromise between the need for freedom and being together. It is a kind of "rite" confirming the couple's status, but also the concept of each other individually.

Moments of buying, renovating or arranging a shared accommodation appear in the biographies as confirmation that there is a closeness between partners, a sense of authentic community, and joint plans for the future, but also a community of tastes. It is especially significant in women's narratives for whom the renovation of an apartment has an essential dimension of gender subversions. Urszula and Monika chose a tile as a significant object for their relationship, and on this occasion, they told the ethnographer about the renovation works in the apartment they did together:

MONIKA: There were no tiles. I also remember that at the very beginning, there was no wardrobe either. Urszula received me with such a beautiful cardboard construction [laughs] in which she kept her clothes. So everything there was so temporary. This was one of the first things we did together to give this apartment its final shape. So we put these tiles. She always told me that she would like something of this kind [as the tile], and she also talked about the ceramics studio which produced them. Well, we ordered them together. We chose the colors and so on. And then we put these tiles ourselves.

URSZULA: Yes. It was our first job together!

[Monika], [Urszula]

Caring for the appearance of a house or apartment is a crucial activity without which the household cannot function well. For this reason, it has a distinctive character, allowing us to see similarities and differences in the structure of capitals, habitus, and the system of dispositions of both partners. The case of Aniela and Adriana illustrates how the renovation of an

apartment, which formally belongs to Aniela, is a process of negotiation and compromises and getting to know each other better:

ANIELA: I wanted a "serious" apartment that would make me feel like an adult person, a mature woman, and Adriana wanted to make it very youthful.

ADRIANA: Youth, great word. I wanted it, I wanted peace and love

ANIELA: She wanted it to be colourful and cheerful, and, in general, youthful, full of colours on every wall. Well, I did not want to feel like a teenager there. And it was a long process we went through. What it was going to be, what style it should be so that I could feel right there, and Adriana could feel well too. It was also a long process and we changed these projects many times.

ADRIANA: I mean in such a well-designed way but very nice, only that we were terrified that with all like that Aniela would just get bored.

ANIELA: But it was also cool that in the process of deciding what and how we wanted in the apartment, a lot of our features, even the traits of character, came out. For example, when I know what I like or I don't like, I have to share it. And Adriana, the very moment she hears my opinion, she no longer speaks her mind. She only responded to my vision and immediately adapted her own needs and expectations to it. And it also gave us a lot to think about. I learned to restrain myself and ask her what she thought.

[Aniela] [Adriana]

House-as-home comes into being through daily performances and interactions. The everyday practices of doing domesticity (like renovation in the above case) become the process of imagining a family where both partners could feel comfortable.

The Taboo of a Non-Heterosexual Household

The house also becomes a contentious space, a medium through which a lack of legitimacy and refusal of recognition can be expressed. It manifests itself in various ways of treating the home by the family of origin. Some relatives stop visiting their non-heterosexual son/daughter. For instance, Teodor's parents have stopped coming to his home since he started to live with Marcel:

> I proposed to organise the name-day party at home, and I began to invite my parents and family. It turned out that my parents did not want to come to this party. They had some other idea that they would arrange it, but in general, they didn't want to come. So just my sister came here. On the other hand, after returning [from abroad where they got married], we met them, they invited us, but they invited us to a restaurant and they started to apologise. They said that they did not

> want to offend us but needed to explain that they had to take a doctrinal stance. Marcel remarked that if they were going to apologise just to have a clear conscience, he didn't accept that apology. And you know, we quarrelled. I said: "you invite us to the restaurant because you just don't want to invite us home". And my dad agreed with me.
>
> [Teodor]

Kacper's family behaves similarly, treating his apartment as an immoral space. His father warned him that he would not enter Kacper's new home, showing his disapproval of his relationship and identity:

> WE LIVED TOGETHER. And then I told my family that I was gay. My father made it clear that he would never set foot in my home —his words exactly. My brother warned me against possible illnesses. I replied: "I have only one partner."
>
> [Kacper]

Attempting to isolate young children from a new home created by a same-sex couple may also be an expression of disapproval. It is evident in Ireneusz's case whose ex-wife did not allow their children to visit their father at his home, thus preventing their contact with his partner Tymon. The most striking example was Bożena's mother "kidnapping" her granddaughter after being that she would live with her female partner. She kept her for several months and finally gave her back when Bożena's ex-husband intervened.

Another phenomenon is the caution with which queer couples invite others to their homes. Something once unproblematic, taken for granted, and beyond serious reflection after entering a same-sex relationship and moving in together becomes a problem because it might disclose the nature of the relationship to strangers and/or relatives. Although home offers a refuge from social and familial homophobia and heteronormativity, its walls are always penetrable. The private intersects with the public. Therefore, my informants were very cautious in organising their inner space, avoiding objects overtly identifying their sexuality.[2] Sometimes, they even removed proof of their commitment when they expected visitors whom they had not told about their relationships, as in the case of Marta and Pola. During their interview about photos and significant objects, they talked about their first selfie, which symbolised a particular point in the relationship trajectory – often recalled by the couples – the moment of their first declaration of love. Usually, this picture stands in their bedroom but sometimes, when the couple expects visitors, they remove it:

> POLA: Sometimes, we take it off and hide it. For example, it happened recently. There was my uncle's funeral, and we invited all my distant and close relatives – aunts, uncles, grandparents. The aunts all know but my grandparents are the only family members who don't know about us.

MARTO: I mean, officially.
POLA: They don't know about us. These are older people; I don't think it would occur to them.
MARTO: No.
POLA: Sometimes, we hide it too when someone new is coming to our house.
MARTO: But generally, it stands there all the time.

[Marta] [Pola]

The above examples clearly show that non-heterosexual couples/families can resist heteronormativity, affirm their sexual/relational difference, and make a space where their intimacy might flourish through the homemaking process and various domestic practices. At the same time, the dominant heteronormative ideology infiltrates their private safety. Families of origin refuse to enter the "contaminated" space and express their disapproval. Also, families of choice engage in some attempts to "clean" it in order to avoid a more open "demonstration" of their commitment and gain acceptance.

According to Scicluna, a home might be conceptualised as a syncretic subversive place that bridges the oppositional categories of thinking. It offers both spaces for practising non-heterosexual subjectivity or/and relationships and the possibility of others' surveillance because queer people build their homes within the existing structures of families and friends, neighbourhoods, and communities. She rightly states that

> scrutiny does come not only from the outside but also from within, through the gaze of family, children, neighbors and friends. It embodies the public and the private simultaneously, which come together through various social relations that are performed within and outside home. It is through this performativity of complex asymmetric relations that the public is interwoven with the private, that is, ideologies become inscribed in the home through the performativity of cultural norms and ethics. Thus, the performativity of the self is intricately linked to the place and the built environment, along with gender and sexuality.
>
> (Scicluna 2017, 112–13)

Regulating Property as a Formal Family Proclamation

In addition to living together/moving in, which is for same-sex couples one of the few available ways to send a status message about their relationship to others and display their serious character, another strategy to mark a more advanced stage in the relationship's trajectory is joint property decisions. Due to the lack of other possibilities for formalising the relationship, combining budgets to buy an apartment, joint repayment of a housing loan, financing a home renovation or its purchase by both partners might have a similar effect for family and friends as civil marriage. The change of status

is recognised here in the light of the property law only and not protected by the constitution as it is in the case of heterosexual marriages. It shows a complete discrepancy between legal and institutional regulations and family practices of non-heterosexual people. Such a tactical use of market rules to formalise relationships is one of the few formal procedures available to give status and social significance to their relationship. However, the consequence of this process is the neo-liberalisation of the intimate space of non-heterosexual relationships. When the only legal foundation of a relationship is property and market law, the relationship depends on balancing profit and loss, resulting in the sense of constant uncertainty.

Still, non-heterosexual people take this risk, aware that property decisions open up space for redefining the status of relationships in the eyes of their family of origin. Establishing property division, preparing a will and other authorisations mark the proclamation of changes in the couple's status towards each other and their social surroundings. The family of origin is either informed about such decisions or participates in them as a guarantor of the provisions (e.g., supports a will, undertakes to comply with its requirements, waives the reserved share, helps to repay or take a loan). In this way, they have the opportunity to confirm their acceptance of the relationship and recognise its importance. The economic dimension provides the space for legitimising relationships.

The story of 47-year-old Kacper and 66-year-old Sławomir, who have been in a relationship for 21 years, might be an interesting case illustrating these trends. The turning point in their relations with Kacper's family of origin (Sławomir's parents are dead) was the decision to build a house that the partners constructed with their own hands for 7 years. They both think that their families' acceptance of their relationship had increased since they began the construction, although they lived together for many years before it started. At that time, their families finally recognised that their relationship was "something serious" and began to invite them to all family events such as weddings and baptisms. Building a house functioned as the final proof that they wanted to be together and formed a lasting and stable relationship:

> We used to rent a small apartment, we lived there for probably about six years. Finally, we had to think about something bigger. But we could not afford to buy a flat right away. […] We found this piece of land, and gradually we started to move on with our lives … When we bought it, things started to change, their acceptance appeared, they simply realised that it must stay like this, well, they can't break it and make us give it up. Right now, I am accepted in his family, this is not the acceptance AS IT SHOULD BE, NORMAL, BUT I AM ACCEPTED.
>
> [Sławomir]

Combining financial resources and sharing a common budget also becomes the basis for a formal contract with Kacper's family of origin. In the notarial will, Sławomir transfers to Kacper his share in the joint property (including

the right to the house and land) in exchange for lifetime care. All parties agreed that if Kacper should die earlier (he is younger), then his heirs must provide lifelong protection to Sławomir in exchange for the right to the property after Sławomir's death.

In turn, the parents of 51-year-old Tadeusz and 48-year-old Adam formally recognised the relationship of the two men when they decided at one point in their 21-year relationship to writing a will in which they secured joint property in the event of the death of one of the partners:

> There was also the matter of the so-called *zachowek* [legitime, compulsory portion of an inheritance reserved only for family members] which is given to parents when their child dies. Naturally, if there is a will. We asked our parents, Adam's and mine, while my father was still alive, whether they would agree to renounce this right. […] My parents and Adam's parents agreed, we did this, the official way with the notary public, we also drafted a will that all the property, if I die, stays with Adam, and if Adam dies, it stays with me.
>
> [Tadeusz]

Securing a partner's rights is not easy in a situation where relations with one of the families of origin have been difficult for a long time. In such cases, partners do not feel confident, they anticipate possible scenarios of family behaviour, and look for additional, often costly safeguards, including taking out insurance policies to cover the prospective tax on *de facto* joint ownership. They even try to gather all pieces of evidence now, for example, in the form of a certificate of marriage entered into abroad, to refer to such formalisation in the event of a possible legal case for legitime. This is what Teodor and Marcel did:

> For example, I wondered what would happen if I died, and Marcel would inherit according to my will. Well, we have an apartment and so on. There are many different economic issues so to say, which, perhaps, are not the most important, but which cannot be left alone. It is impossible not to talk about them. It is impossible to leave them entirely alone. Things like writing wills, buying an insurance policy. Marcel thought about this marriage first as such a pragmatic solution that would help us with the future inheritance. And indeed it may play this role.
>
> [Teodor]

We can see that in the case of Polish same-sex couples, a formal involvement of the families of origin in the process of recognising their relationship is very often based on economic and not emotional factors. For some families of origin, moving in together is a sufficient proof of seriousness and maturity. Others need more formal proof, from buying apartments through writing wills to seeking ways of formalising relationships, which I describe

below. Therefore, I propose to read all those practices not only as a way to gain a sense of belonging and security within the couple but also as few available means to display their families, gain recognition and respect from important others and repair sometimes broken kin ties.

Formalisation of a Relationship as Tactics to Gain Recognition

The collected stories show that the possibility of formalising a relationship would be an opportunity for my interviewees to show the family of origin (and the world) that they are a "real" family and, in return, gain social and familial recognition of their relationship. Although in the project survey, its respondents declared that they would like to formalise their relationships mostly for practical reasons to facilitate everyday life or the possibility of material protection in the event of death (98%), the recognition of the relationship by the family and the environment was chosen as a reason by 76% of respondents (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). However, in the current political situation, this question reflects their desires not possible to accomplish.

Still, some non-heterosexual persons do not merely dream about getting married but look for available opportunities and decide to go abroad to get married there or perform a humanistic commitment ceremony in Poland (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2014; Stasińska 2018). Both unions are not legally recognised but have symbolic significance for the couples, changing how others (especially family of origin) relate to them. In this specific context, they constitute a particular rite of passage but different from heterosexual marriage. In the latter case, it is usually a desirable decision that others welcome with joy because it fits in with their expectations of a relationship and its trajectory (Schmidt 2015). It also entails many legally protected obligations and benefits. For a non-heterosexual couple in Poland, it is a "fateful moment" (Smart 2007a) that marks a purely symbolic transition – from an inappropriate relationship to an accepted one offering some form of partial recognition of its importance. However, this (partial) recognition is often burdened with different emotions felt by the social environment rather than joy, causing consternation. It reveals the nature of the relationship, making same-sex relationships more visible and harder to hide, often forcing the family of origin to face their fears, confronting "what people will say". Namely, it requires going out of the closet by the family of origin itself.

The story of Kamil and Włodzimierz can be a good illustration of these tendencies. They emigrated to Great Britain and intended to marry there (the wedding was planned for June 2014; the interview took place in February 2014). Kamil's parents, quite religious and living in a small town, reacted to their news with fear:

> There is one thing about Kamil's family and the wedding, his mom would come, but his dad would never. Kamil's parents are VERY

> stressed about this wedding. Because, if we say we are getting married, the relatives will start to talk and so on. And it will somehow negatively affect them.
>
> [Włodzimierz]

Non-heterosexual people in Poland are fully aware that marriage primarily changes the way the environment perceives the relationship because it includes the couple into a socially recognised, familiar script and symbolically gives them the family status. It makes others begin to see the relationship more seriously as a family, inscribes them in socially identifiable stages, and gives the couple the respect of others. Furthermore, it is often the primary trigger for them to consider such an option.

Karina and Daniela, who were planning to get married,[3] discussed this issue. As a way of strengthening the symbolic meaning of their marriage and emphasising the status alteration of their relationship, they also intended to change their names:

> DANIELA: Karina's dad thinks of me as family at the moment. Well, I dare to believe that my mother will start to think about Karina in this way too. I have no idea what my father thinks. Grandmothers, I guess, they come around to realise that Karina seems to enter the circle of my family of origin.
>
> KARINA: Well, it will be hard to miss when we change names.
>
> D: Well, if we change names, it will be another surprise.
>
> [Daniela], [Karina]

In this dialogue, it is clear that, on the one hand, marriage can be a symbol of participation in a broader cultural community. On the other hand, it authenticates relationships in the eyes of others. It changes their thinking about a relationship, so far often neglected, considered less important, and without a future. The intended marriage legitimises the relationship. Thanks to it, as if by magic, something that used to be "just a relationship" becomes a family. Therefore, it has a performative significance.

The case of Teodor and Marcel only corroborates this tendency. Teodor's parents, very Catholic and conservative, did not accept their 20-year-long relationship. The significant change took place only after the couple made a spontaneous decision to get married abroad. From that moment on, his parents began to look more favourably at their relationship and finally started inviting men together for family occasions. It should also be emphasised that Teodor and Marcel went beyond the traditional relationship trajectory scheme and the conventional model by deciding to get married abroad after almost 20 years of being together. Their marriage took place without prior planning during holidays, and family members were not invited. In the following fragment of the

interview, the couple highlights the emotional dimension of this event, which surprised them:

MARCEL: We just went to [name of country], and it suddenly turned out we could get married. […] As we checked out the formal requirements, which were virtually none, we decided to get married. Just like that! After twenty years of our relationship. […] We did not have the opportunity to invite our family because we chose not to wait.

TEODOR: They couldn't come during our stay, right? There just wasn't enough time.

M: Our departure date was just a week away. So we only e-mailed our relatives. They sent us all best wishes. […] It was so banal and simple, and so official, but it was, at least for me, so heartfelt when I said there that I was taking you as a husband and that I would look after you. I said it with full conviction and the experience of twenty years. And it was so emotionally moving, […] it gave me a kind of social recognition that I thought I did not need. And yet it was important. It means that such institutional recognition does play a role in all this. That is why I am a supporter of marriages and partnerships. […]It intensified our mutual relationship.

[Marcel], [Teodor]

Kamil, quoted below, also emphasises the symbolic importance of marriage. He mentions that wedding rings they had bought earlier before they decided to marry abroad are an unmistakable status sign for society. However, he opposes heteronormative connotations, ready behaviour patterns ("formulas" – as he defines them), which heterosexual couples can simply apply. Their decision to marry was not to display their normalcy, so it cannot be considered an expression of assimilation. Kamil shows that in seemingly similar or even the same situation – engagement, exchange of rings, planning ceremonies – there are differences related to their sexuality. He expresses his desire to "escape" ready-made scripts and the need to invent one's scenario. In a sense, Kamil also emphasises the ordinariness and familiarity of his own commitment/engagement ceremony:

> There were no special festivities; each of us said a few words about why he wanted to put this ring on. It was something like the American vows, Americans always write their marriage vows […] We spoke about the feeling that unites us, why we wanted to wear these rings, well, it was so ordinary, except for these words we said to each other. All the rest was … so ordinary […] It wasn't a ready-made formula, it was definitely about the fact that … I love him […] I had always been happy because being gay is fun, at least you don't have to get married, you don't have to say any such phrases and formulas, which has always stressed me a lot. And then these words just came to me […] It was … it was from the very heart […] we would like to show everyone that we

> wear the rings, […]so that people would see that I have a boyfriend but they would see that I am wearing a wedding ring. The metal was immaterial for us; we associated gold with the heteros too much. Well, we've got used to these rings, we won't change them now [when they get married], although they are just cheap silver wedding bands. Maybe, I don't know, we'll carve something on the inside, but that would be all.
>
> [Kamil]

In Eliza and Marzena's case, who had a humanist wedding in Poland after almost a year of being in a relationship, the attention is also drawn to transgress the traditional heteronormative model. The ceremony took place in the park, where they fell in love, only in the presence of witnesses and the person performing the ceremony. Then they organised a wedding party at the LGBTQ friendly club, to which the couple invited guests on the pretext of Marzena's birthday. For this reason, only Marzena's sister, who acted as a witness, represented members of the family of origin. Both women's relatives later regretted that they had not been informed about the real reason because then, they assured, they would undoubtedly have come to the party. After the wedding, the couple decided that Marzena and Michalina (Marzena's biological daughter) would take Eliza's surname. Regarding this, Eliza emphasises the symbolic dimension of this family practice – displaying the significance of relationships for others, more serious treatment of the relationship by the family of origin, and being included within the kinship framework. Although from a legal point of view, their marriage has no standing, what matters is its significance for themselves and their environment:

> For us, this wedding did matter. Let's take this example, at my work, people know about ut […]. Still, some did not even realise that there is no such possibility, that you just can't get married when you're in a same-sex relationship. Believe me, people did not know this […] they thought it was normal, that we could go to the office and get married, just like the straights. […] And we thought that since there was the marriage and the wedding, it should be a natural consequence that we have the same name later on. Marzena really wanted it the most. And it was so natural for us.
>
> [Eliza]

The cited examples show the ambivalent image of marriage and wedding ceremonies which differ significantly despite their similarities to the heterosexual ones. Some Western authors claim that queer marriages are fundamentally assimilationist acts that resemble existing normative patterns, reinforcing heteronormative institutions. Arguing against such practices, they firmly state that queer people (and their relationships) should signify opposition and resistance to the normative society (Bell and Binnie 2000; Warner 2000; Edelman 2004; Halberstam 2005; Duggan 2002).

Others demonstrate that the motivations and ways of getting married elude such a simplified classification (Lewin 1999; Smart 2008, 2007a). I join the latter voices and claim that these practices cannot be understood in a dichotomous model – conforming to or overcoming the heteronormativity. As I have demonstrated, same-sex marriages and weddings performed by Polish same-sex couples escape such a simplistic reading and might be placed somewhere between assimilation and resistance.

On the one hand, LGBT people care about recognition of their relationships and their inclusion into a broader kinship network. Therefore, they might present themselves as similar or ordinary and use the familiar script (and the legitimate social status of marriage) to create connections and a sense of belonging to the *larger family framework*. In this way, they also protect and extend their kin ties, so precarious and precious in a given context. On the other hand, they emphasise their diversity, specificity, and extraordinary character. Thus, entering into marriage has contradictory meanings – refutes the heteronormativity of this institution, even if it appears to strengthen it (Lewin 1999; Kimport 2012, 2013), particularly in Poland, where marriage is strictly reserved for heterosexual couples.

Implementation of Reproductive Plans

Planning to have a child together and then implementing this plan can also mark a breakthrough in a couple's life. Non-heterosexual people in Poland, especially women, increasingly include parenthood in their life projects and choose to have a child outside of heterosexual relationships as a part of an existing relationship. To make their plans a reality, they can either opt for a one-off, reproductive relationship with a man, perform self-fertilisation with the semen of a(n) (un)known donor, or use the procedure of artificial insemination in a fertility clinic abroad, where the donor remains anonymous. They can also adopt a child as single, hiding their relationship. The increase of the range of possibilities of realising the desire for parenthood in comparison with the previous LGBTQ generation also entails the necessity to overcome all kinds of problems with the chosen method (i.e., finding the right clinic, financial difficulties, the selection of donor, its role in raising the child, etc.). New reproductive techniques mark a kind of "generational turn" (Mamo 2007) in non-heterosexual people's life in Poland but in a different way than it is in the Anglo-American contexts because their choices are still very limited by the state (Mizielińska 2020).

In Poland, planned parenthood concerns a minority of non-heterosexual people. Most children raised by same-sex couples (92%) were born in a previous heterosexual relationship of the respondents. (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). Surrogacy is illegal in Poland. Therefore, men's possibilities are limited to informal arrangements with lesbian couples or heterosexual relationships. While their plans are more remote it does not mean that they do not discuss them as an option. They mostly refer to co-parenting as the most realistic option; some think about migration to

countries where they could adopt a child. Contrary to older men's generation, they do not think about the child only as an outcome of heterosexual marriage/relationship. The youngest generation of women includes having a child in their vision of their future. They do not consider, as the older generation did, entering into a relationship with a man to have a child, but they incorporate parental plans into their current same-sex relationship. Nevertheless, it is still much more difficult for them to accomplish their reproductive goals and move on to the "next stage" than heterosexual couples or lesbian couples living in the global North. Earlier, many lesbian couples used the services of fertility clinics in Poland. Nevertheless, according to in vitro regulation introduced in Poland in 2015, access to artificial insemination procedures is limited to heterosexual couples. Therefore, they have to go abroad or find other legal loopholes, that is, buying semen via the "black market".

Women have reproductive plans regardless of their social capital and class background, although there are differences in their choice of fertilisation techniques. Women from the middle or upper classes mainly consider insemination with the semen of an unknown donor in a fertility clinic. Women from lower social classes look for sperm from strangers via the internet and/or through friends' networks, which is not easy and requires overcoming many potential obstacles.[4] For example, in the case of Arleta and Ola's 2-year relationship, they both plan to get pregnant (the older Arleta wants to be the first). Ola searches for information on various methods and looks for the perfect donor on the web. The last year of their relationships was a period when the couple often talked about their expectations of each other as prospective parents, exchanged views on upbringing, argued about the donor's role in their family life, the moment of informing the child about his identity, etc. For instance, Arleta wants the child to have a father; Ola is less concerned about it.

> It was my idea, for example, that we could have a child together with two gay guys we know […] But Ola is against it because of the possibility of a later court fight over the custody rights and so on. She thinks that when the donor is anonymous, it is better. Then he won't interfere with how we raise the child. He would only want to see a picture from time to time.
>
> [Arleta]

The youngest generation from the middle class incorporates plans to have a child into the current same-sex relationship and the trajectory of their own lives. Moreover, even, perhaps unwittingly, they succumb to the normative vision of life and peer pressure. For example, 27-year-old Ewa and 26-year-old Anna have been together for 4 years and started to talk about their reproductive future. Ewa believes that this should be the next step in every relationship of people of their age who have achieved some stability in life. While meeting their mainly heterosexual friends, the couple talks about

"how to make a child". Ewa, as a social worker, would prefer to adopt a child. Still, as this is hardly possible in Poland, they consider the method of artificial insemination because then their rights to the child are most secure:

> Now, this topic crops up most often because we have reached a certain age […] She graduated … and I am already at such a stage that I have this apartment. Well, I used to say: "If there is no flat, no money, there will be no child." I am not like a stereotypical Polish family, of the "let's make a baby, even if we don't know what we will eat later on, we'll wait and see how things turn out" kind. I am the kind of person who must first be sure that we have the resources […] As far as the child is concerned, well, […] we have friends of our age and this is precisely the right age, so this topic crops up at the parties, mainly in the context that it would be nice to be able to raise a child.
>
> [Ewa]

However, parenthood, like marriage, is not only significant for couples. They are ways of displaying families and can be seen as a catalyst for the acceptance of same-sex couples by families of origin and a way of strengthening kin ties. Having a child sets the relationship between its parents and grandparents at an entirely different level. It also allows looking with more acceptance at the social parent, precisely because of their bond with the child, their care, and upbringing practices. In the case of Ela and Ala, the parents of the latter, after hearing that women try to have a child, and glad that they will have a granddaughter, begin to support their relationship more strongly. Ela's first meeting with Ala's dad took place in the hospital after delivery:

> We shook hands and then he just said: "well, this Ela seems pretty nice" … well, OK, somehow the ice was broken […] They focused on their granddaughter, and now she is the most important, right? Well, we sometimes joke that Zuzia patched it all up together […] I have great in-laws, as it turned out. Naturally, there is also financial support involved. They contribute when we buy something, for instance, a bike for Zuzia. […] So we get financial support, emotional as well because, as you can see, they have accepted us completely.
>
> [Ela]

Thus, the child functions as a bridge strengthening mutual relations between families, allowing the family of origin to look at the previously unacceptable relationship differently.

The birth of a child is perceived as a significant change, a marker of another stage of life, commitment to a relationship, a signal of its certainty, maturity, and seriousness. In the absence of social guidelines on the trajectory of a non-heterosexual relationship, this particular stage – planning a child and its upbringing – is something that the older generation can

understand, translate into their own experience, and launch appropriate familiar scripts towards such an ordinary reproductive order.

Conclusions

The analysis of the relational trajectories presented in this chapter highlights the specificity in the life transitions of non-heterosexual couples in Poland. Although participants of the research display various life strategies and personal choices, what unifies them is the idea of seeking a stable relationship and authentic love. They talk about their relationship in non-economic categories: friendship, genuine connection, a community of mutual interests, and understanding, seeking love for itself. They often emphasise the need to find someone with whom they can build a lasting and trustful relationship. Mutual support and a sense of security become essential dimensions of friendship, and the path "from friendship to love" appears the most often. Partners help each other cope with the past, often marked by the experience of violence and discrimination from the family of origin. This therapeutic dimension is particularly crucial in same-sex relationships due to their constant exposure to homophobia. Moreover, the younger partners, acting as biographical caretakers, teach and encourage their older partners to live in harmony with their feelings and support them in the process of achieving this harmony.[5] Although the importance of having a partner might remind self-reliant "capsule coupledom" described already by Anglo-American researchers (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013, 79), it has a specific meaning in Poland where this "capsule coupledom" is built against the hostile outer world and sometimes offers the only haven.

The analysis of transition rituals, which aim to legitimise and validate same-sex relationships in the others' eyes, primarily their families of origin, in a situation of social and legal exclusion, shows queer creativity in negotiating the couple's statuses and attempts to find social recognition in circumstances where the state promotes only heteronormative coupledom. However, as I have demonstrated, space for the formal legitimisation of relationships is sometimes limited to the economic dimension and market logic. Formal "rituals" are often determined by property decisions, which, due to the inability to legalise a partnership, function as the only proper space for defining the status of relationships between partners and the family of origin. For many same-sex couples, such a strategy consists of a few available formal methods to give their relationship a rank, social significance, and recognition from the significant others. Therefore, my findings call into question the interpretation of same-sex relationships by Giddens, who perceives them as a representation of a pure, non-market-mediated relationship (Giddens 1993). If only formal market rules offer protection for same-sex unions, then this protection, and consequently, social ties, become dependent on the profit and loss of periodic market conditions. Contrary to Giddens, I have demonstrated an externally imposed and systemic neo-liberalisation (and thus economisation

and precarisation) of intimate space of non-heterosexual relationships with all the risks involved.

More generally, the analysis also shows the different trajectories of becoming a family and the lack of socially recognised rituals, which could symbolically affirm the most fateful moments in same-sex couples' lives. It results in difficulties that the social environment (mainly the family of origin) may have with full recognition of a same-sex relationship as a family (or even a relationship). In a heterosexual family's life course, such markers of life experience as engagement, marriage, anniversaries, the birth of a child, baptism, etc., form familiar scenarios, which the social surrounding is fully equipped to read as displaying family. Their proper reading and recognition are also facilitated by the entire popular culture, which in Poland completely ignores the presence of non-heteronormative families, unlike in the West, where there are already offers addressed directly to non-heterosexual couples and their families, primarily due to the legal recognition of same-sex coupledom.

The life course of non-heterosexual persons in Poland, whose marriages contracted abroad are not legally valid, remains still different and marked by other significant moments. The family of origin often feels lost, not finding known reference points that mark key life transitions. Living together, creating domesticity, getting married (no matter that not recognised by the state), and planning a child are part of the familiar life pattern. They allow two generations to meet and find commonality in their "similarity-in-difference" (Tang, Khor, and Chen 2020). Therefore, I propose to read them as a bridge facilitating recognition of a relationship and strengthening kin ties. They are a socially known measurement of commitment, offering significant others a possibility of respecting the relationship. They are also symbolic turning points with the performative power – transforming the relationship into the family in others' eyes.

Criticising same-sex couples' compliance with "heteronormative" expectations should not fall into dogmatism, aptly named by Lewin "queer fundamentalism" (Lewin 2009), which also has its specific local equivalents. First of all, after Schneider (1997), we should remember that demanding non-heterosexual people to come up with entirely new configurations and family models is a certain naivety that does not take into account their immersion in culture. Schneider rightly writes, "so why do gays and lesbians fall in love, which they expect to be lasting if not eternal; sometimes confirm their love with ceremonies they and others call "marriage"; form couples and domestic units; get very upset when and if these relationships break up; and want and have children however they can? They do all these things because they live in this society and are steeped in this culture, as everyone is" (Schneider 1997, 271). Gays and lesbians, like other marginalised persons, are not able to completely cut off from the norms of culture and function entirely beyond it because "it is hard to contest something without having something better in mind, at least in the sense of 'not that'" (Schneider 1997, 273).

Secondly, reaching for the norm does not exclude the difference in the practices of its use. Quite the contrary, it allows reevaluations and shifts by using possible interstices of the normative scheme (Hayden 2013). I have shown this on the example of wedding/marriage ceremonies that, at first glance, can be considered an assimilation strategy, a blind copy of a heteronormative pattern, but when looked at closely, turn out to be different. These practices, simultaneously similar and different, undermine the hegemonic Western paradigm of assimilation vs. subversion. I claim that it is crucial to grasp their meanings beyond this binary to recognise their potential in given geopolitical locations. Couples come up with their own scenarios, often not wanting to copy those available or being critical to the heteronormativity of marriage as an institution. However, it is crucial to look deeper and see their motivations contextually, imbued with local meanings even if they appropriate them. As I have shown, same-sex couples apply specific cultural and social scripts not only because they are understandable for them (due to their immersion in culture) but above all for those whom they care about – their kin. These commonly known scripts help them reach the older generation and significant others, strengthen kin ties, and open the possibility of being accepted as a family. In the Polish context, their apparent assimilation and inclusion within the family framework might be potentially subversive, introducing elements of otherness into well-known, traditional patterns and the ritualised (and heteronormative) behaviour. The "copy" might transcend the "original" and make otherness almost ordinary. I will develop this idea in the final part of the book.

Notes

1 The issue of the couple's coming out to families of origin, although also important for the couple's trajectory, will be discussed in Chapter 4, devoted to relationships with families of origin.
2 Most ethnographers did not observe any of such objects (photos, rainbow flags, etc.).
3 Karina and Daniela also disrupted the form of the "traditional engagement". When Karina asked for Daniela's hand in marriage, she offered her a ring. Daniela, on the other hand, gave Karina a multiple entry ticket to the shooting range which Karina dreamed of.
4 Nowadays, due to the 2015 in vitro regulations, it is also an option chosen by women from the middle class.
5 Here, queer time and relational time intersects.

3 Ain't We a Family?

Introduction

Until the 1980s, in publications on both family/kinship and LGBTQ communities, non-heterosexual persons were mostly presented in opposition to family. Moving away from families of origin (particularly after coming out) was considered a shared experience and necessary step in self-invention within affective communities and friendships networks, called "invincible communities" (Blasius 1994; Nardi 1999). LGBTQ communities were built on brotherhood/sisterhood, friendship, and a shared sexual identity. This perception began to change in the 1980s, when, as a result of "politicisation of kinship" (Weston 1997) during the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic, it was noticed that relationships of non-heterosexual persons perform functions assigned to family in their lives, providing support and care, often until death. Weston shows that in non-heterosexual people's lives, the family of origin frequently fails to fulfil its role and the assigned social expectations. On the contrary, it disappoints, hurts, and rejects, making relationships based on blood ties fragile.

Contrary to the popular belief that family can always be relied on, the family of origin "regulates" support depending on its members' sexual identity. It means that in the eyes of many queers, "biological" relationships were no less vulnerable than relationships with friends, lovers, and children consisting of their families of choice (Weston 1997, 57). Weston was one of the first to start writing about families of choice, describing the phenomenon and the renaissance of the concept of "family" among non-heterosexual people. Her interlocutors believed that they formed families consisting of many significant others. Particularly noteworthy is the inclusion of non-relatives, such as friends, former and current partners, who perform a family function in the participants' lives, giving practical and emotional support. As other researchers show, in the absence of support from the family of origin, friends' networks are the primary source of help (Nardi 1992; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001).

Some researchers warn against the over-idealisation of the role of friends in families of choice's lives. In their view, it functions more often as a communal myth than an experience of reality (Hicks 2011). Some relegate this

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experience to the older generation (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013). They emphasise that the relationship between partners is considered primary, above relationships with friends, and many non-heterosexual family support networks are based on deliberate exclusion (Carrington 1999; Gabb 2008). Spencer and Pahl (2006) argue that it is too simplistic to consider relationships based on friendship as chosen and relationships based on kinship as given. In fact, nowadays, we rather deal with the process of suffusion between friends and family roles – some friends may play the role of family and be chosen, whereas others are considered as given and some obligations towards them are assumed (chosen-as-given). Conversely, some family members become given-as-chosen. Thus, friends and family are not "opposite poles" because they can occupy a very similar place in people's lives.

What distinguishes research on non-heteronormative families among work on alternative family forms in the modern world is the emphasis on the political dimension of such families' lives. Naming or not naming one's relationships family is closely related to the social context, visibility of non-heterosexual families in public space, relations with institutions, and legal recognition. Mary Bernstein and Renate Reimann, in the co-edited book under the significant title *Queer Families, Queer Politics* show that it is impossible to separate the private dimension of queer family lives from the political one. They point out that calling one's relationship family by LGBTQ people is a specific choice that goes beyond socially recognised forms of family life. They emphasise the emotional aspects of family creation, which are now also gaining importance in the case of heterosexual families (Bernstein and Reimann 2001).

The emergence of families of choice is also described as a part of a wider range of changes in family life in general. Giddens (2007, 163) has already stated that gays and lesbians are "pioneers undertaking daily experiments". Whereas Judith Stacey, who interviewed gays about their approach to fatherhood, calls gay and lesbian families postmodern family pioneers (Stacey 2006). However, the perception of non-heterosexual families as avant-garde, pioneers, or precursors is in line with the dichotomous approaches I criticise. Such understanding assumes that since they are pioneers, they are non-normative, unlike heterosexual families. This image contributes to the mythologisation of queer families and is responsible for failure to notice their ordinariness, the daily, often normalising tendencies and assimilations strategies of not distinguishing oneself, which are sometimes the only possible choice in a given context and aim at protecting their own families. Queer families sometimes do not want and sometimes cannot afford to be "experimenters" and "pioneers". However, by showing their everyday ordinariness, they often introduce otherness into a heteronormative framework (Hicks 2011; Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013).

In this chapter, I intend to show how informants construct the complex webs of family relationships and present open, inclusive, and dynamic definitions connecting biological ties with the chosen one and normative meaning of family and kinship (theoretical family) with family practices

(practical family), such as support, help, boundless acceptance, trust, security, unconditional love. By examining their struggles over the meaning of the family, I show how their reference to family ordinary practices allows them to overcome kin normativity and include other significant persons, such as partners and friends, who are their "support system" (informant's term). I claim that in the Polish context, due to subjective importance attributed to family, non-heterosexual people tend to call important others/ties family and broaden the kin framework to include kin and non-kin people instead of seeing their own family in opposition to a family of origin (Weston 1997; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001) and contrary to the thesis of individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1993) and the decline of kinship ties in the Global North (Wall et al. 2019). Moreover, in the given geo-political situation, calling one's own relationship family might carry political and potentially subversive meanings.

"Families against Everything"[1] – Meanings of "Family"

Although some of my informants think about "family" in a conventional way and in accordance with kin normativity, and they are reluctant to define their own relationships in such a way, the majority of them believe that together with their partners, they form a family (no matter whether they raise children or not). They express the need to move away from the traditional way of defining the family and open to the multitude of family constellations common in the modern world. The prevailing view is that the term itself is crucial and constitutes an important self-declaration in the often homophobic social environment, denying same-sex couples the right to define themselves in this way. They also believe that, particularly in the Polish context, calling one's relationship a family can be more subversive than not naming it that way. The rejection of this term in the name of freedom from the norm is considered an empty, insignificant gesture that would mean giving in to the homophobic society. As Piotr, quoted below, says, describing one's relationships as a family may be an expression of disagreement with the manipulation and imposition of its normative vision:

> When I think about all these conservative right-wing politicians and also the people who say that family means a woman, a man, children, and so on. Damn, who gave anyone the right to define what family is? I do not impose my definition of friendship on anyone, I have my own, which I practice, and you can have yours. Obviously, there are legal issues. My father is family, my brother is family, my grandmother is family, but for example, Lidka, the daughter of Krysia [a friend] is not my family by law, but I consider her my family. It's my right, isn't it? Or if someone I don't know, has a cat, a dog, or a ferret and thinks that this is his family, that's his right, isn't it? I disagree when someone imposes definitions on someone else.
>
> [Piotr]

Most research participants think of family as a dynamic constellation whose boundaries are fluid and blurred. They also believe that it is necessary to use the concept of "family" despite its heteronormative connotations. Martyna objects to rejecting the category and situating herself outside the family. She is afraid that such an attitude may be counterproductive, that is, it will not change anything in the social mentality, but may even worsen it, leading to further marginalisation of non-heterosexual people and the relationships/families they create. According to her, smuggling subversive contents within the concept itself, somehow queering it from the inside, is a better way to change social perception. She calls this strategy the "Trojan horse" method:

> I was a revolutionary once, but now I see that the world can't function like this. It is better to introduce it slyly and let it flourish there […] The Trojan horse method means just introducing something, and it may be a way for us to have a better life as a community […] To broaden this notion of "family", not to fight it, to let it be. Family is a woman, man, and a child, but then let there be a family that consists of a woman with another woman who can have children or a man with another man who can have children.
>
> [Martyna]

Informants are fully aware of the fact that they define themselves as a family regardless of others, contrary to the imposed norms (social, religious, etc.) and culturally valued markers of a family (i.e., biology, legality). Consequently, defining one's relationship as family acquires a political dimension with a clear purpose to change social attitudes towards same-sex relationships. Many participants are convinced that saying "we are a family", repeating this sentence, and displaying their familiness through ordinary practices (Finch 2007), can act as a performative, changing the perception on same-sex relationships, causing others to begin to recognise them as families. Gustaw, when asked if he considers Mikołaj [his foster son whom the couple informally adopted as a 20-year-old boy, let him live at their home, helped him financially] and his partner Pabian as his family, answers:

> Yes of course! We adopted the name, it creates reality because words create reality. At least, that is what the good book says: "In the beginning was the word." And it is the name or definition of this reality that starts a specific chain of consequences.
>
> [Gustaw]

In what follows, I will look at how my informants redefine the concept of family. How do they justify including in family people who have been excluded so far? What are the most critical determinants of a family? How does the traditional, normative definition of family change under the influence of family practices? Are family boundaries completely fluid, or are they subject to any rules?

Partner as a Family

An expression of going beyond the traditional definition of family is recognising one's partner as a family member. It has already been evident in the survey results, in which 97% of respondents recognise their partners as family. The exact number of respondents think so about their parents (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015).[2] However, in individual or couple interviews, we can track the participants' motivation more closely, observe how the familiness of one's intimate relationship is argued, and how non-heterosexual present/display it as a family to others.

The need to call one's relationship a family is often mediated by the experience of rejection on the part of the family of origin, as it was in Kasia's family described below. Her parents do not accept her relationship with Basia, often making homophobic remarks. For instance, during one visit, they accused her of "leading an abnormal life, not compatible with nature". Therefore, Kasia emphasises that she, together with Basia and Jurek [their son], form a family, separating it from her parents and siblings:

> For me, family is what I created with Basia. This is my family. My parents and siblings are out there. I separate them because this is the way they want it. Sometimes I'm sad, I feel sorry for myself, and I cry after talking to them. And if I do not care so much, I wait patiently for the day when it will just be easier. That's all I can do. As it is in this prayer for the alcoholics … God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. I change what I can. And wisdom to know the difference. The same would be good for my parents if they would accept what they cannot change. If they would distinguish one from the other. And then maybe it will be possible for us to live together as a family like everyone else. Because somewhere deep down, we would both want it. We would like to visit them and spend Christmas with them.
>
> [Kasia]

In turn, for Izabela, her family is primarily her partner Wiktoria. She considers people from her family of origin as people from her past with whom she shares only blood ties. Below, Izabela speaks about how events related to her parents' lack of acceptance have changed her concept of family.

> My [family] means Wiktoria. In principle, only, and exclusively. She is my immediate and most important family. The rest are people I grew up with, with whom I have blood ties, who are very close to me, but they are not the most important to me. Once, they used to be the most important. Once, it was these blood ties. Those people with whom I grew up or who brought me up were the most important thing in my life. Well, it's not like that anymore. Now, when I think "family," I think of Wiktoria, that's all.
>
> [Izabela]

Justifying recognition of a partner as family, the participants often recall the concept of "the closest/most important person" or "immediate family". For instance, Damian describes his partner as the "closest person in the world", while for Marta, her partner Joanna is "the closest family".

Gabb and Fink (2015) write that the most significant person in their informants' lives were primarily their children rather than partners. In their research, the tendency to recognise one's partner as the most important person in life increased with children's age. In turn, Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir (2013), in their study of young generations of married gays and lesbians, noticed that partners were essential and prioritised. They represented the most suffused relationships of all – they were spouses, family, and best friends. The investment in the coupledom made it self-reliant.

These interesting differences and apparent similarities between UK research findings and my own might result from different socio-legal conditions. In the Polish context, the investment in coupledom might be more substantial due to the lack of legal and social recognition and protection. Not finding respect in the eyes of society or the family of origin, non-heterosexual people in Poland attach greater importance to having a partner and invest a lot in the relationship. The survey results showed the practical dimension of this attachment. The respondents' partners were mentioned as somebody they could always count on, who offered support in all circumstances, significantly ahead of friends or family of origin in this respect (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). This support gained a deeper dimension in the qualitative parts, allocated to individual family practices: care, shared mourning, joint care of someone sick from the family, etc.[3]

Practical vs. Theoretical Family

In the informants' thinking about family, various attempts to distinguish what and whom society recognises as such (i.e., normative understanding of kinship, organised in a hierarchical system) from who they consider as family (i.e., their own experiences of emotional closeness and real support) are noteworthy. Their reflections show the split between social norms (kin normativity) and individual practices (kin practices), which often contradict these norms. On the one hand, they firmly believe that they should include relatives in their definition of family and do so even if they do not have contact with them. On the other hand, their own experiences of closeness, support, care, found outside the kin network, make them renegotiate the place of kin and chosen ties. They broaden family boundaries, include other essential persons, and exclude those who, according to normative kinship criteria, should be considered a part of their family but do not meet their standards for being one.

The division into theoretical and practical families reflects the emic perspective of the study participants. Adam, quoted below, introduces it in an

interview while trying to separate the sphere of declaration/ideal/norm (theoretical family) and the sphere of practice (practical family). His reflections exemplify most informants' contradictory feelings regarding the problem of diverging their internalised ideal of "family" from their everyday family practice. The importance of these two dimensions and their impact on renegotiating the "family" meanings was particularly evident during the interview around the family map. When drawing the map and then talking about it, informants reflected on their perceptions of family ties. The inherited or internalised ways of defining family collated with their practices and emotions. Thus, they had the opportunity to "name the problem", distinguish the normative ideal and the cultural phantasm of family and kinship from their own family practices. Doing family and kinship, for example, maintaining daily contacts with someone, giving/receiving support and care, affected their ways of talking about family and its visual representation. Let us take a look at Adam's map (Figure 3.1) and what he said about it:

Adam makes a distinction between theoretical and practical family when he tries to justify his right to omit some persons who, according to normative family understanding, should be included on the map:

> These are the people who form my family in a closer sense. Without these two subgroups, without these [omitted] people, I mean, my brother, Mariusz's father and sister, I believe that we are a family. […] Emotions are stronger, life experience has brought us closer together, we are with each other every day, we maintain constant contact, I think that we make up a family. And let's say, these aunts, uncles, cousins there [at the bottom], they are people who are imposed upon us. I do not necessarily want them to be my family since I do not keep in touch

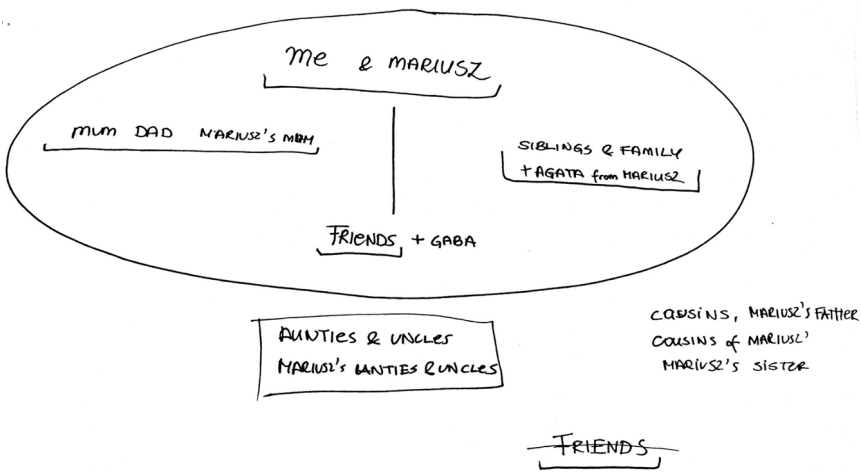

Figure 3.1. Family map drawn by Adam (reconstructed).

> with them. It is the same with my brother or Mariusz's sister. They are more of a theoretical family. This is the theoretical family [outside the circle], and this is the practical [inside the circle – see drawing] family.
>
> [Adam]

Adam places his "real family" in a circle, separating it from the extended kin network, cousins, and other relatives he is not so close to. His practical family (also called elsewhere "the real family") consists of people constantly present in his life, maintaining close contact and supporting the couple. This criterion excludes Mariusz's sister and father (however, Mariusz himself put them on his map), who do not participate in their lives and turn to them only when in need of something. Mariusz's father is an alcoholic who does not even know that his son is in a relationship with Adam. In turn, Mariusz's sister "keeps her distance" to his relationship with Adam and has never visited the couple. Adam also compares his extended family to "Facebook friends" and ultimately moves his friends above them because he has closer contact with them.

Adam's distinction coincides with attempts undertaken by other informants to justify their choices and explain their exclusion strategies. Although they feel a formal obligation to include their kin, they often exclude (some of) them because they do not give support and are absent in the informants' everyday lives. In their narratives, they construct complex meanings of family and kinship, allowing the presence of important others no matter the absence of legal and/or biological ties. Interestingly, this emic perspective meets the theoretical description of the similar phenomenon by John Gillis who demonstrated the coexistence in our thinking of two types of families – its mythologised form, that is, the imagined family ("family we live by"), and the real family, the one in which we live ("family we live in") (Gillis 1996). In the next part, I aim to unpack the informants' notion of practical family, describing in more detail ordinary/daily practices they consider as the most important in their family lives.

Family and Kinship Practices

Most informants distance themselves from formal and structural determinants of family, definitions based on a sense of symbolic affiliation (origin, legal), or blood ties. In their descriptions, they refer to situations and practices that, in their opinion, make up their families. They also bring up a whole set of moral justifications in which individual preferences determine the selection process. Kinship/family appears in these definitions as a set of daily relational practices of often ritualised character. Thus, family is created by practices, not the other way around, that is, practices are a consequence of being a family. Based on their statements, family practices can be divided into:

1. Practices related to the shared household.
2. Practices related to family rituals.

3. Practices focused on activities related to interdependence and responsibilities.
4. Practices regarding emotional closeness and intimacy.

It is noteworthy that these four dimensions of practices do not occur separately in the informants' everyday lives, but they intersect, often creating twisted logic of justification. It is also necessary to emphasise the dynamic nature of belonging to a family – family relationships change in time and space; they are dependent on socio-cultural factors.

Creating a Shared Household

The informants emphasise creating a home, building a household together as an essential measure of family life. Practices related to running a shared household, for example, joint arrangement and division of chores (cleaning, cooking, and eating meals together) create important dimensions of family. A shared home and living together build family ties. A desire to live together is often mentioned with other family practices – future joint plans, undertaking activities together, and sharing everyday life.

> Well, we are just a family. We make decisions together. We simply live together. […] We love each other, and we have a dog. For us, it is just the way it is, an everyday norm, and we do not intend to change it too much. This is just the way we live together.
>
> [Klaudiusz]

Emotional ties significant for Aldona and Milena quoted below are associated with family practices, such as cohabitation, joint plans, and aspirations. Creating a home understood as starting a family shows even the most minor practices of everyday life – sleeping together, eating meals together, gathering and owning possessions together – as significant building bonds:

MILENA: We cohabit, we live together, we sleep together. [laugh]
ALDONA: Well, we have common plans, right? Common dreams
M: [singing] COMMON PROPERTY.
A: I don't think we lack anything as a family.

[Milena] [Aldona]

Many respondents believe that cooking for their partner or managing their diet is an excellent way to show affection and care (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2019). Meals prepared by one of the partners and/or together build up bonds and family atmosphere:

> After such a hard day's work, I am waiting for him. To be honest, it's so nice when we are together, we eat, let's say, I make the dinner, Mariusz comes and this dinner is already here. I think that this is the coolest

> thing because I, for example, feel the need to just be in this house and make the dinner. And Mariusz comes, and we sit and eat together, and then we rest together in this apartment after work.
>
> [Adam]

A joint creation of a home, practices around its maintenance in a physical, aesthetic, and emotional sense constitute a significant part of family life. Defining "one's" home is related to the feeling of kinship and recognition as a family. It confirms, to some extent, the observations of anthropologists who demonstrate that in various cultures, blood ties are not crucial for defining kinship, but it is rather a household with which certain family practices are associated (Carsten 1995; Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Züniga 1999; Ossman 2001). For instance, in her study of the Malay community, Janet Carsten shows that kinship was defined around the household, a place where one eats together, and nutrition is believed to create equal blood. Common food creates a common substance from which the family is constructed. So home is not a place where bonds are strengthened, but bonds are produced within it with food-related practices (Carsten 1995).

Family Rituals and Spending Time Together

Family means not only bustling around the house, preparing meals, sharing chores, etc., but also practices of maintaining relationships with significant others, for example, visiting together their own families of origin:

> I mean, well, we also have our family life, because we go out together, it is not so that each of us visits his own family alone, but we go together to meet our families of origin.
>
> [Ryszard]

For many informants, the critical determinant of being considered as family is whether they celebrate holidays together and are invited as a couple. In their eyes, the latter also means the final confirmation of acceptance for their relationship by the family of origin. However, according to the quantitative survey as many as 53.2% of respondents were not invited to important family celebrations as a couple by their families of origin (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015), which reflects the difficult/fragile relations with relatives and their potential homophobic attitudes.

Informants often recall in their narratives the moment of invitations to ceremonial or festive meals by families of origin, which in their eyes become a ritual of transition from being outside the family, being non-family, into being one. At the same time, they describe their efforts to connect the two worlds: the family in which they live with the one they were born in. According to Manuela, holidays are the quintessence of family life, and a real family is one which celebrates holidays together. Hence, when her

parents refused to invite her partner Kinga for their first Christmas, she argued with them, demanding her inclusion. Later Kinga became a regular guest every Christmas. For Manuela, the fact that they can participate in all family celebrations together is the final proof that Kinga is recognised as a family member. Simultaneously, she still notices double standards and that her parents, especially her mother, are prejudiced against her relationship. If she were with a man, he would be considered by his mother as a family member, while Kinga is only "like family":

> Kinga is my family, but when it comes to my closer and extended family, she is definitely not a family member for them. She's just who I am with. So I asked my mother: "If I were with a man and he would be my fiancé, would he be our family?", and she answered, "Well, he would".
>
> [Manuela]

Holidays, especially those considered to be family events in Polish tradition, are strongly standardised both at the social and family levels. Certain activities, such as celebrating holidays, should be undertaken only as family because the dominant tradition or established cultural patterns define them as such. Celebrating holidays together can shape attitudes as an essential set of family practices and involve some social expectations (i.e., holidays have to be celebrated with the family). Hence, for many participants, a joint celebration of holidays becomes an essential element of self-definition as a family. Sometimes the very fact of celebrating holidays or other family feasts with someone is considered a criterion of inclusion and exclusion in one's personal definition of family, despite close ties and received support.

> When I think about family, the first thing that comes to my mind is an image of Christmas. You celebrate Christmas with your family. In fact, maybe, some strange cultural complexities are surfacing here that I didn't even think about putting my friends in this picture [on the family map]. And yet, they are significant to me and play a critical role in my life.
>
> [Aniela]

The importance of mutual celebration is related to the integrating role of the festive feast (Mintz and Du Bois 2002; Straczuk 2004; Belasco 2008). Common food builds closeness, strengthens relationships, and sets boundaries between oneself and strangers, both at the level of relationship and symbolically. Therefore, the person one eats their meals with during an important bonding time, such as Christmas or Easter in Poland, is of considerable importance. These holiday-related practices shape participants' opinions on family and influence their feelings towards important others, unveiling the hierarchy of relationships and who is less or more significant. Therefore, holidays become a kind of litmus paper of the attitudes of the

family of origin to same-sex couples. Through inclusionary and exclusionary practices, they become an expression of openness and/or intolerance.

Support, Care, Responsibility, Reciprocity

In their thinking about family, many informants emphasise such practices as giving support, care, trust, mutual understanding. Therefore, a family becomes a group of people they can always count on, who understand them and do not let them down in difficult situations, offering help in moments of crisis. The following statements illustrate this tendency:

> I think it is a group of friends… a group of people who support each other every day, who help each other in difficult moments, who can count on each other in such a situation. Family means people who understand us, no matter their stage in life, what kind of problems one has or who is who.
>
> [Adam]

> I think that defining family in a biological sense is wrong. I mean, yes, family, in the sense that this is your kin, this is your biological heritage, but that is all. Family is the people who support you. They may well be friends, and even … they may JUST be friends, and not necessarily, for example, a sister, a brother or a cousin …
>
> [Adela]

Usually, the emphasis on the perception of family through the prism of reciprocity of relations is associated with the exchange of family practices or values that are these binders. The informants mentioned that the family is a particular scope of joint responsibility for the relationship, the need to take certain obligations. Piotr emphasises his concern resulting from attachment, readiness to help in all circumstances, and even sacrifice:

> I do not have a GENERAL definition. (…) It includes various things that I am able to give up my own needs, comforts, and interests for this person, but on the other hand, I have such family members, these relatives, that I am not willing to give up my needs and interests for them.
>
> [Piotr]

Acts of care or support regarded as significant for building a sense of being a family, probably due to the perception of the family as the primary source of care, go beyond the kin normativity as a system determining membership and based on exclusion. Many scholars associated with queer theory perceive the acts of care as the possibility of reworking the traditional construct of family or kinship (Freeman 2007). They believe that

only by focusing on acts of care outside the family it will be possible to describe significant relationships for non-heterosexual people (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Indeed, caring as a relational concept, that is, based on various close relationships, not only in a family context, allows grasping the multitude of constellations of support networks that have not been considered as family until now. In her book about care, Judith Philips (Philips 2007) rightly states that although in many respects, "care" is a vague and ambiguous concept, as a part of everyday life, it seems obvious. And the participants seem to refer precisely to this obviousness, and even ordinariness of their experience, when they describe their criteria for being a family and mention all kinds of care practices such as taking care of partner's ill parents and/or remembering about partner's need while doing shopping.

Emotional Closeness

In defining family, informants depart from formal/normative determinants in favour of valuing individual feelings and emotions. Many emphasise the feeling of emotional closeness as the decisive factor that makes someone family. Karina even states that "if you feel that you are a family, then you are". Bogumił, in turn, says that "love makes family". In his definition, one can see the distance to family members, both of origin and children from a previous relationship, and the closeness felt with the partner whose support he can always count on:

> Well, as I said: "Love makes family!", But… it literally does we [with his partner –jm] simply say: we are a family to each other. […] I am always aware that I cannot count on my children, whom I have somehow failed […] We can rely only on each other. Because I know my partner's family, […] sometimes they come to us, sometimes we visit them. But we can count only on each other: if we need something, we talk to each other, and we don't go looking for something out there.
>
> [Bogumił]

The informants emphasise the importance of regular contacts that imply involvement in a person's life, create a sense of emotional and spiritual closeness, and become the basis for mutual support in difficult times. For Dominika, cited below, kinship is often a necessary but insufficient condition to define a family. In her opinion, the quality of contacts and mutual care builds family:

> The most important thing is people and relationships. And not the very fact of kinship. […] This is important in my opinion how do you care about relationships and then comes what the close relationship brings, understanding and so on.
>
> [Dominika]

Adrian generally rejects thinking about family in terms of blood ties and perceives it instead as a specific emotional community, that is, a community of people who support one another and share their successes and failures. In his opinion, this community is defined by a particular code of conduct towards each other. Its main determinants are mutual interest in each other's lives, knowledge of the other person's preferences, and the values they profess, but also care and support. Adrian distances himself from his "genetic family" with which he has no deeper bonds and far less contact than with his family of choice. Consequently, he does not place anyone from his family of origin on his map, and he is one of the only two participants who did so:

> The family is people who are the first to know that I am sick. When I am successful, they are the first to know that I have succeeded. If I fail, they know first that I did, and they support me first. Or when I think about people at all, what's up with them, they are those people, right? Of course, I keep in touch with my family, because it's not like I don't, but I didn't put them [on the map]. Well, they are a genetic family for me. We have some matters that bind us, family issues like property […] Intuitively, I think that the concept of family is about an emotional relationship with a person, not a relationship resulting from blood ties or any other connections.
>
> [Adrian]

Most informants are not quite as uncompromising in their claims about the family of origin as Adrian. Instead, for them, family is not limited to blood ties. Their definitions try to combine imaginary dimensions (theoretical family) with their own experience of closeness, intimacy, or support (practical family), extending its boundaries, including a partner or other significant people. An illustration of this way of thinking about the family can be a statement by Max, Adrian's partner:

> It is obvious that there are family ties, blood ties. Well, there are people who have an important place in my life, right? Well, Adrian, it's clear, he is my partner, so this place belongs to him because this connection between us has a different meaning. I have an emotional connection with each of these people, but this connection has a different intensity. Well, it has to, doesn't it? The connection with Adrian is the strongest because he is with me every day. These emotions and feelings are entirely different from those towards siblings or mother, or grandmother. However, in fact, my mother and sister are also important to me. In good times and bad times, they are the people I can count on in every matter, both materially and emotionally. If I need to run away, I can go to them. They know a lot about me, and I know a lot about them because we talk to each other.
>
> [Max]

It is worth emphasising that seeing the family through emotional bonds, with their practical realisation in care and protection, sets a new framework for kinship understood not as biological connections or symbolic affiliation, but as a particular code of conduct – the second component of kinship indicated by Schneider (1984). Because of diverse family practices, work on building and maintaining emotional ties is carried out every day. Emotional closeness is often expressed by a sense of being important to someone and is described as a specific sense of building a community of interests. As Marshall Sahlins shows, in some cultures (e.g., in New Guinea, but also Western societies), people value family members' similarities that unite them. A sense of family or kinship is defined as mutuality of being, a kind of being-together-in-kinship. As individuals, people also feel part of a group of similar members (Sahlins 2011). It is not synonymous with defining kinship through genetic bonds because this community of behaviours, habits, or general similarity can refer to time spent together (as in a long-term partnership or friendship) or joint upbringing (e.g., in adoptive families, adopted siblings/offspring, or in the ritual relationship).

The "Gray Zone" of the Family

In this part, I would like to focus on the problematic members of the family, whose presence or absence from the map required some additional justifications. These justifications often reveal the contradiction of my informants' family criteria and illustrate family and kinship not as a static and unchanging creation (theoretical family), but as dynamic relational ties, reflected in daily practices, often unspecified or unnamed. Therefore, I devote this subsection to marginal persons, liminal beings (Turner 1995), who are on the border of the family, often in the space of transition, somewhere "in-between".

"An Alien Family"[4]

As I have written above, for most informants family practices such as giving support, care, involvement in family matters, etc., are essential criteria of being family. Thus, some family members are excluded because they do not meet this criterion in the informants' opinion. For example, Ilza, while talking about her various experiences with her mother's and father's families of origin, describes her relationship with her paternal grandfather as an "ostensible relationship". This expression illustrates the informants' feelings when a relative becomes *de facto* a stranger:

> My grandfather still plays an essential role because he influenced my grandmother's and my dad's life. However, he is a person I am only in touch with when I go there, to my grandparents, but to call it "contact" is a lot because I get the impression that he has closed inside himself

> and that there is no real contact with him. He does not seem interested in listening to anyone too much. I do not mean any mental disorder but it is more so that his attention is simply directed rather at what he wants to say. This relationship is rather ostensible because we see each other, and he is a person who influences other people and what they are like but he has no direct relationship with me.
>
> [Ilza]

While in the case of parents or siblings, the informants usually placed them on the map, even if the relatives did not meet the criteria of being a "practical family", in the case of members from a more distant family they were much more selective. The reasons for exclusion from the map and one's family construct can be very different – from a lack of contact with a person through a lack of support to some family conflicts that cast a shadow over these relationships. The informants often told extensive family stories, explaining why they believed that someone who was a family member in its normative understanding did not qualify as family in their opinions. Such people are, using the words of Dominika, "an alien family". She coined this term referring to her half-sister, whom she did not place on her family map because she had not been in touch with her for years, and nothing connected them anymore:

> According to the rules of kinship, I have a half-sister from my father's previous relationship. Well, but I don't keep in touch with her now. At the moment, she is probably an alien family to me, although there was a time when I had some contact with her. We moved apart so naturally. I am far from defining my family through blood relations. (…) Still, there is four year age difference between us. And at that time, it was a lot. Moreover, she grew up in a completely different environment (…). I don't feel like maintaining relationships just because someone is related.
>
> [Dominika]

Sometimes the participants do not include such close relatives as their parents on the map. Let's look at Kazimiera's family map (Figure 3.2). Together with her sister, she was brought up by their aunt Emilia. Their father died, and the mother suffered from an alcoholic disease. Kazia maintains a superficial "politically correct relationship" with her because the mother does not accept her relationship with Klara, and claims that Kazia does not have her own family. Kazia does not place her mother on her map. In the first circle, she draws herself, her partner Klara, Klara's biological son Bruno (whom she has helped raise since he was 7 years old), and her sister Monika. In the second circle, she places her niece and nephew – Mela and Staś (but excludes her sister's husband), and in the third, Klara's mother, Helena, whom she calls her "mother-in-law", and her aunt.

Figure 3.2 Family map drawn by Kazimiera (reconstructed).

Kazimiera explains her understanding of the map in this way:

> Emilia is the person who raised me, she knows Klara, and after some years of being convinced by my sister, she treats Klara and Bruno as my family. However, she does not quite understand that it is precisely the same kind of family as Mela and Staś [sister's children] together with Paweł [sister's husband] are for my sister. Nevertheless, she works hard to get it. And if you consider that she is a very simple person, I have a lot of respect for her because of that.
>
> [Kazimiera]

The above examples show that the family of origin is not a homogeneous group. Relationships with its members may vary, and often the quality of these relationships determines the location on the family's map. Sometimes, the participants had difficulties establishing a border between family and non-family; moreover, these boundaries could change over time; stepsisters or stepbrothers, so important in childhood, might no longer play any role in adulthood. Therefore, it is vital to perceive the definitions in a specific context and as a dynamic relational constellation. Strategies for recognising someone as family (as well as recognising someone as worthy of inheritance like in the Finch and Mason study, 2001) are the consequence of relational practices, negotiated and developed, rather than given in advance, by placing someone in the family structure. It shows even more clearly that non-heterosexual people do not passively accept the ideal of the (theoretical) family but put it in the context of their own family practices, comparing the ideal with reality.

Friends as Family

In the survey, 64% of respondents claimed they considered their friends as family. They also stated that friends knew about their relationships and accepted them more often than family members (parents and siblings). In matters such as practical or emotional help (hearing, understanding,

consolation), they were the most important source of support after their partners (57% of indications), ahead of parents and siblings (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015) However, in the qualitative part of the study, the informants often found it difficult to decide whether friends belonged to their family. Interestingly, regardless of the friends' role and how much they supported them, some put them on the map, while others did not. The reflections associated with this choice often highlighted the already described dilemma: the theoretical vs. the practical family and the participants' attachment to specific socially widespread and normative ways of perceiving family and kinship in isolation from friends.

When participants have a problem with including friends on their map, they evoke blood ties. Often, as in Irena's case, the family of origin which refuses to accept same-sex relationships is placed on the family map, while the accepting friends are not. It seems that their exclusion is determined rather by a sense of duty, an internalised ideal of family and kin normativity, than by evoking other criteria of belonging to family such as previously discussed family practices:

> When it comes to family, all these are blood ties, I have a big family. When it comes to friends who are like family to me, I have two. But I don't put them here [on the map] because they are friends. They are very close people, but this is not my family. And I didn't think to include them here. Because… you asked about my family.
>
> [Irena]

Launching clichés concerning family in the informants' heads and following normative definitions can automatically exclude friends. However, they are often placed somewhere on the border, in the space of uncertainty and transit; they are almost there (i.e., like family), vividly present in their lives, and yet ultimately remaining outside.

The case of Marta and Pola, who raise their son Henio, might illustrate this tendency. Both their families of origin live in other cities, so they are not present in their daily lives and do not help the couple raise their son. This lack of support is compensated by friends, a female couple that regularly visits them (sometimes more than once a week). They also spend weekends and holidays together. Both women are the closest aunts for Henio, and the boy addresses them as such. They take care of him, entertain him, and give presents. Despite this intense contact, neither Pola nor Marta put them on their family maps. However, both were thinking about doing so. Friends appear as part of their thinking about their family, but ultimately they are not recognised as family.

> Kamila and Maria are probably also the first people I would go to if something was happening or, I don't know, I would risk my head if they needed it. However, it is probably not a matter of some family affinities.
>
> [Marta]

POLA: I was thinking whether to [put] Kamila and Maria here, with whom we have close relations now but they are not family. Because family means blood ties primarily, and there is this determinant of holidays. Because holidays we celebrate with the family that is bound by blood ties. And this is probably the essential, primary factor.

RESEARCHER: Are there any other?

P: Emotions but only later.

R: But is blood more important to you than emotions? At least that's how I understand it.

P: In most cases. Because I didn't put Kamila and Maria here, who should probably be around us somewhere, but this is not family. And that is also so noticeable during events such as Henio's birthdays. We had one party during the day, just for the family, and in the evening the neighbours came, Kamila came with Maria, and other friends.

[Pola]

In the above case, as in many others, kin normativity works as their default system, making them automatically include even distant relatives and exclude even the closest friends. Friends as family go beyond this normative default response, demanding non-normative conscious choice. Many informants who placed friends on their map think that they must justify and renegotiate their place. In Julian's case, cited further, one can see the difficulties he has in explaining the placement of his friends on the map and the fact that he feels such a need is significant. He wonders that perhaps he should not do it because he is aware of the normative understanding of family based on blood ties. Though, when creating the map, he was guided by his emotional relations and could not ignore friends. He puts them on an equal footing with the family because he can always count on them. He also opposes seeing friendship as impermanent, as opposed to family that is supposed to last forever. As he points out, some of his friendships have been going on for 20 years, so they meet this criterion of durability:

> He [a friend] is basically my family. I know that I can count on him in the same way I can count on them. I am calm […] I have so many close friends and family that I know that I will never land on the street, I will never be alone. […] The family is the first association, but it is blood. But if I take it emotionally, […] then I would put friends who are equally close to me as part of the family. I know that it is said that friendship is unstable, but it seems that there are several people whom I have already known for about twenty years, so I think it is not true.
>
> [Julian]

People who consider their friends as family go beyond kin normativity, referring to criteria other than blood – emotional and relational bonding, family practices, already discussed in the previous section. They understand

that being a family is evidenced by care, affection, unconditional love, and attachment. Support is a particularly important factor for identifying friends as family, while they often compensate for the lack of such from the family of origin. Facing the lack of acceptance, exclusion, and even discrimination from their families of origin, non-heterosexual couples value their friends even more. They fulfil the function expected to be performed by family; they provide the support necessary to cope with life and often, particularly in the Polish context, systemic discrimination.

For Lucyna, who moved to Great Britain with her partner Aneta and an adopted son Lucjan, the family means a sense of security, loyalty, openness, a sense of emotional closeness and unconditional acceptance. In such a vision of family, their families of origin do not meet the criteria. The couple has complicated relationships with them and does not receive any support. That is why friends play such an essential role in their lives. Her friend Danuta is particularly noteworthy because she is the "adopted grandmother" of Lucjan, to whom, as Lucyna says, he is "bequeathed" in their will. Danuta used to send them money for 6 months when they emigrated and were in financial straits. Lucyna calls her up when in trouble and needs to talk and cry. For Lucjan, she plays the part of a grandmother, which Lucyna's mother refuses to play, having responded in a very homophobic way to the news of Lucjan's adoption by her daughter.

> When I had the feeling I could die, I first asked Danuta whether she could help Aneta and Lucjan if something happened to me. "Of course" she said. Lucjan is bequeathed to Danuta in our will. Although it can't be done, we wanted to leave a mark. When she asked what was going on, I could just tell her I could cry safely with her; she doesn't have to say anything in such moments.
>
> [Lucyna]

Also, for Adam, whose family did not accept his sexual orientation and relationship until recently, friends have long been the most crucial source of support. They offered help in difficult times when his family let him down. During the interview, Adam, whose map I already presented earlier in this chapter, decides to move friends' position on the map and put them above his distant family. Adopting the criterion of emotional closeness allows him consciously overcome kin normativity and reflect on the weight of particular persons more accurately:

> In hard times, really, when I was just on edge, these friends did a lot for me, and even today they do a lot […] I know that I can trust them, […] That's why I moved them higher, and they play the role of family for me.
>
> [Adam]

For some participants, the boundary between being a friend and being family is fluid, blurred, and the criterion of blood ties ceases to matter in the

face of other, more significant ones related to support, care, etc., practices. As in the case of Gustaw, who says about friends that they are "like family":

> If we can help each other, we do; it even borders on family relationships. It is challenging to separate these matters because I have relatives that I would not call my friends because I just don't know them, and I have friends who are more important than these distant relatives.
>
> [Gustaw]

Participants even elevate some family members by calling them friends. For example, Ala places her cousins on the map, but not merely because they are related but because they act like her friends. Therefore, friendship gives them a higher status than that of other family members.

As I have shown, friends' value is often evoked in relation to the family of origin, in frequently quoted statements that they are like family, almost family, etc. Friends are undoubtedly crucial for the people whose family of origin fails, disappoints, or rejects them. But if they function as the last resort, by compensating for the lack of other support, the boundary between what is chosen and what is given becomes blurred. The choice is often, after all, limited and dictated by necessity. This fact undermines a little the legitimacy of the division into chosen/given as a criterion for distinguishing one's own (family member) from a stranger (Strathern 1992a). Some LGBTQ family researchers have already shown that due to limited support from the family of origin, friends are not chosen but rather become substitutes for other relationships in a compensatory role (Weston 1997; Carrington 1999; Hicks 2011). In the Polish context, where the role of family is so decisive, choosing friends as family might be motivated not only by the experience of being rejected by the family of origin but by the desire to broaden the family network by including the important other. Therefore, the above-described tendency to perceive the important ties as family might serve as a way to expand the notion of the family instead of giving it up, as a way of politicisation of family in given circumstances.

"Well, but This Is Only a Pet"[5] – The Role of Animals

Animals form another group with liminal status. As numerous studies show, they are an integral part of extended relationships/intimacy networks (Haraway 2003; Konecki 2005; Charles and Davies 2008; Gabb and Fink 2015; Riggs and Peel 2016), often overlooked in research or in theoretical considerations on the crisis of relationships and progressing individualisation. Nevertheless, their presence and role in a family prove that a couple usually in the centre of analyses of family practices is not a separate nomad in their daily functioning. On the contrary, it is dependent on others, and its activities/practices are based on other significant non-human actors (Latour 2010). As Gabb and Fink show, using George Simmel's considerations

about the diads and triads, the diad always needs a third party who can be a mediator in disputes and conflicts, eliminating the uncertainty or revealing tension to improve its status. As they state, an animal may be a significant third party for a couple (Gabb and Fink 2015).

Krzysztof Konecki, a Polish sociologist analysing the relationship between people and animals from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, notes that animals "take on the role of Other" in many social games. Perceived most often from the perspective of "particular anthropomorpisation" by the owners, animals are treated as family members, often positioned in the role of the child (Konecki 2005). In the *Families of Choice in Poland* survey, the majority of respondents with animals (58%) considered them to be family (61.2% definitely yes, 24.1% rather yes) (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). However, in the qualitative parts, the informants revealed numerous uncertainties and ambivalences, perhaps related to making such a declaration in a less anonymous setting in front of the researchers conducting the interview.

Even those who treat animals like family members and whose life is strongly intertwined with them sometimes do not place animals on their family map. For example, Kazimiera does not place animals on her map; her partner Klara does it collectively without mentioning names or species (the couple has both cats and dogs). However, the ethnographic observations show that they treat animals as full family members and reach for the family terminology when they refer to them:

> Animals, treated as family members, play a massive role in women's lives. All who currently live with them have been rescued […] They are treated with respect: the partners talk to them, do not act against their will, ask them to move but never move the animals. They care for their health: they use the services of veterinarians, behaviorists, give them medicines every day, and maintain an individualised diet, depending on the needs of a given animal. Kazimiera describes the relationship of her partner with one of the dogs as motherly. She often jokes that the bitch is her "daughter" and must fight with her for Klara's attention and feelings, while the animal "loves Klara with boundless love." Klara spends much time stroking and cuddling animals with which she has lived from an early age. An essential criterion in the selection of friends is, among others, their attitude towards animals.
>
> [ethnographer report: Kazimiera and Klara]

Ryszard keeps a ferret called Mieczysława, whom he treats as a household member. He calls her his "daughter", calling himself and his partner "fathers" accordingly. But neither he nor his partner put her on their maps. However, when asked whether they would consider animals as part of the family, they emphasise her importance in their lives. Ryszard speaks about the family-bonding role of the animal – the ferret fills the emptiness at

home and gives them the consoling thought that somebody is waiting in the house:

> Animals are essential. I have had pets all my life because I was brought up in the countryside. Later, an animal was always with me when I lived alone, and it was such a substitute… I could talk to someone, it was always there. I don't like the silence, dead silence when you enter an empty house […] If you know that there is an animal, then you can always talk to it. it's very cool.
>
> [Richard]

The fragments quoted above show that animals participate in everyday family practices, which does not always translate into the informants' family constructs. Perhaps it is so because the theoretical family and kin normativity based on blood ties, in these cases, prevails over the conceptions based on emotional connections. Maybe the sphere of practices, in which animals often occupy a central place, does not translate into the sphere of declarations due to cultural anthropocentrism and belief in human superiority over other species. Studies show that animals are treated as family members in many cultural contexts. They are called children or grandchildren, but people hardly admit it; they are often ashamed, masking their anxiety with laughter, jokes, and additional remarks (Charles and Davies 2008). This tendency is also visible among those informants who recognise their animals as family but need to explain it or distinguish it from other relationships. They are often ashamed of such confessions and try to weaken their seriousness. Sometimes they placed animals on their family maps with some additional "but", "though":

> I think that my closest family is Klaudiusz and, well, Kama, although she is just a dog. But Kama has brought a lot into our lives, cool things, lots of cool emotions. she is a family member.
>
> [Patryk]

The difficulty in determining animals' status is reflected in attempts to emphasise the difference between relations with animals from relationships with people. At the graphic level, it was visible in the way they were presented, for example, the silhouette of the animal vs. names that identified people.

Some participants directly oppose the popular belief according to which for people who do not have children (or cannot have them), a pet becomes a substitute for a child, allowing to give vent to their parental instinct. For instance, Ilona fights against this stereotype of satisfying parental needs by taking care of animals. She, with her partner, raises two disabled cats she had adopted before the beginning of the relationship. She claims that animals have no identity other than pets, so she does not place them on her family map (but her partner does). After some consideration, however, she

recognises that they are a significant part of her family and wants to draw them:

> These are my animals, not children, which does not mean that I treat them as objects. Simply put, these are beloved animals, but not children. Not little sisters and so on, or brothers… Well, it was unconscious – not putting them on my family map. Well, since there is a lot of space, I can still draw them.
>
> [Ilona]

Manuela, who places her dog on the map, tries to emphasise his otherness by distinguishing love for him from the love for others – her son and partner (Kinga):

> I have three separate loves, one for each of them. For Kinga, a partnership one, unconditional one for son. And for animals also a different one. Such an animal-like one.
>
> [Manuela]

Sometimes the moment of adopting a pet is perceived as crucial for becoming a family. Marcel and Teodor, for example, agree that shared cats bonded their relationship, making it more family-like:

MARCEL: I think [we started calling ourselves a family] when we moved in together and had cats together. […]

TEODOR: In any case, there is a certain amount of truth in this that the cat put us closer together.

[Marcel], [Teodor]

This family-making function of animals is also evidenced by the fact that photos or objects associated with them were often chosen as necessary for the relationship.[6] They were chosen by Jarek and Mateusz (a photo with a dog at a neighbourhood picnic), Adriana and Aniela (a photo of cats), Patryk and Klaudiusz (a toy of the dog, as they said they could not choose a picture of the dog because he was not an object), Kazia and Klara (a photo of the cat they were treating). For instance, Adriana and Aniela chose a photo of their cats for the interview, and both placed their animals on family maps. When describing the picture, they referred primarily to the feelings that connected them: longing, a sense of lack when they are not with them. During the informal conversations, Adriana sometimes mentioned that her love for cats and dogs awakened her motherly instincts:

ADRIANA: We had experienced such situations that we felt incomplete when our pets were not next to us.

ANIELA: We returned many times from holidays earlier, for example, because we missed a dog or a cat.

ADRIANA: It's so amazing because we miss them like family members, don't we?

[Adriana], [Aniela]

The importance of animals can be grasped when we look at family practices that focus on them. Care for animals must be done every day: one needs to provide them with access to food (and sometimes prepare it), water, take a walk, clean up after them, etc. In specific cases, such as during illness, the animal requires even more dedication, time, and work. Care for animals also forces the caretaker to be vigilant because animals cannot verbalise their needs and problems. Therefore, communication is mainly non-verbal and is built with the help of corporality. Animals show that they suffer differently, and caregivers usually need to be sensitive enough to see the problem and remedy it. The appearance of the animal at home also enforces changes in life and a different division of chores. A pet can dominate household members' lives and subordinate them entirely to its needs in some situations. For instance, Kazimiera and Klara talked about such an incredibly dramatic situation during an interview about photos and objects. The photographs they presented to the researcher showed their cat that sheds its skin due to infection. Although both women take very good care of all their animals, the cat's condition required a special devotion.

KAZIMIERA: When Leopold [cat's name] had his skin fixed, it took a few weeks before… Didn't it? A few weeks?

KLARA: Well, it did last a while.

KAZIMIERA: It certainly lasted for several weeks. However, really, it was, you know, heavy toll because it had to be lubricated every day, it had to be cleaned every day. […] He ate only pure beef. He slept, oh dear, separately with Klara. Unbelievable! We didn't sleep a wink because we just watched over him, didn't we?

[Kazimiera], [Klara]

At the same time, this crisis made partners more aware of their closeness and agency as individuals and as a couple. The women are aware of the role professionals played in saving the cat, but they believe that their daily care for the animal was no less critical in his convalescence process. Taking care of him, they also felt that they had established a mutual understanding regarding the purpose of the undertaken actions (particular anthropomorphisation; see Konecki 2005). They mention that the cat understood the need for their daily treatments and patiently accepted it that he could not go outside like their other cats.

Research on the relationship between people and pets has shown that animals can be "family members" and perform three different functions in family life: they facilitate the projection of the self onto others, that is, the animal serves as a symbolic object which is an external extension of the human self; a social function of facilitating interpersonal contacts in the

family, and a role of the replacement of partners in interactions (Konecki 2005, 11). In the case of non-heterosexual families, an animal often plays one more role – bonding one. Pets tie family members, strengthen their relationships, and even create the feeling that one forms a "full family". The family terminology used in reference to them also shows that they are often treated as children, in a similar way as in heterosexual families (Konecki 2005). However, given the greater difficulty in becoming a parent by non-heterosexual persons, in Poland limited by legal constraints, this role may be more important in their life. Indeed, animals play an integral part in the life of families of choice, included in their rhythm and routine, perform essential functions in many areas. Treating them subjectively and as family members does not mean declarative inclusion in the family, resulting in their symbolic placement on the map, but it is most visible at the level of family practices. I agree with Jacqui Gabb, who proposes to go beyond the perception of animals within the paradigm that they are "like relatives", filling some lack/deficit of intimacy. Instead, we should include them in broader web connections and relationships as meaningful in their own right (Gabb 2008, 2011).

Conclusions

Contrary to the proponents of the thesis on individualisation, detraditionalisation, and the loss of meaning by family (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1993), my study shows that family is still of great importance in cultural imaginary and individual practices of non-heterosexual people in Poland. However, its form changes and the boundaries become more fluid and blurred. Relations are still important, but not always with those who are immediately recognised as family members. While describing their families, the informants only seldom reach for structural dimensions, for example, drawing a family tree on which each relative has a place designated in advance. They often distance themselves from such a predefined arrangement (theoretical family) and talk about their family in terms of relational, jointly negotiated, and dynamic practices (practical family). The family of origin is still considered important in their descriptions, but not all members are equally crucial. The decisive factor determining their significance is not their place in kinship structure but the quality of bonds. Hence, sometimes a stepfather or the aunt who raised a person is present on the map, while the father or the mother is not. The family of origin becomes the family of choice for them as the boundaries between both are meshed.

Drawing the map and talking about their families allowed informants to rework kin normativity and brought an awareness of the true meaning of various bonds in their lives. By making a conscious selection, they include and exclude its members, activating various criteria of belonging, often contradicting kin normativity. The criterion of blood remains essential, especially when it comes to including parents on the map, but it loses its

primary importance. The boundaries between choice and the existing state, nature and culture, given and chosen, become blurred (Strathern 1992a). They choose the people closest to them from their kin for various reasons, glorifying given-as-chosen relationships (Spencer and Pahl 2006). Some family members are becoming "like friends", which has now become a form of emphasising the importance of these relationships, and makes "friendship" an essential measure of the quality of relationships and their reliability, replacing other, previously binding criteria (Gabb 2008).

By creating their family definitions, the informants also show a solid need to find irrefutable criteria for belonging and exclusion and create a hierarchical system that privileges certain relationships over others (Strathern 1992a, 2005; Carsten 2004, 2000). They also try to put borders between their own and the strangers, which is particularly visible when we look at the particular category of people/relationships that cause them definitional problems and worry them about their uncertain, liminal status. This "grey zone of the family", as I called it, includes all those who, for some informants, is situated between "family" and "non-family". In the study, it encompasses distant or close relatives ("alien family"), friends, and animals.[7]

The chapter shows that family practices have a crucial impact on family definition and specific manoeuvrability/reciprocity of kinship by non-heterosexual people in Poland. For them, family does not immediately mean blood ties, but it is mediated through everyday practices, activities, and feelings associated with them. Family becomes a community of mutual interests, shared duties, daily practices, care, etc. It is done and produced, not given in advance, once and for all. As we have seen, only some of the informants completely reject thinking about family in terms of blood ties in favour of emotional bonds, the majority try to combine these two dimensions, choosing simultaneously from the most significant blood ties and from selected bonds (e.g., only some friends are family). Everyday practices become a litmus paper for both types of relationships. Practising/doing family changes its definition and undermines the regime of kin normativity. "Blood", while still important, may prove to be an insufficient criterion. Rather, it is a specific combination of a sense of closeness and biological bonds that affects the way of practising and defining family and negotiating its boundaries by people in same-sex relationships.

Nevertheless, one might ask to what extent this way of defining and practising family differs from the trends described in Western studies on heterosexual families, in which relationships increasingly constitute a combination of blood and the context in which they are created? According to them, they are more negotiable than given and unchanging (Edwards 2000; Finch and Mason 2001; Smart 2007b). Contemporary techniques of reproduction further complicate the nature/culture division that has been used to distinguish kinship (Strathern 1992b; Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Franklin 2013).

I argue that the specific context in which non-heterosexual families exist intensifies these changes and sharpens their view on relationships and

normative family assumptions. As I have shown, persons particularly vulnerable to familial homophobia and violence tend to call their family people who give them support (friends, partner) and challenge the permanence of biological ties. Therefore, the experience of rejection by family of origin or being unrecognised and unprotected by society affects the renegotiation of the definition of family, and increases the role of practices as crucial determinants. It is enough to recall the project survey results, which compares the vision of family of non-heterosexual people with that of a representative group of Poles from the CBOS survey. For non-heterosexual participants, there are many equal family models, while for the CBOS participants, the very term "family" is mainly reserved for heterosexual married couples raising children (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015).[8]

In their study of new generations of British gays and lesbians, the authors found out that friends were not as vital for them as they used to be for the previous generation. In the latter case, disconnection from the families of origin resulted in putting friends above families as an "invincible community" (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001; Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013; Nardi 1992). The new generation did not feel the sense of estrangement, maintained the relationships with families of origin, and recognised "inherited" values and practices (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013, 77). Their narratives of increasing familial acceptance contrasted with the narratives of marginalisation, social hostility, and pathologisation of the previous generation. It seems that a more inclusive legal framework has changed the way kin and non-kin ties are perceived there. However, in Poland, with a very heteronormative legal framework and vision of family, there is a tendency to include both kin and non-kin ties into family and blur the boundaries between these two. So, the process is not facilitated by the legal changes as it is in the UK, but as I argue, it is deeply rooted in geopolitical location.

It is crucial to see non-heterosexual narratives about family and its definition through the local context, Polish or, more broadly the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). As I stated in the introduction to this book, there is very specific importance attributed to family in Poland due to Catholicism, the post-communist past (familism), and very traditional values regulating family norms and obligations. Other studies have proved that whereas the importance of kinship declined in the global North, in Italy and Hungary, kin ties were predominant (Höllinger and Haller 1990). Also, in the study carried out by Karin Wall and Eric Widmer, which included Lithuania as the only country beyond the West, the authors noticed the predominance of kinship bonds there. They also stated that familialism seems to promote a stronger process of suffusion between personal and family networks. In Lithuania, family configurations centred predominantly on the nuclear family and excluded non-kinship ties (such as friendship). However, there was also a tendency to perceive important personal ties as family. As the authors stated, "in Lithuania the overlap is mainly driven by the overall salience of

kin in personal relationships" (Wall et al. 2019, 234). They explain these tendencies, referring to differences in historical, social, and normative pathways. In the case of Lithuania, it is an experience shared by all former post-communist countries, a totalitarian past that undermined the commitment and trust and led to a new normative frame focused on pro-traditional values and politics (Wall et al. 2019). However, it must be noticed that Wall and Widmer focus on heterosexual families, and that these tendencies might be different among non-heterosexual families in the CEE region. My analysis shows that the salience of kin ties and importance given to family life in Poland have an impact on the perception of significant non-kin personal ties as family, particularly when participants experience exclusion, homophobia and violence from their families of origin.

Notes

1 An excerpt from Karina's statement: "I would, frankly, call this study 'Families against Everything', that is, despite the fact that there are no regulations, people still form such families. So they are families against obstacles".
2 In the quantitative study, 97.2% of respondents consider their parents to be family, siblings – 96.4%, grandparents and grandmothers – 94%, distant relatives – 70.8%. Compared to 97% considering their partners as family, 85% included their pets, 65% their friends (see Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015).
3 I write more about it in the section on family practices of this chapter and in Chapter 4, devoted to relationships with the families of origin.
4 Expression coined by one of the informants.
5 A fragment of Mateusz's statement.
6 A joint interview around important photos/objects was conducted during the ethnographic part of the research done in 21 families (see Appendix). For comparison, photos and objects of the family of origin appeared only twice.
7 In some cases of children from lesbian step families, it includes also the social mothers but I am going to discuss it in Chapter 6, devoted to children.
8 The study repeated the question asked by the CBOS: "What kind of relationship would you consider a family?" For those surveyed by the CBOS in 2013, family meant a married couple with children (99%), followed by a mother/father raising children alone (91%), people of a different sex in an informal relationship raising children together (78%), a marriage without children (71%), people of the opposite sex in an informal relationship without children (33%), same-sex relationships bringing up children (23%), and same-sex relationships without children – 14%. For the surveyed *Families of Choice in Poland*, the results in the same categories looked respectively: 98%, 96.5%, 94%, 93%, 83.3%, 94.3%, and 87.6% (CBOS 2013; Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015).

4 Communicating Vessels
Relations with Families of Origin

Introduction

Little space is usually devoted to a deep analysis of relations between families of choice and families of origin in the existing literature on families of choice. If the latter is of any interest, they are most often presented from the perspective of the former and in the context of the family reaction to coming out (Grafsky 2014). The picture presented in Weston's book where families of choice were shown in opposition to families of origin, created in response to the latter's lack of support and rejection (Weston 1997), somehow determined the perception of their mutual relationships for the following decades. Excessive pressure on coming out affected the perception of families of choice in isolation from family support in general. It created their distorted picture as entities somewhat utterly independent of the family network.

Meanwhile, in many family-oriented countries (e.g., Italy, Spain, Poland, etc.), where people build their identity more "in the shadow of family homes", and family ties are still considered the most important, this does not fully reflect their experience. As Chiara Bertone and Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli demonstrate, the experiences of LGBTQ people from non-Anglo-American societies show different dynamics of the relationship between family of origin and family of choice. The authors question the legitimacy of the distinction between families that LGBTQ people create and those they come from, showing that it is based on heteronormative assumptions about family forms and boundaries. Thus, they emphasise the need to look at the relations between generations again, taking into account their dynamics, changeability in time and membership, and the role of context (place, ethnicity, class) in their creation (Bertone and Pallotta-Chiarolli 2014).

In a similar vein, researchers question the opposition between heterosexual families seen as guardians of tradition, relatively passive recipients of innovation, and LGBTQ "new families". Instead, they propose to focus on family practices (Gabb and Fink 2015; Morgan 2011a, 2011b), which simultaneously reproduce and undermine gender or sexuality hierarchies. An example of this new approach is Carol Smart and Beccy Schipman's study,

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which analyses the importance of introducing civil partnerships in England and Wales. The authors noted that their interlocutors strongly emphasised the bonds with their relatives and valued their help in everyday life (Smart and Shipman 2004). Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir point out that, unlike the older generation, young LGBTQ couples tend to describe their relationships as similar to that of their parents and perceive their relationships in terms of continuity and not in opposition. British researchers associate this change with their experiences of coming out, which nowadays do not imply the necessity of breaking the kinship bond due to the greater social acceptance for their relationships. It means that in countries with more inclusive legislation, where public recognition for non-heterosexual families increases, intergenerational relationships become less conflicting and less marked by rejection (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013).

In recent years, studies have begun to register differences among families of origin and undermined the tendency to treat them as a monolith. There are works on non-heterosexual people's relationships with siblings (Caspi 2010) and grandparents (Scherrer 2010). They bring new valuable perspectives on the dynamics of relations between LGBT people and their families, emphasising the impact of factors other than just being members of two opposed groups. Simultaneously, more research still needs to show how the socio-political context influences mutual relations between families of origin and families created by LGBT people.

In this chapter, referring to the concept coined by Smart, I aim to demonstrate the importance of family stickness through the narratives of families of choice and families of origin. I claim that in the case of non-heterosexual families in Poland, the stickness of familial bonds is firmly embedded in the specific context – the lack of legal recognition and protection of LGBTQ families, the weakness of the LGBTQ movement, the perception of the family as a "safe haven" and the most important source of support in the face of an unfavourable and homophobic society, combined with the specific value of family ties. Lack of other possibilities makes family relations glue family members more forcefully together, making them co-dependent. In the absence of institutional support and weakness of its own "invincible communities", the family of choice strives for good relations with the family of origin also out of practical necessity. Similarly, in the interest of families of origin, due to the lack of institutional forms of care, lies the necessity to depend on kinship services. It entails maintaining contacts, including families of choice in the family framework and/or seeking such forms of belonging, sometimes tacit (Decena 2011), that allow their more or less peaceful co-existence.

Through the chapter, I will track their co-dependence and diverse ways of co-existence, starting with the detailed accounts of diverse disclosure strategies through the description of changes in mutual relations over time to daily interdependencies visible in the family practices of care. In some parts of the chapter, the same phenomenon will be presented through the eyes of both families of choice and families of origin. By doing so, this

chapter brings novel insights on their mutual co-dependence and allows to see similarities in their daily practices of care, strategies to manage homophobia and/or (non)disclosure (i.e., as a way to care for the significant others). Drawing on their accounts, the chapter unveils the lives of families of choice and families of origin as combined/communicating vessels arguing that this metaphor reflects the truth of their everyday functioning in Poland more than the binary opposition still prevalent in describing their relationships in the West.

Family Stickness

In my opinion, one cannot understand family life by reducing the family to dyads/couples. Instead, it should be studied in the broader context of ties, as embedded in previous generations, who leave a mark on our lives (Smart 2007b). According to Smart, especially blood relations are sticky, full of emotions (both good and negative), it is difficult to shed them, even if sometimes we want to. She shows that kinship and family of origin affect the individual to a much greater extent than it is assumed in the social sciences, foretelling the crisis of relationality and extreme individualism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

In this respect, my research findings are consistent with Smart's account providing an invaluable perspective on family stickness in the case of queer families in Poland. Despite often very complicated relations with the family of origin, it remains crucial for the research informants. During the interviews around family maps, almost all participants placed it on their maps, choosing whose members to include and whose to omit. They considered many factors by which they tried to assess the type and quality of their bonds. For example, the map might exclude the mother because she did not participate in the education of a given person (the case of Kazimiera described in Chapter 3), or the father because he was almost unknown. However, even in the face of a complete lack of contacts, these relationships remain important, living in their memory, haunting them, and constituting an often painful part of their identities. Sometimes, even facing/remembering negative experiences related to rejection or homophobia, the informants included members of the family of origin on their maps. Ilza quoted below explains the need to include those who are not supportive at all by referring precisely to the affective side of this kind of relationship:

> It seems that even someone close in the sense of family connection, blood ties but who does not provide support remain essential to us. Such a person's presence and this relationship affect us, so in some way, s/he will be a family for me.
>
> [Ilza]

Conversations and observation of the informants' everyday life prove that family relations do not end with lack of acceptance. Quite the opposite, this

lack of acceptance can be relived every day from scratch, un-made calls might be just as important as those made, and mental–emotional presence compensates for the lack of actual contacts. Lack of support and love could be the reason for exclusion from the family map but often results in marking (verbally or graphically) some distance. This way, a family of origin becomes a family of choice because the informants consciously choose whom to include in their family and whom to exclude. Moreover, the main criterion of belonging is the actual quality of family practices (care, frequency and quality of contacts, support, etc.), as I have argued in Chapter 3.

The findings demonstrate that almost all the informants share a desire to build their own families, not in opposition to their families of origin, as it is often described in Western literature (Weston 1997; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001), but preferably in a kind of co-existence, despite often painful relationships and experience of homophobic reaction to their coming outs. Therefore, I claim that family of origin and its well-being are much more important than previously suggested, which the following parts of this chapter will demonstrate. Particularly in the context of CEE, where family is still considered the primary institution that supports and protects its members (a remnant of years of communism and the influence of the Catholic Church promoting traditional values). In the case of LGBT people, the importance of family ties is also strengthened by the lack of institutional recognition and protection and the weakness of LGBT communities. Nevertheless, before focusing on the mutual co-dependence of families of choice and of origin, I want to address the key questions regarding their diverse practices of disclosure, which mark their contacts from the very beginning and determine the shape of their further relations.

Practices of Disclosures and Recognition as a Family

The issue of coming out has become central for understanding the relations between families of choice and families of origin. The Anglo-American/Western literature on this topic primarily concerns its individual aspect and importance in building one's sexual identity (Savin-Williams 2001; Seidman 2003). It presents disclosure as an absolute value, despite criticism from researchers associated with non-Western cultural circles who point out that in traditional family-oriented societies other non-verbal forms of communication take precedence over talking openly about one's sexuality (Boellstorff 2004; Manalansan IV 2003; Decena 2011; Acosta 2013). Researchers from CEE emphasise that Western activist rhetoric, focused on visibility and the imperative of coming out, often fails to match the life experiences and needs of LGBT people living there (Stella 2015; Szulc 2018; Béres-Deák 2019; Stasińska 2020). They write about the necessity to see complex processes and practices related to disclosure and its lack, talking about their private lives and the silence of their relationships. Moreover, they emphasise that the information about one's

non-normative sexuality and/or living in a same-sex relationship impacts not only the person who comes out but also their close surroundings (Švab and Kuhar 2014).

Following the informants' stories, I have identified various trajectories of "coming out", reasons behind not deciding on being out, and very nuanced shades of secrecy and silent/tacit presence in relations with families of origin, which I will describe in the following parts. I claim that the decision to "hide" a relationship or "manage" transparency should always be considered as a contextual survival strategy in given circumstances and not regarded beforehand as wrong and "lagging behind" or in need of "Western leveraged pedagogy" (Kulpa 2014). In the Polish context, where couples are often exposed to homophobia and discrimination, disclosure most certainly cannot be the "only right" strategy, contrary to some LGBT organisations' linear emancipation narrative. It might be seen as analogous to the management of secrets within a family (Smart 2007b; Poulos 2008). For instance, Christopher Poulos states that refraining from disclosing some secret can be understood as a "strategy of silence" which functions against the release of all kinds of regrets and gives the illusion of control. That is why, in his opinion, keeping secrets may become the main form of family communication practices (Poulos 2008).

The moment a relationship "comes out" is a critical turning point in a couple's life trajectory, often limiting contacts with family of origin for many years. Possible reactions to this information range from rejection to acceptance. The likelihood of the former is greater when it is a son or daughter's first same-sex relationship, even more so when they were in earlier heterosexual relationships and/or have children. Following my informants' accounts, I do not treat their coming outs as a "one-time act", but rather as a specific sequence/continuum, for example, one might disclose the information but not to the distant family; to the mother, but not the father.[1] Hence, the research participants often expressed the need to repeat (or not) the act itself, depending on the needs and context.

Below, I look at different types of responses to coming out in both the narratives of the LGBTQ persons and in the accounts of their parents and siblings who participated in focus group interviews. This multi-dimensional perspective brings a more nuanced vision of their mutual relationships, allowing us to look at families of choice and families of origin not in terms of two opposing entities but more like combined/communicating vessels, often interconnected by care, love, and/or interest.

Familial Homophobia and Rejection

Although most of the informants are aware that their family may find it challenging to welcome their coming out, they hope that their choice will be accepted in time. Nevertheless, both the first reaction after the coming out and subsequent relationships are marked by homophobia and even aggression in many cases. The reactions of families from very religious

environments and small towns are particularly problematic. In their cases, others' opinions, that is, that of the local community, or the teaching of the Catholic Church have a significant influence on the rejection of intimate relationships of their LGBTQ relatives. The case of Kasia and Basia is an example of such a homophobic reaction. They come from a small town in central Poland, and both their families are religious. When they told their parents about their relationship, both families responded negatively, giving them an ultimatum – they would either break off contacts or lose their houses. In Kasia's case, it was the house where she lived with her son, formally belonging to her parents. In Basia's case, the house where she lived with her parents formally belonged to her. Both women chose to maintain their intimate relationship, which meant that they had to leave their homes, and move to another, a larger city, where Basia found a job. Interestingly enough, Basia's more religious family eventually accepted and started supporting them, while Kasia's family has not:

> We both had houses. I had a house in the city with a large garden, my parents allowed me to live there. Obviously, it was not formally mine, but we had an unwritten agreement that I could live and start a family there. But when I told my father that I would like to live there with my wife, he said that I would not live there with absolutely any wife, that if I did not like it, I could move out.
>
> [Kasia]

> I told my mother: "Mom, I love Kasia, and I want to be with her." My mom began to cry hysterically, she said that it was impossible, that she had not expected it. She was totally desperate. Gradually, she began to accept all this, I talked to my mother, sister, and brother-in-law. He told me that we shouldn't be together, that when Jurek [their son] turns eighteen, THEN we may be with each other, not now, because we would destroy his life.
>
> [Basia]

However, not only small-town families respond homophobically to the information about their members' same-sex relationships. This problem also applies to well-educated upper-middle-class families from large cities. The factor that strongly influences their reaction is their religiosity – the more religious they are, the greater the difficulties with acceptance. For example, Izabela's parents, educated, living in a big city, very religious, reacted to the news about her relationship with Wiktoria in a very aggressive way. They threatened her; they did not want to let her out of the house, they invaded her apartment. For fear of them, Izabela moved to another city. Currently, any contacts with them are painful, and she tries to avoid them. Her parents do not even know where she lives, and Izabela does not want to tell them because she is still afraid of her mother's threats. In this example,

the family's reaction, filled with aggression, has a significant impact on Izabela's well-being and their future contacts:

> The turning point and probably the worst moment in my life was when I told my parents that I had a girlfriend. My mommy is such an ultra-Catholic that you just cannot imagine. It started with threats and insults, they told me they would lock me up in their house and never let me out again. Finally, I was able to return to [name of the first city of residence] after these few days of total madness at my parents' place. I had to escape from my apartment because I was so afraid of them, I couldn't tell what they were capable of. So I packed all my belongings, distributed them among friends; only books and household items remained in the apartment, all personal things I just took with me. […] I did it within a week after this action and after another series of threats that were quite serious. For instance, my mother claimed she would immolate herself in front of my workplace. At that moment, I really thought she could do it. So I went on a sick leave. For almost a month. And then I just ran away from work, from my city, from everything. And my partner was with me, my dear girl who supported me through all this.
>
> [Izabela]

The siblings of people living in same-sex relationships who participated in focus group interviews also talked about their parents' violent reactions to their brother/sister coming out. In such situations, the siblings most often take up the roles of trustees, supporters, or mediators/interpreters. On the one hand, they showed acceptance to their brothers or sisters, assuring them of their friendship. On the other hand – in communication with parents, they attempted to explain the situation and stood up for their loved ones. Sometimes being a mediator meant an attempt to convince the parents to change their attitude towards a brother or a sister. Siblings often feel left alone in such situations, especially if their sisters or brothers do not have close relationships with their parents or when in reaction to homophobia and a lack of acceptance, they stop communicating with them. Sometimes siblings are placed against their will on the axis of a family conflict, as in the following quote. In this case, they can assume the role of an "interpreter" forced by the context, explaining one party's arguments into the other's language. Complicated relationships with parents also affect the closeness and frequency of contact between siblings.

> My mother refused to accept it and said she didn't want to hear and know anything about it. She doesn't cut herself off from my sister, but generally speaking, the topic simply does not exist. My mother doesn't talk about it at all. It probably took her about two years before she started to admit a little, that, well, sorry, but that's the reality. [laughs]

> I felt terrible about it, as if I had all the responsibility to settle this matter for my sister, who cut off all communication, and my mother all the time kept turning to me with this problem. I found myself in situations when I had to mediate, talk, and explain. Well, we live in a small town; this topic is taboo there. Actually, it does not exist at all. Our mom is entirely unfamiliar with this. Her husband is even worse. There is only the stigma, no acceptance. It was hard, really hard. It's better now, well, now it's like mom is somehow getting used to it.
>
> [Matilda, 32 years old; sister, 31 years old]

On the other hand, some parents, who participated in focus group interviews, talked extensively about their fear of losing their child, which was the primary motivation to accept their sexual identity and/or same-sex relationships. They spoke with regret about their first reactions, which now they perceived as a mistake for which they had to pay a high price. The following quotation includes the imagery of death, which was also present in other interviews describing the experience of learning about children's non-normative sexuality as particularly severe.

> When nineteen years ago, I learned that Maja, my daughter, had started a relationship with a female friend from school, I made a mistake. I, a psychologist. I shouted, "I wish I was dead." It's difficult for me. It costed me a few years of very superficial relationships with her. She treated it as rejection. That I want to die because I don't accept her but it wasn't like that. But I didn't explain it to her then because I didn't realise she took it that way. I only thought that I would not be able to protect her against the bad world and bad people who can do great harm. […] Well, sometime later, our contact became closer and closer. I have always accepted homosexuals, but the blockade was between us because of what I shouted back then and because we did not explain to each other later what each of us thought at that moment.
>
> [Maria, 70 years old; daughter, 37 years old]

Several mothers pointed out the difficulties resulting from their husbands' lack of acceptance. Often fathers disavow their sons' relationships, undermine their sons' masculinity, and ridicule their identity (e.g., by calling their son's partner a woman).

> He said that he absolutely could not imagine that our son would bring his partner Marian home. It is hard for me, but I have to live with it somehow. Marian and I often see each other because Marian is getting his master's degree here at the University this year. So we are going for coffee, and my husband asks: "and who are you going with, your daughter-in-law?" I am sorry that he behaves like this, but unfortunately, I have no influence here.
>
> [Klaudyna, 62 years old; son, 28 years old]

Parents mentioned the issues of guilt, unprocessed homophobia, and lack of skills regarding implementing parental roles and agency in a new situation. They also expressed fear for the future of the child and his/her family. The reaction to the child's coming out is a challenging experience for them due to the change in their image – forcing them to acknowledge that they are not as open as they thought. Sometimes parents manifest behaviours that, in the children's perspectives, could be seen as homophobic, out of fear for their children's safety. For example, they might ask the children to show restraint in displaying affection in public spaces. However, from the parents' perspective, such strategies often aim to protect the child from experiencing ostracism, homophobia, or violence. Just as it is in the following case:

> Girls went on vacation and travelled to the seaside by train. I know that they like to cuddle, well, it's not forbidden. So they cuddle, kiss, show their feelings. […] And I say, "Girls, please take care on the train, you don't know whom you will meet. Please, show some restraint".
>
> [Matilda, 48 years old; daughter, 26 years old]

For parents who experience difficulties accepting their child's same-sex relationships, contacts with psychologists, psychotherapists, the LGBTQ community, and organisations are helpful. However, some speak of an independent process of reconciliation with the child's relationship/identity. The parents' narratives show that the change occurs in the parent, not in his/her relationship with the child. Moreover, these difficulties are often hidden from the children for their own sake, not to burden them additionally:

> First, I had to come to terms with myself. The relationship with my son has not changed because he is my child. There was no other way. Because people have different children, don't they? Not only in such relationships. […] I also think that love will endure more than anything else. So the relationship with my son has not changed.
>
> [Barbara, 55 years old, son, 34 years old]

> I did not say anything to my son because, after all, it is not easy for him, he should find support in me.
>
> [Eugenia, 54 years old; son, 23 years old]

Transparent and Family Closet or Selective Disclosure

The family of origin's reaction to information about the relationship does not boil down to a one-time outbreak of emotions but spreads over time. In the analysis of the narratives, I was particularly interested in how families of origin, especially parents, deal with the knowledge about the nature of their child's relationship and share it with other significant people, for example, distant relatives, friends, acquaintances. Finch (Finch 2007) pointedly argues

that "displaying family" is a social/relational act. The information: "this is my family" must be read correctly by others. Therefore, it is of great importance not only to look at the "displays" that were successful (coming-out stories ending happily) but also at those that failed (Dermott and Seymour 2011).

It happens so that when a child's same-sex relationship is revealed, parents enter the closet in turn. In such a scenario, the disclosure of the relationship is questioned, its nature silenced by those to whom it was disclosed. A concept of "transparent" and "family closet", presented already in the introduction, might be useful here (Švab and Kuhar 2014). Although it concerns an individual coming out, it can help understand family reactions when the relationships are disclosed. Švab and Kuhar emphasise the social nature of the act of disclosure, even if it concerns a one-off speech. They claim that it is wrongly believed that if someone reveals her/himself, s/he is out. However, for an act of coming out to be successful, it must be confirmed by the other party to whom it is addressed. Somebody must acknowledge it.

In some cases, after coming out, one is forced to hide again because others do not accept this fact and behave as if the disclosure never happened. In the case of a family closet (Švab and Kuhar 2014), the family of origin/parents ensures that this information never goes beyond the close family circle. Combining concepts of "transparent and family closet" and unsuccessful "displaying families" can help us understand the problematic situation in which non-heterosexual families find themselves, simultaneously living openly and secretly, often towards the same people. Below I present some examples of the phenomenon of transparent and family closets taken from their narratives.

Paweł draws attention to his mother's hypocrisy. His mother comes from the middle class and hides her son's 11-year-long relationship from other family members and friends. Although Paweł has come to terms with his mother's attitude and is accustomed to her way of thinking, he is critical and compares his mother's behaviour to how his partner's mother. In his opinion, although his partner's mother is a "simple", "uneducated" woman, she has readily accepted them:

> He just moved in, told his mother what had happened, and she accepted it. She is a very practical person with a lot of common sense. A week later, she came to see how things were. She spent a few days with us, said that everything was fine, and left, which was shocking to me because my parents, despite all their theoretical acceptance and the fact that they knew, reacted with petty-bourgeois hypocrisy, as I would call it. God forbid anybody should know, they agree, but still it's hard to accept. However, in his mother's case, and she is an uneducated person, a simple woman, there is a lot of life wisdom, which also his grandmother had. […] As I say, in my family, it was a very superficial acceptance. We are educated, wealthy, middle class, "we have to accept it somehow that we have such a child", but they had a hard time with that. And now, when we have more frequent contact with my mother, whom we visit at least once a

> week, I see this distance all the time [….] I mean, there is no hostility or aversion, but I think there is such a deep resentment in my mother that it is … how to say it? Well, she has a son-in-law, not a daughter-in-law.
>
> [Paweł]

In turn, when asked during focus group interviews about their reactions, parents of LGBTQ people explained their own disclosure strategies and presented carefully crafted strategies for managing homophobia and stigmatisation. In a situation when they are concerned that such information could negatively affect a son or daughter, they sometimes try to protect their child by not revealing it. The same decision applies when there is a risk of breaking contacts or significant family relationships deterioration. Therefore, they apply selective transparency, balancing the desire to protect one's children, respect for their privacy, and the need to maintain good relations with loved ones. For example, parents point out that telling about their child's sexual orientation and/or same-sex relationships to family, friends, or at work can cause homophobia:

> I do not speak to the outside world directly. When various people ask me, "How is your daughter? What's up with her? How is she doing? "then I would prefer to tell them that she has a girlfriend and everything is excellent. However, I am afraid that it will ruin everything.
>
> [Patrycja, 45 years old; daughter, 22 years old]

Some parents believe that only their children are entitled to disclose their relationship. They feel that they can conduct open conversations only within the limits of privacy set by the child.

> For me, it is clear and easy. It is my son who sets these boundaries, and those who know they know, and those who do not know, they simply do not know until my son decides to tell them […] So he decides whom to tell and how.
>
> [Adam, 62 years old; son, 31 years old]

Another practised variation of this strategy is avoiding naming the child's relationship directly while talking about elements of relationships that confirm intimacy or family life. In this strategy, parents believe that their child's behaviour is so apparent that relatives should guess, especially if they know that the child lives with a same-sex person/partner.

> Well, if someone is intelligent, he probably knows what I'm talking about. When he sees them all the time, he cannot see it differently, right? … The boys live together just because they like each other? They bought a flat because they like each other? People are intelligent. They know what's going on.
>
> [Barbara, 55 years old; son, 34 years old]

Balancing on the non-verbal side can lead to tacit acceptance, and thus to a situation in which the couple's verbal coming out never occurs. Moreover, it is not necessary. The child's partner joins the family meetings without naming their relationship. Interestingly enough, this strategic omission is also used by non-heterosexual couples, described in the following part.

The ethos of not disclosing a child's relationship affects families of origin's daily lives: it can inhibit conversations about family matters and build a sense of distance among friends and in family circles. This situation is a frequent challenge for parents who maintain close relationships with their extended family, unlike their children. For example, there may be a situation when grandfather or grandmother does not know about his grandchildren's same-sex relationship, not having contact with them daily, unlike his parents. Then the burden of keeping the secret falls on them.

Therefore, selective disclosure chosen by non-heterosexual persons regarding one's own family might introduce additional family tension because some people in the family know and some do not. It means the necessity to "keep the family secret" from some family members who often live under one roof. Amanda, whose brother did not tell his parents, presents it in the following way:

> I remember my brother telling me he was gay. It was about two years ago. He called me up for a chat, and somehow he said that he felt very lonely. And then he told me he was gay. For me, this is not a problem at all. I told him that I loved him and that it didn't change anything between us. (…) He asked me not to tell anyone about it. My parents don't know it yet. […] He is afraid because the society does not accept it. But until he tells our parents, he can't bring anyone home. It is also a terrible discomfort for him and for me.
>
> [Amanda, 29 years old; brother, 27 years old]

The support given by siblings is accompanied by the need to respect the family member's autonomy in deciding on disclosure. At the same time, it means that their siblings (or parents) keep secrets which can affect family relationships.

The confidentiality may also be caused by the desire to protect and care for another family member. This concerns situations in which a person is sick, and the shock associated with the disclosure could affect his/her health condition. The difficulties in making this kind of decision may be confirmed by Maria's narrative, who hid her son's orientation from her mother and husband because her son decided not to come out to them:

> It was three years of secrecy. And of my suffering, because my husband didn't know. My son was afraid to come out to his father and his grandmother, who suffers from heart disease. There were also such dramatic moments when my mother had a valve implanted. She was at the hospital, and right before the surgery, when she feared for her life,

> she wanted to know about her little sunshine, her oldest grandson. Would he be happy in life? And that's why she asked me, "Baby, tell me, is he alone or not?" And although I always wanted my child to come out on his own terms, I thought it would be good for his development and also for his grandmother. But at that moment, I told her. Anyway, I also told my son, "Child, I will not tell a lie, if someone from among our friends or family asks me directly, I will tell them". Simply because, for me living with this secret was a nightmare.
>
> [Maria, 53 years old; son, 30 years old]

LGBTQ people also indicate sometimes that their non-disclosure may result from their care for a given person because of their age, illness, and fears that such information could strain their health, as it is in the case of Przemek. He looks after his 85-year-old mother, together with Witek, his partner of 15 years. Przemek has never come out to her and never talked to her about his relationship but he thinks that she knows anyway, although she officially "prefers not to know":

> My situation is more complicated because my mother is 85, I have always been in a very close relationship with her. Still, I have not told my mother that I am gay, nor that I live with Witek, although Witek is a regular visitor in my family home. We celebrate Christmas with my mother, and I am convinced that she knows. […] She is getting older, she requires more care, Witek's presence is simply necessary because he just helps me with it.
>
> [Przemysław]

Švab and Kuhar described the family and transparent closet as a negative phenomenon (Švab and Kuhar 2014). Their interlocutors – lesbians and gays – saw the silence concerning their identity by the family of origin as an attempt to hide an embarrassing or difficult fact of family life. However, focus group interviews with accepting parents and siblings revealed that their decision not to speak about a same-sex relationship or to choose the selective disclosure was often based on very different motivations, for example, the desire to maintain good family relationships and to protect their loved ones (child, sibling and/or relatives). The last reason is also often cited by the LGBTQ people themselves, for example, someone does not tell their grandmother out of concern for her health. So parents, siblings, and the LGBTQ people actively negotiate the transparency of their family situation, sometimes choosing the same strategy and deciding to enter the family closet for the sake of the loved ones.

Silence, Guessing, and Strategic Omission

Informants make much effort to connect somehow two distinct worlds – the family they live in and the one they were born in. Not naming the nature of their intimate relationships allows many couples to be with their partner

and the family simultaneously, which would often be impossible with open disclosure of the nature of the relationship. Ewelina and Edyta's case is interesting in this respect as their families of origin do not officially know about their relationship, although the couple claims that they guessed it. Edyta mentions that she often takes Ewelina and Marek (Ewelina's biological son) to visit her own parents and sister during the holidays. She has the impression that her parents treat Ewelina as a "part of the family". Edyta emphasises the advantages of including her partner in the family's framework without having to name the nature of the relationship. Thanks to this uncertainty, she manages something that many respondents dream of: maintaining good relations with her family of origin, making her relatives like her partner, and accepting her presence during family celebrations.

> We even manage to celebrate Christmas together because my parents like Ewelina so … she just spends a part of the holidays with her parents, and then just packs up and comes to me, to my parents, and we're there together […] I don't necessarily care about communicating things … playing with formulas like "my partner" or "yes, I'm a lesbian, and this is my partner." No. It's just Christmas time, and this is someone closest to me, someone whom my family accepts. And it does the trick.
>
> [Edyta]

Recognising partners as someone important without the need to verbally determine the nature of the relationship can also occur due to their tasks and familial practices, for example, care during someone's illness presented in the following part or support in difficult life moments. For example, Paweł describes how his partner became a family member for his mother by supporting her after her husband's death and undertaking funeral practices assigned to the family. The funeral, as a peculiar performance of family life, introduced his partner to the family, even despite the lack of a clear message about who he is:

> I remember a moment at my father's funeral when we were there as the closest family. I was with my mother, and my partner was with my mother's sister, it was so bizarre because there were neighbours, some friends, some extended family. There was this somewhat comical element of mystery, who is this handsome young man who holds my aunt's arm and seems in charge of this funeral? […] In such moments, a partner becomes a member of the family, doesn't he? And from that moment on, his relationships with my mother and her sister began to be very close. Because we were together in the most dramatic moment in our life, he showed great class and helped so much.
>
> [Paweł]

Lack of access to financial and housing resources, the inability to rent or buy an apartment, and possibilities to improve the economic situation make

some non-heterosexual people from the lower/working class or the modern precariat bring a partner to the family home. Thus, they must somehow integrate their non-heterosexual relationships into the traditional and conservative world of families of origin, often by hiding them. For them, economic deprivation sometimes might be a more difficult barrier than the homophobia of the family of origin, which they learned to live with. The case of 20-year-old Nora reflects this phenomenon. She has been in a relationship with Anka for a few years and had to escape from her alcoholic and violent parents. She found shelter in Anka's family's apartment where Anka's adult brother lives with his wife and young child along with her mother. Both women hide their relationship from Anka's mother, even though they sleep in one room with her, the two of them even in the same bed. Although Anka's mother probably suspects the true nature of her daughter's relationship, when she asks them directly they both deny as they think that disclosure would result in their expulsion and risk of homelessness. Although Anka has a permanent, though low-paid job, in such a pessimistic scenario, she would not be able to afford to support herself and Nora, and rent an apartment:

> We share a room in Anka's mother's flat, she is at work all the time. She goes out in the morning and returns in the evening, so we basically have the room to ourselves all day. When we are in the room, it is evident that we hug, kiss, and everything, but if, for example, we enter the kitchen or something, then … I do not know … sometimes we laugh when Anka hugs me. Still, it is never public […] Yes, we have to [control ourselves] because we don't know how Anka's mum may react or how her brother and his wife may respond. When lesbian or gay subjects are discussed, they always have a negative opinion. […] Therefore, we prefer not to come out at the moment. We have plans with Anka, in general. When I go to Norway, I will probably come back in September unless I manage to find some more work there, and Anka also wants to join me there […] I know we will be much better off there. Here we have to hide all the time, it is awful.
>
> [Nora]

Thus, we see that liminal functioning "between" naming and not-naming relationships can enable some same-sex couples to be included in family structures or function safely in a social environment. Also, the possibility of passing (Goffman 1963) as a close person or a relative may protect couples and their relatives from the homophobia of their extended family or surroundings.

The necessity to consider contexts of the disclosure has been brought up by prior researchers, mostly postcolonial and/or postsocialist (Acosta 2013; Stella 2015; Szulc 2018; Horton 2017). For instance, Katie L. Acosta rejects the metaphor of coming out of the closet adopted in Western literature as a too restrictive analytical tool, based on the assumption that individuals must

either be in the closet or outside, that is, live openly. As she writes, this simplifying dichotomisation does not reflect the complexity of cases that fall "in-between". Various social, legal, and economic needs affect the relationship models adopted by same-sex couples towards families of origin. In her study, Acosta shows that Latin American lesbians sometimes would not be able to function openly with their partners within their families of origin. Still, they also would not be able to (or did not want to) break their relationship with them entirely or risk worsening it by an explicit declaration of the nature of their relationships, so they chose an indirect way instead. They introduced their partner to the family as a close friend, often under the pretext of caring for someone in the family. Thus, partners could be present in the family circle under the guise of friendship, usually during important family moments.

Consequently, her interviewees achieved some form of recognition of the closeness of their relationship without breaking fragile family relationships, which could happen in the case of an open declaration. Simultaneously, they could continue fulfilling family responsibilities towards the loved ones, for example, performing the role of good daughters who care for a sick mother, often with their partners' help. Acosta tries not to romanticise their strategies, emphasising that negotiating visibility in the family of origin is often painful, creates tensions, and makes them revive old family disputes and traumas. She shows that the integration of families of choice and families of origin is not easy, and often its price is acceptance of marginalisation or silence, the experience and emotions so well known by my informants. Nevertheless, in given circumstances and considering cultural, class, and social differences, it is sometimes the only option for some of them. Also, over time, a change might occur for better in mutual relations, which I will demonstrate in the following part.

Changes in Time: From Rejection to Moderate Acceptance and Recognition

It is essential to see disclosing the relationship to the family of origin/parents and subsequent relations with them as dynamically changing over time. The analysis shows that parents go through specific phases of "coping with" or "managing" the knowledge that their child is in a same-sex relationship. In the beginning, in the *denial phase*, they most often react very nervously, emotionally, sometimes aggressively, they try to break the relationship by all means, using the available set of argumentative strategies. They often refer to the "well-being of the child" (if the daughter/son has a child), threaten them with the loss of property and disinheritance, or renunciation, that is, threatening that the son/daughter will stop being their child. They also refer to others' opinions or use the argument that it "will pass you over time", that is, refusing to accept the fact, denying it, and hoping that the child will finally bond with the opposite sex. Then, over time, afraid they might lose their child, the parents enter *the breakthrough phase*, realising that the relationship is not a child's temporary whim and the situation will not change.

At this stage, they begin breaking the ice and inviting the child with the partner. It is often so that the parents still do not inform others, extended family or friends about the situation. In the end, the parents enter a *phase of acceptance and openness* in which, having worked through their prejudices, they begin to talk about same-sex relationships more openly. They do not force their child to "stay in the closet" in the presence of others anymore if s/he does not want to.

Nothing is black and white in these individual phases. Some parents stop at one of the stages; their attitude towards the relationship remains the same for many years, as in Teodor's case, whose parents began to accept his relationship with Marcel only after 20 years. Some change their minds under the influence of certain events or the subjects' struggle for acceptance.

It is worth emphasising that behind a slow transformation in the character of relationships between families of choice and families of origin often lie endless pedagogical efforts of the former to change the attitude of the latter, caused by numerous factors (emotional – family stickness, structural – exclusion from civil rights and legal non-recognition, ethical – the value of family). The example of Marianna and Judyta's relationship illustrates perfectly this specific work. Marianna's 70-year-old mother, Catholic, and a regular listener to the very conservative religious radio station, Radio Maryja, could not accept her daughter's relationship with another woman for a long time. However, Marianna and Judyta visited her regularly and endured many unpleasant situations when they tried to explain and convince Marianna's mother that homosexuality is not sinful. Marianna's mother's attitude changed to such an extent that she recently announced her desire to adopt Judyta as her daughter during one of the dinners. The change in the mother's attitude led to a change in the attitudes of other family members. At present, Judyta can, for example, look after the little daughter of Marianna's sister, who expressed fierce homophobic opinions in the past. Marianna is aware that behind this breakthrough there lies their agency and determination. The best exemplification of this relationship evolution is Marianna's mother's naming strategies changing throughout the process of accepting her daughter's same-sex relationship. She went through many stages, each time using different terms when talking about her daughter's partner:

> She calls Judyta "Judyta" but earlier she called her "this friend of yours". There were stages, first that she called her "the whore", later she only called her "she", as in "did you see her?". Then she used to say: "with that colleague of yours", then there was a stage that she also mockingly called her "a friend", then "your SEXUAL friend", then she called her "Judyta" and now she is a "daughter," "her daughter."
>
> [Marianna]

Names and naming strategies used by the family of origin change over time and unveil the attitude of the family of origin to the relationship and vice versa. The expression of acceptance and inclusion into the family might

take various verbal forms that families of origin develop in search of an adequate language that reflects the nature of the relationship between them and their child's partner. The fact that the adopted naming strategies reflect the closeness of bonds is evident in the following Agata and Alicja's case. Alicja, whose parents stopped talking to her after coming out, has an excellent relationship with Agata's mother. Speaking of her, she uses the term "mother" at her explicit request. Alicja also mentions with joy and pride that Agata's mother portrays her as a "daughter" and that she talks explicitly about their relationship:

> Her mother and her sister, brother-in-law, her nephew, her aunts, her mother's friends – everyone accepts me, and to such an extent that Agata's mom presents me as HER DAUGHTER […] even the very fact of how she depicts us to her friends, that she is not ashamed of it at all matters to me.
>
> [Alicja]

In turn, parents and siblings participating in focus group interviews also reflect on the role of time in mutual relations and emphasise their efforts and agency in coming to terms with their child/sibling's disclosure and accepting their families of choice. They admit that they needed to work through their homophobia, which often involved time and patience in educating themselves, acquiring knowledge independently, rejecting homophobic attitudes, and changing their attitude towards same-sex relationships. Parents often regret that they did not learn to respect people regardless of their sexual orientation during their school education.

> I was born when access to information was relatively limited; the library was the only source. Over time, these opportunities to obtain more information grew, for example, that the relationship between two guys or two women is natural … I found it out later. Nobody told me that before. So maybe if I learned about it at school from the teachers, then I wouldn't have called anyone a fagot in secondary school. Because I would realise that if he were homosexual, for example, I might have offended him.
>
> [Robert, 48 years old; daughter, 26 years old]

Past homophobia was also a subject of concern and reflection of siblings. They underlined that they had used the language of contempt or hate speech towards LGBT people, often unconsciously, as a reproduction of heteronormative culture. Having experienced coming out of a family member meant for them the awareness of the possible harm and more reflexive use of language (i.e., they stopped using offensive vocabulary).

> When I was a teenager, I was perfectly OK with calling my pals gay (…) But now, I will think twice before using such a term because you can

> also push someone to the margin, you can offend someone. (…) It should not be used when you call people names, as I used to do during my adolescence when I was unaware that there could be such a person in my family.
>
> [Janusz, 32 years old; sister, 37 years old]

Most of the parents and siblings participating in the focus group interviews treated their children's/siblings' partners as family and looked for an adequate language to express it. Phrases such as "I have two daughters", "I treat him like a son", "s/he is my second child" repeatedly appeared in the research. Addressing partner's parents as "mom" or "dad" by a child's partner becomes an expression of family life for mothers and fathers and gives them pleasure:

> As far as I can see, the girls are happy. I am also pleased with this. Wanda has a permanent job now, she works for the newspaper, she is very happy with this job. Olivia also works. She is like a second daughter to me.
>
> [Gustaw, 45 years old; daughter, 24 years old]

> I call her my sister-in-law, I know that if they could, they would just get married, and that's why she is just family for me.
>
> [Manuela, 25 years old; sister, 30 years old]

The last examples show that members of families of origin also re-evaluate their approach to defining family, calling into question the superiority of blood ties over those of choice. Moreover, they provide an invaluable perspective on the dynamics of relations between families of choice and origin. They clearly show how important it is not to perceive them as predetermined but as renegotiated continuously by LGBTQ people and their families of origin.

Mutual Dependencies and Family Practices

Although most literature focuses on the role of disclosure in relations between families of choice and families of origin, in everyday lives of non-heterosexual people, especially when the moment of revelation is quite distant, it does not play a dominant role. When we look at these relations through daily family practices, we can see the extent to which mutual assistance or the lack of it affects their functioning. During the ethnographic study, it was possible to observe how declarations about some members of the family of origin, presented in conversations or interviews (e.g., around the family map), are translated into real contacts with them and manifested in help received from a given person. The daily observations revealed many dimensions of material support – from small everyday gestures in the form

of shopping, cooking a meal, giving preserves, looking after the child, to more engaging activities such as help in renovating the apartment, helping to pay taxes after buying an apartment, buying out a share in the apartment from partner's ex-husband, or offering accommodation until the couple can afford their own. Let's follow these everyday family practices based on reciprocity and care on the example of Denis' parents.

Having learned about his relationship with Darek, Denis's parents quickly accepted this fact. When the couple planned to live together Denis's mother suggested that they live with them in the upstairs apartment in the same house with a separate entrance. They accepted the offer. The ethnographer describes the daily mutual "interdependence" of the couple and Denis's parents in the following way:

> Denis believes that Dariusz feels good living in his parents' home – they do not try to influence how Dariusz and Denis live; they respect their privacy. […] Dariusz confirms that he feels accepted in Denis's family and feels taken care of […] Their attitude towards him surprised him somewhat. Dariusz is liked, Denis's father is grateful to him for help writing various documents (…) and computer matters. Denis recalls that he thinks his mother even prefers Dariusz over himself, that for her Dariusz is "the son she was always waiting for". […] Denis's parents show Dariusz affection, e.g., Denis's mother bought Dariusz a shirt for his birthday, and they baked a birthday cake for him once. […] Denis sometimes calls his own parents "our parents", Dariusz sometimes addresses Denis's mother as "mother", and sometimes, jokingly, as "mother-in-law".
>
> [Etnographer's raport_Denis_Darek]

The principle of reciprocity works in the couple's relationship with Denis's parents, and it is particularly evident in the family eating practices. Sometimes Denis brings food from his mother, and at other times he makes a meal for his mother – the main actors of exchange are Denis and his mother here, but they represent two families, two groups, as in the classic theory of gift exchange (Mauss 2016).

The ethnographic research has demonstrated a solid attachment to families of origin in daily life, and all kinds of interdependence that have a more mundane, everyday dimension. Many informants maintain frequent telephone contact with their families of origin. For example, the ethnographer who stayed with Adam and Mariusz observed that after the couple's holidays visit to Adam's parents, Adam talked more often with his mother on the phone even several times in one day, advising her on various matters and expecting advice in return. The material and emotional nature of often daily contacts situate queer families amidst a web of mutual services and confirm the importance of seeing families of choice and families of origin not as two independent entities but as communicating vessels. Presented examples clearly demonstrate that regardless of lack of institutional and

legal recognition, families of choice in Poland operate within broader relational structures and not outside or in opposition to families of origin (Weston 1997; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). This importance of reciprocal relationships was also illustrated by family maps, on which the family of origin was almost always present, even if not very accepting. The symbolic and structural significance of family combined with the lack of legal and social protection may strengthen this tendency. Due to unfavourable, homophobic context, the family of origin often remains the only source of support and assistance (apart from the partner and friends), which same-sex families cannot afford to lose, as the following part tries to track.

The Need for Family Support

Numerous studies show that same-sex couples receive less support from their families of origin than heterosexual couples and must compensate for it in various ways (Kurdek 1988, 2006; Goldberg 2010; Goldberg and Allen 2013; Tasker 2007). They might do so by creating informal support networks based on friends and acquaintances, caring for closeness and intimacy within the relationship (i.e., lack of support, aside from being a source of stress, might strengthen relationships from within), hiding the relationship from the family, trying to change the family's opinions about themselves, renouncing contact with the family and thereby rejecting its views, and/or internalising these opinions. Regardless of the chosen strategy, various researchers postulate to see them from the perspective of biographical experiences because most of them are simply adaptations to the given situation and have protective functions (Rostosky et al. 2004; Goldberg 2010). However, I claim that context (i.e., Polish specificity) also matters and influences ways queer families deal with insufficient support, provide care and mobilise the help they need.

In the Polish context, it is assumed, or even taken for granted, that kinship is based on mutual assistance, and the densest networks of help, support, and exchange should take place among close relatives. This conviction is reflected in Polish sayings, "the family will always help you in poverty" or "you can always count on your family". What happens when these family support networks do not function and how non-heterosexual people deal with a lack of support? Why do they not receive this support? Does it result from family-independent factors (e.g., lack of economic capital), or prejudices, and lack of acceptance for a same-sex relationship?

In the survey, the respondents were asked whom they turn to if they need help in various life situations (care in illness, financial assistance, practical help, understanding, and comfort). In all cases, they primarily indicated their partner as the primary source of support. Then they mentioned their friends and their mothers (they were ahead of friends only when financial help and care during illness were concerned). Fathers were addressed if they needed financial (ahead of friends here) or practical help (ahead of mothers)

(Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). The exact hierarchy of support has been observed in the qualitative parts, but in its detailed scope and amidst a web of everyday mutual relations. This contextualisation of help and support often reveals dramatic situations in which the family of origin fails to help. In their narratives, the informants often mention specific difficult situations where they felt a lack of help or the help they received was disproportionate to their needs. They are also aware of the fact that they could not count on their parents' support when it comes to issues related to the relationship itself. For them, this proves that the acceptance is superficial, and the relatives secretly hope that the relationship will break up and they will "return to normal". It can even be said that crises in a relationship often reveal the apparent nature of acceptance by the family of origin or show its lack in whole light. In their case, we can speak of a kind of "rationing" of support because it takes place under certain conditions set out by the parents, which non-heterosexual people have to accept.

The informants who indicate the family of origin as a source of support usually describe immediate, practical, or material assistance situations. For example, when asked about whose support she can count on, Kasia, whose parents do not accept her relationship with Basia, points out to her parents. But then she described only three situations when they actually helped her. The first case was when her father rented them a trailer to move out of town, the second was when her parents drove her to the airport when they decided to emigrate, and the third was when they lent her some money at the beginning of their stay in the UK. However, apart from these one-off situations, Kasia knows that they would not respect her will, and in the event of her death, they would like to take Jurek [her biological son], whom the couple has brought up together since the boy was small. Fears related to this were one of the reasons for their decision to emigrate:

> I think I can generally count on them in difficult situations. Just like they gave me a ride to the airport, they claimed they didn't want to help me with all of this, but they did. It's so hard to figure out what they really think. We desperately needed money at the beginning here, it was tough for the first three months… We even had to save on food. When I asked my dad, he lent us that money. So I think I can rely on them a little. If I died, things would be pretty different, and they would like to take Jurek. They would not help Basia. I'm sure of it.
>
> [Kasia]

The support of the family of origin is particularly crucial for couples raising children who face the challenge of securing the social parent's right to bring up the children in the event of a biological parent's death or illness. If the birth parent's family of origin accepts the relationship and fully recognises the social parenthood, the couples feel safe as in the cases described below. If they do not feel confident, as in Kasia and Basia's case, they look for other ways to protect the social parent's rights (in their case, it was migration).

Ela, a social mother, presents the plan developed with her partner Ala in the event of her death or another cause of the inability to take care of her child. However, the project cannot succeed without the support of Ala's family of origin. Ela assumes that she will never have to take such desperate steps as "escaping abroad", but the quoted passage reveals a certain level of anxiety caused by the unclear situation of the social parent and the degree of dependence on good relations with the family of origin:

> Ala's parents wouldn't even try to adopt her because of their age, they wouldn't be able to cope, so one of Ala's sisters would officially adopt Zuzka and then Zuzka would stay with me. (…) if there were any problems, I would sell everything, get a forged passport, and just run away with her. And I know that these are extreme situations and it will never happen, and I hope it won't, but I would do it if necessary. I will sell everything, take a suitcase and, I don't know, I'll go somewhere with her. And I won't give her to anyone. And this is what hurts us the most.
>
> [Ela]

The feeling of anxiety associated with the lack of certainty about securing relationships in a crisis (illness, death of a partner) seems impossible to eliminate in the described cases. Non-heterosexual couples with children are fully aware that all such carefully undertaken precautions may eventually be questioned and found insufficient, as I will present later in Chapter 5, focusing on queer parenthood.

Acts of Care and Protection Towards the Family of Origin

In the specific context of CEE, where the social policy model based on private familism prevails (Krzyżowski 2013; Szelewa 2015; Conkova and King 2019), it may, paradoxically, become an opportunity to include non-heterosexual couples into the broader framework of family. In Western European countries where the ageing process is either better organised institutionally by the state or more economically available (care markets, immigrant care class), elderly parents become more independent of kin care (King 2013; Heaphy, Yip, and Thomson 2004). Therefore, there is less need to strengthen intergenerational relationships in the event of disagreement. In Poland, low state support for ageing people, limited residential and home-based care combined with strict norms of filial obligations make elders more dependent on close relatives', particularly children's care. Elderly or sick parents are often forced to revise their current views on same-sex relationships and improve relations with their son/daughter if they want their support.

This type of opportunity also involves the risk of exploitation or a new kind of redistribution of care work, which in the situation of same-sex couples or childless non-heterosexual people is organised according to the

criterion of gender and sexuality. In my research, primarily women treat concern for the older generation as their duty. Moreover, they undertake or plan to take care of their parents, often despite their lack of acceptance and support. For example, Aneta's parents come from a small town, they are deeply religious and concerned with others' opinions. Hence, they do not want their daughter to visit them frequently. They still have not accepted her divorce, and afterwards, they were more eager to contact her ex-husband than her. Despite their lack of acceptance and support, and sometimes even open homophobia on their part (e.g., concerning Klara's adult daughter, who is also a lesbian[2]), Aneta feels the obligation to take care of them when it is required:

> [Our relations] are superficial. They exist because they are my parents. I respect them and I am ready to help them at any time. I will, if necessary. My mother said that I couldn't visit them with Andrea too often. Because people will talk, they will see. I respect them. I will not make a revolution in their lives, What will this change? They are conservative, my mother, more so, she does not understand certain things. She keeps on attacking homosexuality. It is not pleasant. My mom said that Klara [Aneta's younger daughter who is a lesbian] could be changed if someone raped her [...] It killed me. Blood ties connect us, at some point, they will need care. I will have to deal with it, I am aware of it, and I will certainly do it. That is my duty, and that's it.
>
> [Aneta]

Certainly, her decision is influenced by the lack of institutional care for the elderly in Poland and the reliance on filial obligations as the primary source of support for ageing parents. Women are most often assigned the "natural" role of family caregivers, and their care is considered an obvious element of their unpaid work (Finch and Mason 1992; Philips 2007; Krzyżowski 2013; Conkova and King 2019). It seems that Aneta has strongly internalised this role and cannot imagine that she could act differently.

It often happens that an informant's partner, otherwise not accepted by the family of origin, takes an active role in caring for its members in need. These care practices also facilitate the process of redefining family borders. During daily care, often lasting for years, family ties are born. For instance, in Ada and Agata's case, it was Ada who had to look after Agata's ill parents. Initially, Agata wanted to quit her job and move to her hometown for a while to take care of them. However, together with Ada, they concluded that for economic reasons, it would be more profitable if Ada, who had no job at that time, would go and look after Agata's parents while Agata would stay in the city and work. Therefore, Ada had a substantial share in caring for her partner's sick mother, acting like a family member. Her full inclusion into her partner's family could be seen in the reaction of Agata's father, to whom they never officially came out. When he heard the news that the

women almost parted after Agata had cheated on Ada with her colleague from work, he reacted very emotionally. He told Agata to fight for her partner:

> Agata's mother preferred that we didn't come out as a couple to her father, but it turned out that he knew everything. When Agata betrayed me, I found out about it when I was there with her parents, I remember that I packed my things and I left, and Agata's father started to cry, he said, "you were with her for so many years, how could you do this to her?" At that moment, we realised that he had known about all this for a long time and that it was unnecessary to hide it at all.
>
> [Ada]

Sometimes, the family of origin with which the couple lives is supportive and becomes the trigger of recognising and accepting their loved ones in the social environment. Gustaw and Pabian have lived with the family of origin from the very beginning of their relationship. They have had excellent relationships with their mothers and Gustaw's grandmother, who invited them to live with her and later on left them her house in her last will. These close, accepting relationships were based on joint care for the sick elderly, dependent on their help. First, the couple looked after Gustaw's grandmother until her death, and then, for several years, after Pabian's sick mother.

> Looking after her was an obvious consequence because every action carries a specific obligation from my perspective. If I live with someone and that someone needs help, I need to help and not run away. […] In the case of my grandmother, it did not last long because she was able, that is, the last two years she was in a wheelchair, of which the last half-year she was in bed, but it was about two years of such physical disability. She retained her full mental ability to the end. It took a little longer with Pabian's mother, and her disability was related to neurological problems, which made contact much more difficult. This period lasted over five years.
>
> [Gustaw]

The couple's relationship trajectory is unique as compared to those of others because they received enormous support from the women in return. For example, grandma became an informal "educator" of the closest environment and propagator of tolerance:

> We have various strange and funny stories about her. For instance, when someone there in the grandmother's presence said something nasty about us, grandmother yelled: "You should learn culture from faggots!"
>
> [Pabian]

Conclusions

Western researchers present the phenomenon of families of choice as emerging in opposition to families of origin, relying on extensive support structures found outside, in their own "invincible communities" (Weston 1997; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001; Blasius 1994; Nardi 1999). Meanwhile, as I showed in this chapter, families of choice in Poland, a strongly family-based culture (Titkow and Duch 2004), function preferably within broader kinship structures than outside of them. To a lesser extent than those in the West, they exist in isolation from their families of origin; instead, they are connected by various webs of mutual dependence. Thinking about family and defining it, the informants do not put their own relationship/family in opposition to their family of origin, but broaden their definitions to include both, which has been shown already in Chapter 3. Indeed, this specificity is influenced by different geopolitical conditions and the heritage of state socialism with its specific functioning of the private sphere and the perception of the family presented in Chapter 1.

Families of choice in Poland are not only deprived of socio-legal recognition but due to the lack of a strong LGBTQ movement, they usually operate in a sense of loneliness or isolation.[3] In turn, it means that, to a more considerable extent, they tend to seek support and recognition in their families of origin, not in their LGBT communities, relatively weak and scattered, mostly available in big cities. Lacking LGBT community support networks makes non-heterosexual people in Poland more dependent on their families' support. Only in critical situations, when their families fail, do they look for help elsewhere. Hence, friends' compensatory role in their life is somewhat different from that described by Western researchers (Weston 1997; Oswald 2002).

In the face of widespread homophobia, the family of origin, if it does not (re)act violently or homophobically, which also happens often, is an essential and often the only source of support besides the partner. As I have demonstrated, non-heterosexual persons do not expect their families of origin to accept them immediately; they are patient, give them time. They also do not remain passive but try by all means to show the value of their relationships and themselves as loving and deserving love children. Therefore, the changes for the better in mutual contacts are due to their constant efforts and fight for recognition by all available means (i.e., they educate the family, patiently endure humiliation, explain their own choices, and show the value of their relationships, etc.). Good relationships with families of origin are vital for families with children. In their case, informal arrangements with relatives in the event of a biological mother's death are often the only strategy available to secure contacts between a social parent and a child.

Sometimes non-heterosexual persons strategically do not inform their parents about the nature of their relationship and introduce their partner to the family by merely joint participation in important family moments or

caring practices. Thus, the notion of bringing the partner home, similar to described by non-Western researchers' alternatives to Western verbal disclosure (i.e., coming out vs. coming home in Huang and Brouwer 2018, is more adequate in describing their functioning within the broader web of familial relations. Including in the family without verbal coming out, only through participation in family life and undertaking family practices, is sometimes the only available option, which allows them to be with the family and with the partner during important moments.

Support and help that non-heterosexual couples can count on is a significant dimension of their relationships with the families of origin. Usually, it boils down to financial assistance, which confirms the earlier results of the quantitative survey (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). However, the ethnographic research also showed the material and everyday dimension of support, visible in daily family practices such as bringing food, helping in daily matters, etc. The support given by non-heterosexual couples to their own families of origin and the latter's dependence on their help is noteworthy. The model popular in Poland, based on private familialism, which transfers state obligation on the family (Szelewa 2015), may paradoxically favour the gradual acceptance of families of choice by their families of origin.

It should also be emphasised that the family of origin is not a monolith, but has a diverse structure. Therefore, it includes more or less accepting others: siblings, grandmothers, grandparents, cousins, etc. They often become allies in the struggle to recognise same-sex unions or provide support when they need it. Importantly, families of origin are confronted not only with the coming out of a family member but, as its consequence, with the possible disclosure of themselves, for example, as the mother/father/siblings of a non-heterosexual person. They also have to face the question of who has the right to speak about a family member's same-sex relationships. Looking at these relationships through the families of origin's eyes illuminates their own efforts and agency in seeking information and fighting homophobia in their environment.

In most cases, brothers and sisters accept their siblings' relationships and try to be a source of support for them. They often assume the roles of liaison, "interpreters", and mediators between parents, extended family, and their brothers and sisters. Like their parents, they are also afraid of the possibility of experiencing discrimination or violence by their loved ones. Some parents readily accept the relationships of children. Still, many of them point to the difficulties associated with acceptance, that is, the need of changing the expected life trajectory of children, a sense of being unable to protect the children from violence and ostracism, guilt for giving birth to someone who will experience homophobia. An attempt to protect a child sometimes results in behaviour which their children can perceive as homophobic. It shows how sticky and complex the issue of non-heterosexual relationships with their families of origin is. The same phenomenon or behaviour can be assessed differently from different perspectives, and only

the polyphony of voices reveals the more complex picture. Noticed similarities in (non)disclosure strategies used by families of choice and families of origin, and the comparable motivations behind choosing some of them (e.g., care for someone older in the family and non-disclosure as an expression of love), provide a different perspective on these relationships. They no longer should be seen as two separate entities but as communicating vessels, combined and entangled through various family practices and obligations.

Notes

1 The results of the quantitative study already indicated that the respondents were not publicly disclosed to all members of the family of origin equally – most often the respondents' mothers and sisters knew, the least often the fathers (71.7% of mothers, 73.2% of sisters, 63.5% of brothers, and 54.6% of fathers).
2 In the quote below, Aneta presents her mother's shocking view about the so-called corrective rape. This demonstrates the strong rootedness of this type of homophobic and violent beliefs in mentality of religious conservative Poles living in small towns.
3 The informants often expressed the feeling that, apart from them, in their immediate surroundings – a district, city or town – no similar families live. Ethnographers who accompanied them for 30 days often mentioned in their reports about their social isolation.

5 Queer(ing) Parenthood

Introduction

Research and publications on non-heterosexual parenting in the West started to appear in the early 1980s when a discussion about the so-called "gayby/lesby boom" began. There have been many studies devoted to this phenomenon since (Patterson 1994, 2000; Dunne 2000a, 2000b; Silva and Smart 1999; Stacey and Biblarz 2001; Dahl and Gabb 2019), initially aiming mainly at confrontation with the myths and prejudices regarding parenthood of non-heterosexual people and verification of its similarity/difference to the parenthood of heterosexual people. The results of the studies comparing non-heterosexual parents and their children to heterosexual parents and their children referred to the most widespread social fears and prejudices, and demonstrated that in terms of children's sexual preferences and gender roles, there are no differences between these two groups (Patterson 1994; Goldberg 2010; Tasker and Patterson 2007; Farr, Forssell, and Patterson 2010b; Farr and Patterson 2012), and that non-heterosexual parents are not any worse than heterosexual ones (Patterson 1994; Golombok and Tasker 1996). Additionally, children from LGBT families do not suffer from any developmental deficits and they enter into normal social relations with their peers and other people from their environment (Patterson 1994; Tasker and Patterson 2007; Goldberg 2010; Farr and Patterson 2012). After a meta-analysis of the results of various studies on this topic, these findings are considered a scientific consensus (Adams and Light 2015).

Western research hardly resonates with the specific dilemmas related to having a child by non-heterosexual people in Poland for many reasons. First of all, most of the recent studies concern planned families, following the proliferation of ARTs, more liberal attitudes to non-heterosexual parentage, and legal recognition of same-sex family configuration and focuses on choice and queer repronormativity (Roseneil et al. 2015; Dahl and Gabb 2019; Mizielinska 2020). To a lesser extent, these studies deal with the parentage of gays and lesbians who have children from previous heterosexual relationships or those who are in intimate relationships with people who are parents. However, this group constitutes the majority of non-heterosexual parents, both in Poland and Western countries (Mizielińska, Abramowicz,

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and Stasińska 2015; Moore 2011; Acosta 2013)[1]. The dominant Western/Anglo-American body of research introduces a narrow understanding of the complexities of queer parenthood. It overrepresents the less-common route of becoming queer parents and excludes the majority of experiences of the less privileged people. It also biases literature on queer parenthood toward the experiences of White middle- and upper-income queer people who are sufficiently better off to afford costly insemination procedures (Moore 2011, 114) and mostly live in the global wealthy North.

Therefore, the local context and its impact on parenting practices and experiences are crucial. It limits queer choices to reproduce and forces future queer parents to look for loopholes in the system, first in their attempts to become parents and later in their precarious situations as queer parents (Mizielinska 2020). In Poland, the mainstream discourse on LGBTQ parenthood is mainly based on prejudices and stereotypes where the need to protect "family" from "queerness", perceived as two opposite phenomena, is frequently raised. In such context, arguments used by "queer fundamentalists" (Lewin 2009) who see family and marriage as contaminating queerness, making it less transgressive and homonormative (Duggan 2002) might overlap with homophobic assumptions (or even fuel them) to a much greater extent than in the US with its much wider visibility of queer families nowadays. This context influences daily strategies of forming, displaying, and practising families by LGBTQ parents in Poland (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2013, 2017).

In this chapter, I intend to show how LGBTQ people become parents and display their parenthood in the specific Polish context. First, drawing on some results from the research survey, I present gender differences in paths to parenthood which will be explored in the following parts. By so doing, I want to underline the importance of surveys and numbers in writing on LGBTIQ families in Poland since their specificity is usually not considered in national surveys where heteronormativity of family is taken for granted, as I have presented in the introduction. Moreover, the absence of "big data" about queer families causes their further marginalisation and increases objections to any attempts to show their specificity as an important topic to be studied on one's own (i.e., questions like "how many of this we have in Poland" or about validity and representativity of my sample which I heard all the time). Then, the chapter unveils the experiences of queer parents that are hidden behind those numbers. First, it concentrates on mothers' experiences and then presents incisive accounts of gay fathers whose paths to fatherhood are even more blocked by the state's regulations than those of women. In the final part, I will present how "illegitimate" queer parents fight for their recognition, mainly focusing on precarious situations of social/co-parents[2]. I will demonstrate diverse tactics of making their sometimes "unbearable" and full of uncertainty lives more liveable. By doing so, I propose to read queer parents as active subjects who tactically mitigate the impact of legal and social constraints on their family life to account for their agency in having a child and negotiating their family

model. My understanding of tactics resonates with the one given by Michel de Certeau. According to him, the main feature differentiating tactics from strategies is their relation to power. Tactics are used by the underprivileged and powerless groups who must find their trickery ways to oppose power (Certeau 2011). I will return to this issue in the conclusion of the book. Through the chapter, I argue that any insights on queer parents need to be contextually situated and attentive to the specificity of time and space that constitute their possibilities and problems.

Queer Parenthood in Numbers

In the analysis presented below, I distinguish different types of families and try to describe their situation. I take into account not only the specific local context but also the type of parenting and generational and gender differences as these factors strongly differentiate parental experiences, which has already been shown already by the results of the quantitative study (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015).

Most of the respondents did not have children (91% vs. 9% with children). However, 24% of women and 5% of men would like to have them in the foreseeable future. Women considered insemination in a fertility clinic (81%) or insemination at home but without the participation of a man (60%) the most often. Most of them did not want the biological father or the sperm donor to participate in the child's upbringing and the family life of their relationship. More than half (57%) would prefer the biological father to remain anonymous; another 13% would allow the child to get to know him, although they would prefer it if the father was not involved in its upbringing. Almost one in five women (18%) would be willing to raise the child with the biological father, treated as the father or as an uncle. A similar tendency towards exclusivity was discovered among the male respondents. Over half of them (57%) would like to raise a child with their partner, and one third (32%) considered adoption; 8% would like to bring up the child with its mother/s (as a parent), and only 2% would accept limited contact with the child (as an uncle). The exact number of respondents would like to be anonymous sperm donors.

In reality, most of the respondents' children (61%) were conceived in an earlier heterosexual relationship, while only 8% were in a current same-sex relationship. Parenthood of women and men differed significantly. Women were more likely to be parents (12%) than men (5%). They were also much more involved in raising children. The majority of children of the female respondents (68%) were raised with the active participation of their female partner (the social mother), in 44% without any participation of the biological father, and in 24% also with the participation of the biological father. Parenthood of the male respondents looked very different: 58% of the respondents raised their children with their mothers but without any participation of their male partners; 20% of children were raised by three parents: the biological mother, the respondent, and his male partner.

The study showed a significant difference between same-sex and heterosexual relationships regarding the division of duties connected with raising children. In the case of same-sex relationships, the majority of duties are done jointly. It was only in contact with institutions (kindergarten/school, health care) that the biological parent took over most duties. However, one should note that this situation was probably caused by the fact that the social parent does not have any legal standing in such situations and the fear of revealing the family situation to institutions. Consequently, this disproportion seems to stem from necessity rather than from choice. According to the studies on a representative sample (Titkow, Duch-Krzysztoszek, and Budrowska 2004), in heterosexual relationships, both men and women agreed that the vast majority of educational duties belong to women. This discrepancy indicates that there is a significant difference in the way same-sex relationships function: they are based much more on equal sharing of parental duties, which confirms the findings of Western studies (Dunne 1998; Peplau and Spalding 2001; Sullivan 2004; Goldberg and Allen 2013).

Social parents not only participated in childcare but also supported the children financially. Biological and social mothers declared fairly similar levels of expenses, although with a tendency towards biological mothers covering a somewhat larger part of the involved expenses. It should again be stressed that both the involvement of the social parent in childcare and providing financial support are fully voluntary and takes place in a situation where there is no legal support of the social partner's interests or securing contacts with the child, who may in many cases be the most important person in their life. The very fact of the involvement remains invisible socially (such institutions as schools or kindergartens are not informed about the specific family situation), which makes the position of a social parent incredibly difficult and precarious.

Mothers "Under Censorship"[3] and the Primacy of Motherly Love

There are two different paths to becoming a mother for non-heterosexual women. Women can jointly decide to have a child (intentionally planned motherhood). However, it often happens that a lesbian woman enters a relationship with a woman who has a child from a previous relationship (lesbian step-parenthood). In the latter situation, the motherhood of the biological mother precedes entering into a relationship with another woman. They are "mothers who become lesbians" (Moore 2011). Certainly, women who decided to have a child during previous heterosexual relationships face different challenges and problems than "lesbians who become mothers" (Moore 2011) who plan a child within same-sex relationships or after they identified as lesbians. For the latter, being in a same-sex relationship was inherent in their motherhood project, while many "mothers who become lesbians" followed the heteronormative model of motherhood without calling it into question for a long time. They often accepted the

ideology of motherhood, recognising motherhood as another "obvious" stage in their lives, an indicator of adulthood and maturity, a model imposed by society and their families of origin.

Lesbian Step Families

In stepfamilies, the role of the biological mother and her identity is largely created by references to biology and myths about motherhood widespread in Polish society (e.g., the myth of motherly love as a natural, instinctive, unquestionable force for which everything should be sacrificed and the myth of the Polish Mother). Trying to combine their older maternal identity with the newly accepted but socially disapproved lesbian identity (or being in a relationship with a woman) has been described as complicated since society views them as fundamentally contradictory. Therefore, biological mothers in stepfamilies face various types of problems. Constantly aware that they are perceived by their social environment (their parents, relatives, ex-husbands) as inappropriate mothers (DiLapi 1989), they do everything to present themselves to the world as good, devoted, and loving. They often proclaim the necessity of total sacrifice for the child as if wanting to be a walking example of the myth of the Polish Mother, according to which this is the women's destiny and sense of life (Mizielińska 2001). Their desire to protect the child, by all means, influences the family's tactics of (non) disclosure and resistance to socio-legal misidentification, but also the choices concerning family shapes and naming practices. Edyta's statement reflects this type of attitude, which puts the best interests of the child above all:

> When you are a mother, you must not only consider what is good for you, but you must consider your baby's needs. And first to fulfil their needs, and only then your own.
>
> [Edyta, 37 years old, BM and SM]

Due to the widespread stereotypes concerning non-heterosexual parenthood in Poland, the main features of lesbian motherhood are twofold. On the one hand, lesbian mothers feel the need to constantly "justify [their] parenthood" (Bos 2012), prove in all possible ways that they are good enough and appropriate. On the other hand, they put the well-being of the child at the centre of all family practices.

As an example, we might look at the family of Bożena (37 years old) and Marzena (34 years old). They bring up four children from their previous heterosexual marriages (both of them were in the divorce process when the ethnographic research in their family took place). Bożena is the biological mother of three: 8-year-old Nadia, 7-year-old Wiki, and 3-year-old Adam. Marzena is the biological mother of the 6-year-old Jacek. The whole family lives under enormous pressure from their families of origin and ex-husbands

who constantly undermine the mothers' competencies and consider their same-sex relationship as clear evidence of being "inappropriate mothers" (DiLapi 1989). In reaction to the fears of Bożena's mother, particularly hostile to their relationship, Bożena and Marzena try not to give their families any reasons to question their role as good caretakers. They do not even keep beer in the fridge so that the children would not tell their grandparents or fathers about it. Marzena does not bathe the girls so as not to be accused of paedophilia:

> One is under constant surveillance. […] He [ex-husband] keeps asking children questions […] how Marzena is doing, if she yells at them […] I don't trust my mother either [….] Marzena said: "I don't want to hear any accusations later that I'm doing God knows what to your daughters. Tell them to wash themselves, or wash them yourself, because I don't want to hear from someone later that I did God knows what".
>
> [Bożena]

The findings demonstrate that the label of "inappropriate/bad mother" is often used by families of origin to bring their daughters back on the "right track". In the case of Manuela's mother, she did not allow her to meet Kinga at the beginning of their relationship. She locked her up at home, from which Manuela had to escape to meet her partner in secret. Moreover, the mother threatened to take her son, who was seven at that time, away.

> When I was just running away from home, my mother told me, that if I ran away to live with someone else, she would sue me and take away my baby. Sue me for immoral conduct.
>
> [Manuela, 36 years old; son, 18 years old, BM]

Biological mothers in stepfamilies often feel either torn between being a mother and being in a same-sex relationship, or they separate these two roles, most often putting love for the child first in their lives. Klara, who has been in an 11-year-long relationship with Kazimiera (Kazia on the drawing), raising her biological son Bruno since he was 7 years old, draws herself in a straddle position on her family map. It symbolically represents the identity dilemmas of many biological mothers from stepfamilies who took part in the study and struggle to reconcile their maternal identity with being in a same-sex relationship. Klara says that she feels like a "punching bag" – both Kazia and Bruno criticise each other's behaviour, and she is suspended between them. Klara places her son with her mother and her partner on her family map at the two ends of her legs (Figure 5.1.). Thus, she becomes the only link between her son and her partner:

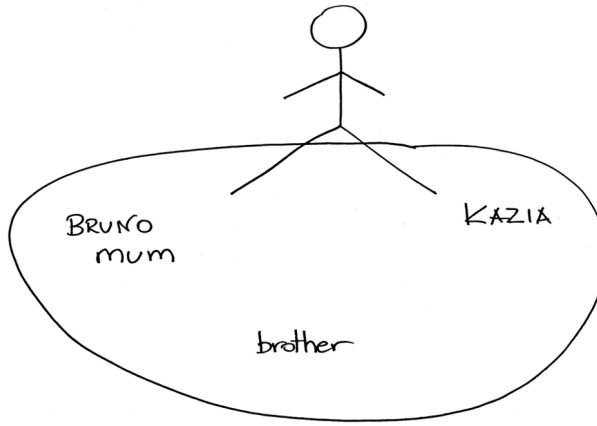

Figure 5.1 Family map drawn by Klara (reconstructed).

Klara's narrative shows a strong influence of the ideology of maternal love, which requires the mother to devote herself entirely to the child. She constantly feels guilty that she cannot sacrifice her love to her partner for her son. In her opinion, she fails as a mother because Bruno (who is 18 years old) has moved out and lives with his grandmother now.

> Sometimes I feel discomfort that we don't live together, that Bruno doesn't live with me but with his grandmother instead, I'm convinced that it shouldn't be like that […] because the child's place is with the mother.

Biological mothers in stepfamilies often seem to believe in the mother's "instinctive knowledge" about the child. They are also critical of their partners and their upbringing abilities, not rooted in the experience of having their own biological child. At one point, in the interview ending the ethnography, Klara said, "If [Kazimiera] had given birth to her own child, maybe she would behave in the same way as I do". Therefore, she believes that Kazimiera's failure to understand her parenting practices may be caused by her lack of experience of biological motherhood and refuses her the right to hold an opinion.

The full realisation of motherhood as a shared responsibility in lesbian stepfamilies is often hindered by ex-husbands who invoke children's alleged good in order to control the lives of their ex-wives (gay fathers from stepfamilies also face similar problems from the biological mothers). Therefore, the step/social mother's identity is often the product of a discussion of the roles of all parties involved. In Ania's case, she does not see enough space in the family as a mother due to the presence of both biological parents.

> Renata calls me by my first name, sometimes she even calls me mom, but I set a limit. I don't want her to talk to me like that. I feel that this will help her organise her world a bit. […] I do not want to replace her dad. She has a dad. She has a mother, I'm an aunt, someone who helps,

> explains, talks picks her up from the kindergarten, takes care of her, puts a bandaid on and so on. I participate actively. I am there.
>
> [Ania, 32 years old; daughter, 7 years old, SM]

Ania sees herself giving up the motherly role in altruistic terms. She claims that she does it for the sake of the child she wants to protect so that her daughter does not have to deal with the non-normativity of parenting and its consequences. This is why she does not want the girl to call her mother, even though on the practical level, Ania, like other non-birth mothers in stepfamilies, participates to a large extent in raising the child.

Lesbian Planned Families

Much more joint accounts of motherhood accompany narratives of planned families. In their case, motherhood is a project of both women who make consensual mutual decisions from the very beginning, including which of them is to become a mother, what type of fertilisation to choose, whether the sperm donor is to be known or not, etc. They also engage in many practices to secure the social mothers' position within the family, compensate for their lack of biological ties with the child, and legitimise the other mother (Hayman et al. 2013). They emphasise the importance of their practices of care, responsibility, and upbringing in creating bonds with the child. However, the narrative about the primacy of biological ties, deeply inscribed in the ideology of motherhood and monomaternalism (Badinter 1981; Rich 1995; Park 2013), is also present in their narratives. Social mothers talk about biological ties underlining their unquestionable, irreplaceable, and certain character.

In contrast, they perceive their social ties as less secure and precarious, which translates into their conviction that the biological mother has a unique and legally protected bond with the child, while their own must be developed and secured differently. For instance, Marta, who together with Pola bring up their 2-year-old son, Henio, notices that the boy often prefers the biological mother instinctively and naturally. For him "Pola is the first choice", as Marta admitted in the interview.

> There is a bond that neither the father, nor the partner who did not give birth is able to create with a child. From the very beginning, when Henio felt hungry, he was fed. As if this contact of the child with the mother holding him to her breast and calming him down, still influences him until today. When Henio has some problems, and there are just the two of us, he runs to me sometimes, but the more natural thing is for him to run to his mother, he looks for his mother.
>
> [Marta, 41 years old; son, 3 years old, SM]

Ela does not perceive such preference in her daughter's behaviour. Nevertheless, she emphasises the socially and legally privileged status of

biological motherhood, which means that in the event of a break-up, her partner, as she said, "will remain in a winning position".

Social mothers often maintain the primacy of biological motherhood. They agree to their secondary status, their role "in-between", or, as one of them called it, "being nobody in all this": neither a mother nor a father, someone else in the child's life, as they often lack terms to describe themselves adequately. For the sake of the child's best interests, they often agree on not being called mother, which resembles the attitude of social mothers in stepfamilies described in the last part. For example, Julia, who wanted to be a mother and feels she is one, considers it selfish to place her own identity needs over the safety of the child, who, in her opinion, would be threatened if this identity was recognised.

> We made the decision that I was going to be Julia for him, not mom. Nevertheless, it hurts a lot on a personal level. For many years I kept saying to Brygida: "Why can't I be a mother? Why can't he call me mum?" Brygida says "so if you like it, let it be". But then I say, "Well, but I can't, because he'll have problems". Sometimes he calls me mom but I correct him to call me Julia instead. Because I'm afraid. Because he's a boy. I'm also afraid of what will happen next.
>
> [Julia, 40 years old; son, 5 years old, SM]

Some social mothers experience dissonance between the need to realise their own maternal identity and the need to protect their child from homophobia, and out of love for the child, they question their own needs. Although cited above Julia knows that it is not the identity of the non-biological mother that threatens the child but its pejorative perception in the homophobic world; she perceives disclosing it as selfish. This attitude reflects the mythologisation of motherhood in Poland and recalls the figure of the Polish Mother, whose role entails constant giving, always being there for the child, responding to all his/her needs and, above all, sacrificing herself (Mizielińska 2001).

Biological mothers in planned families sometimes emphasise the importance of blood ties in shaping the relationship with the child. They refer to the maternal instinct as a significant element of their identity as a mother. Malwina emphasises the biological and "natural" dimension of her relationship with their daughter, although she sees her partner Angelika as a full parent and the couple decided that in the future, as the daughter grows up, she should determine how she would like to address the social mother. An important thread in Malwina's narrative is also the reference to the maternal instinct, which, in her opinion, distinguishes her from the social mother. She describes her partner as playing a more masculine role in their relationship.

> I have had the maternal instinct since I was eight. […] I met Angelika, that was over three years ago, and she said: "I am ready, I do not want to be a biological mother because I do not feel the maternal instinct, but

> I am ready to have a child, raise it, accompany you". She is one hundred per cent successful in this, she is a fantastic parent. Angelika is more masculine so we knew right away that I would give birth because Angelika did not have this instinct.
>
> [Malwina, 33 years old; daughter, 13 months]

It is crucial to notice that the desire to have a child and become a mother in Malwina's case form a coherent part of her lesbian identity (Mezey 2008). In feminist studies and critical discussions on heteronormativity, the maternal instinct is often interpreted as a social and cultural construct, oppressive towards women and marginalising the diversity of practices related to being a mother (Park 2013; Rich 1995; Badinter 1981). At the same time, heteronormative societies create a hierarchy of motherhood according to which lesbian mothers are unfit and placed at their bottom (DiLapi 1989). Therefore, the very right to feel the maternal instinct is reserved to heterosexual women who meet the normative requirements of a "real mother". Malwina's statement about her maternal instinct can, therefore, be analysed twofold. It could work as an exemplification of strengthening a heteronormative pattern of being a woman, internalised by lesbians women, which could strengthen the queer criticism perceiving the desire to have a child as an exemplification of homonormativity (Duggan 2002; Edelman 2004; Halberstam 2005).

Nevertheless, I prefer to read it as a disagreement with the symbolic and practical deprivation of lesbians of the right to become mothers, particularly overwhelming. The latter interpretation opens up a new perspective on lesbian motherhood. It allows perceiving the subjective and reflective side of presented narratives, which shows agency and tactical game with socially constructed categories.

To conclude, the importance of biological kinship remains strong in both lesbian planned and step families. Although lesbian mothers undertake numerous strategies to compensate biological ties by symbolic practices (such as participation in childbirth, attending childbirth school together, sharing care, choosing a donor similar to the social mother), in their narratives they often underline the primacy and privilege of biological motherhood. In the Anglo-American discussion about lesbian motherhood, mostly focusing on chosen ties, little attention has been paid to the strength of biological bonds. There are only a few studies that emphasise this issue (Pelka 2009; Hayden 2013). It might be primarily due to their preoccupation with queer planned families. My findings, however, show the significant influence of biology on the construction of family roles and family relationships, both in planned and stepfamilies. The impact of local context (i.e., legal protection of biological ties) with its structural and symbolic significance of family, the normative ideology of motherhood (the figure of the Polish Mother) and the inscription of motherhood in female identity (Titkow, Duch-Krzysztoszek; and Budrowska 2004) might strengthen these tendencies.

Paths of Gay Fatherhood

The survey results showed a much lower percentage of non-heterosexual fathers raising children than non-heterosexual mothers (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). Due to widespread homophobic attitudes, fully open exclusive gay paternity is very rare and difficult to spot. For instance, no such couples participated in the research (including all quantitative and qualitative parts). According to the participants of the focus group for gay fathers, gay parenting in Poland is more complicated than non-heterosexual motherhood for practical reasons:

> It is challenging for gay men to have a child in Poland. As far as lesbians are concerned, when they decide to they can buy sperm from the sperm bank, we do not have such an option. Well, neither of us has a uterus to carry the pregnancy. So, this is a hellishly expensive [and illegal] solution in Poland. I talked to my friends, they might even want to, but one option is what I have [i.e. co-parenthood with a lesbian couple], which is hard to find. I think I'm fortunate because I found people whom I trust and they trust me.
>
> [Marek, 31 years old; son, 2 years old]

Non-heterosexual fatherhood in Poland is neither recognised by the law nor is it institutionally or culturally legitimised. Moreover, the socialisation of men limits their opportunities to assimilate practices focused on the ethics of care, domestic or care work, reproduced as culturally feminine. For these reasons, non-heterosexual fathers feel lonely in their experiences.

The diversity of gay paternity patterns represented by the research informants may reflect the thesis that many different emancipatory ideas (feminist and queer) exist in Poland simultaneously (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011). Thus, the informants consisted of those who build: gay stepfamilies, gay planned parenthood with a befriended lesbian couple, gay informal adoption, and being a father in a relationship with a straight woman (both living in full disclosure and full concealment). It seems significant that the two other models of gay paternity popular in the West – surrogacy and adoption – are absent. The former is legally impossible in Poland, and the latter is possible only in the case of hiding a same-sex relationship and practically impossible since adoption centres exceptionally seldom give a child to a single parent.

The most common model of gay parenthood encountered among the elderly generation of men (55+) was hiding gay identity in heterosexual relationships and having children due to being married for many years. The decision to leave the heterosexual relationship was very often accompanied by a sense of guilt not only because of the harm that this change may cause to the loved ones but also of hiding gay identity throughout the marriage and not taking the decision to leave earlier. Marian's children grew up in a 40-year-long mixed-sex relationship and found out about their father's

gayness when they were grown up. Only then did Marian decide to divorce his wife. As he claims, he had remained in a relationship with her for so long because of the children's well-being.

Significantly, Marian's narrative overlaps with the appreciation of being a parent, internalised homophobia, and the slow acceptance of his sexual identity. He emphasises the suffering resulting from functioning in a mixed-sex relationship for many years and the feeling of guilt towards his wife, as well as reluctance towards his gayness. In this context, he even calls his family "dysfunctional". Nonetheless, he underlines the joy of having children and grandchildren, as well as the slow process of acceptance of being gay.

> One has to face such problems that you finally have to say "yes, I'm gay, I'm fine with it". Because I'm fine with it and it's a completely different life. I lived through thirty-four dramatic years. Tormenting life with a woman. The only good thing about this marriage is that I have three children, and that I let them go, I gave them life, now they have three different lives. And today I have grandchildren, thanks to my daughter.
>
> [Marian, 64 years old; sons, 38 and 35 years old; daughter, 32 years old]

In the case of gay fathers from older generations, their formation of a same-sex relationship occurs at the end of raising children (so-called "empty nest" stage) because their entry into adulthood reduces the risk of losing parental rights[4]. Their life trajectory is characterised by a sudden break with the wife/partner, often followed by a discontinuity in relationships with children (i.e., complete or partial termination of contact[5]), and the need to start all over again at the age of 40–50.

The parenthood of the younger generation looks a bit differently and usually takes the form of co-parenthood in the stepfamily. As a rule, the children visit their gay fathers occasionally, for weekends or specific days, living, however, with their mothers who make final decisions concerning the children, and the parental decision-making of the men is limited. The story of Jarek and Łukasz serves as an example of such a configuration. In this model, both the biological father (Jarek) and the social father (Łukasz) participate in raising children, exchanging these responsibilities in the alternating care system with their biological mother. The children know about his father's same-sex relationship.

> From the beginning, it was certain that even though the relationship with my ex-wife ended, my parenting over children did not. And in fact, my ex-wife's custody requirements in the divorce proceedings aimed at preventing the situation where the court dismissed the biological father entirely. Because we know that non-heteronormativity may result in a decision that, as a result of divorce, the father is found unsuitable, he is

> ineffective as a member of the parental team. And it depends only on the judge.
>
> [Jarek, 37 years old; daughter, 10 years old; son, 6 years old]

Jarek did not follow the path of the older generation, waiting for his children to grow up or giving up caring for them after the divorce. In his generation, the idea of linking gay identity with being a father is far more common than it was in Marian's case. It does not mean that the process is smooth. For example, Jarek was afraid of losing his parental rights during the divorce because of his gay relationship.

Gay parenthood might also result from informal adoption, as in the case of Pabian, Gustaw, and Mikołaj. Pabian (47) and Gustaw (45) have been together for 17 years and had never planned a child before. However, when 3 years ago they met the 20-year-old Mikołaj, who had nowhere to live, they decided to take him home, and have treated him as a child since then. They sent him to school and have supported him although he has his biological parents.

> We had an idea to help someone temporarily in need who has nowhere to live and has problems contacting his parents. We are both teachers. Therefore we thought that maybe it would be possible to form a young person a little, straighten him up a bit so that he would not lose his opportunities out of sheer stupidity, and he had already lost a lot in his life, he left school at some point. […] At the beginning, we did not put it like "Yes, you are our child". It was more of an attempt to solve some of the kid's problems. Then we found out that if he meets certain expectations, that is, he does what is expected of him, he starts to learn, begins to behave normally, takes care of himself, rebuilds contact with his parents, and expresses the wish to continue living with us, and we decided that it had to be somehow … maybe not sanctioned because it cannot be done in Poland; unfortunately, we do not live in Germany where such a thing can be done formally… but that we have to name it at least somehow because names create reality! This way we created a strange little family, two guys and an adult child.
>
> [Gustaw, 45 years old]

Later on, when Mikołaj met his current boyfriend, the boy also moved in with them:

> In the meantime, our child met his boyfriend, so now the four of us live together. My husband and I play the role of parents, and the children are children; sometimes we need to straighten them up a bit.
>
> [Gustaw, 45 years old]

Thanks to the couple, Mikołaj even renewed contacts with his family of origin. Currently, the four of them celebrate Christmas with Mikołaj's biological mother and his stepfather (who live across the country), and Mikołaj's parents are grateful to the couple for helping Mikołaj.

When the younger generation of gay men want to plan their children, they have to consider local constraints and enter into an agreement with a person with a uterus as a co-parent. In the planned lesbian–gay co-parenting model, parents are friends – a lesbian couple and a gay man – who jointly decide to have a child. In the case of Marek, Amelia, and Maja, Marek is the biological father of Marcel, raised with a lesbian couple. Marek lives in a different city than his son and his mothers; thus, he does not have daily contact with his child.

Marek emphasises that he has always been gay, never entered into heterosexual relationships but also did not question the possibility of becoming a father due to his sexuality. His narrative reflects a specific generational change already described by Western researchers, a transition from the narrative about the inability to become a parent when one is a non-heterosexual person to the inclusion of parenthood in one's life trajectory by the youngest generation (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). Marek was invited to the co-parentage by his good friend and her partner. Fertilisation was performed in the clinic. In the future, the family plans to live in the same city, but that will happen in a few years at the earliest. For the time being, if the mothers visit the biological father, they do not leave the child with him overnight but he takes care of him during the day. Regardless of the remote and supportive character of his parental role, fatherhood is essential to him.

> When Marcel is in my city of residence, he doesn't stay with me for the time being, because he is still relatively young, so the mums prefer not to leave him in my apartment. In general, however, they have no problem leaving him alone with me for longer, say, five days. When I come to their city, generally, I spend all my time with him.
>
> [Marek, 31 years old; son, 2 years old]

Planned gay co-parenthood might also involve straight women. In the planned queer two-gender parenting model, a non-heterosexual man becomes a father by contract and enters into a relationship with a straight woman. What makes this model different from the first and the second of the described cases is that he does not hide his sexual identity from the woman he married. In the following Tadeusz's case, Tadeusz presents himself as a "married gay" and the father of a 3-month-old Wojtek, who was born planned in a marriage with an asexual woman by the use of the in vitro method. The marriage was their conscious arrangement, and his wife is a close friend to him.

> I am married, although I am gay. That's why I have the nickname "the married gay" among my friends. (…) Maybe there will be time for me to tell my legend. When my wife proposed to me, and I am a very polite boy, brought up nicely by a Polish mother, so I did not refuse. The situation has developed, we have a son now. I am not in any stable

> same-sex relationship. I'd dated guys before I got married, but it was never more than a year in one relationship. Usually, I wanted to run away in the end. And in marriage in my own way, I am happy in such a partnership. Well, my wife is my best friend from college, so it is a very special relationship. We both knew that I was gay, she is an asexual heterosexual, but we had our shared dreams and goals.
>
> [Tadeusz, 34 years old; son, 3 months old]

The marriage was concluded for purely economic and practical reasons (a desire to buy a house). The couple wanted to arrange a comfortable life together in which they would both feel good. Only a little later did the thought of having a child appear.

> The idea of having a child arose over time. However, I knew that my wife went through such a stage already in college, she assumed that a man, a husband, is not permanently needed for a woman to have a child, and this is the advantage of women, also lesbians […] But it is so much more difficult for gays to find the person we can trust, and I also knew that I was taking a little risk because I wanted to be a whole father.
>
> [Tadeusz, 34 years old; son, 3 months old]

Tadeusz presents his model of parenthood in opposition to the model of paternity discussed first, practised mainly through gays from older generations, primarily because of his entire identity disclosure:

> I met fathers, gays of different ages, but most of them were divorced already, some years later and in the best situation, they were reconciled with their children, but it took them years because they had hidden it.
>
> [Tadeusz, 34 years old; son, 3 months old]

In the part of the survey dedicated to reproductive plans, a strong tendency towards exclusivity was revealed among gay men, comparable to women. The same percentage of men and women would like to raise a child solely with their partners. Gays considered employing a surrogate mother (57%) or adoption (32%). Only 8% of men would like to raise the child together with its mother(s) (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). Considering restrictive legislation and lack of opportunities to raise the child in the preferable ways in Poland, gay fathers must tailor their dreams (inspired mostly by Western inclusive legislation and popular discourse, for instance, movies about gay parenthood, gay celebrities with children) to reality and search for different tactics: either by looking for loopholes in the law and/or investing in the form of co-parenthood. If they want to pursue their dreams of exclusive gay fatherhood, they must consider migration, but this is an option reserved only for those who have sufficient economic and social capital.

Illegitimate Parents, or Living in Uncertainty

In a culture dominated by heteronormative and monomaternal/monopaternal thinking (Park 2013) the situation of queer families with children is particularly challenging. They threaten the default model of a family consisting of a mother, a father, and child/ren, strongly promoted in the public discourse in Poland (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2017, 2013). The role of social parents and their bonds with the children, based on love and paternal practices, daily sharing of duties, giving support and care, are not recognised by the law and society but often also questioned by families of origin.

The uncertain future of their families because of the lack of social recognition and legitimacy as well as fundamental security regarding the fate of the child in the event of the death or disease of the biological parent was a frequent subject of reflection both by social and biological parents. This burden of uncertainty, described by one of the focus group participants below, is the product of many levels of insecurity of social parents' experience, as well as the tensions between anxiety and the feelings, present in their daily lives.

> I think that my feelings for Jan [the son] are more or less the same as those of Karolina's [the biological mother] and I just can't imagine that I could not treat him as my child. Although I believe there is something different to this experience of parenthood, because it is accompanied by more of uncertainty.
>
> [Ala, 40 years old; son, 8 years old, SM]

The lack of legal recognition is based not only on homophobia and/or heteronormativity, but also on the legal primacy of biological kinship over social family practices. The statutory transfer of childcare to other members of the child's family of origin or the biological father (in the case of lesbian stepfamilies) does not take into account any rights of the social mother as a person directly caring for the child, with whom the child has the strongest bond much stronger than that with other family members. In other words, in the current legal situation, with no recognition of any bonds between the person co-raising the child in the household and the child, their contacts depend entirely on the goodwill of the family of origin and not the will/need of the parents, the child, or an objective assessment of family relations. Moreover, it may also be further complicated by familial homophobia and lead to acts against the biological mother's will. Marysia's narrative well illustrates this situation.

> There are no regulations here. I have this comfort, the certainty that if something happened to me, I know that my mother would be able to get along perfectly well with Inga [biological mother]. On the other hand, I am also aware that if Inga passes away, I would be left with

> nothing because I would probably not be able to see Hanka [daughter] at all because her dad would see to it the whole family would as well. Because at the moment, no one from Hanka's family would be able to change this situation. And regarding financial matters, I know that I would have nothing left.
>
> [Marysia, 26 years old; daughter, 10 years old, MS]

Apart from the lack of legal protection of the continuity of the relationship between the social mother/father and the child, the child's day-to-day care is also limited by law. As social parents are not considered legal guardians of the children, they do not have the right to statutory privileges related to childcare (e.g., parental leave). The lack of legal recognition of their caring practices results in difficulties in childcare organisations, especially in case of illness, but it also influences the shape of family roles, especially when children are small. All these problems appear in the following extract from focus group discussions with social mothers:

JULIA: We cannot take child leave. […] You know what I mean when your kid is sick, and your wife is at work, and she was on a sick leave a week ago, and Adaś is still sick, it would be nice if I could take it because she would not have problems at work when she is gone for two weeks. […]

IGA: I have a sick child at home. My partner's job is falling apart, she works at the computer and goes to work in the evening after 6 p.m. when I come home from my work because I can't stay home with my child when he is sick.

[Julia, 40 years old; son, 5 years old, SM],
[Iga, 41 years old; son, 7 years old, SM]

Gay fathers emphasise that the lack of legal regulations regarding custody makes social fathers fear that in contact with the police or representatives of other state institutions, it could be revealed that they do not have any rights to the children:

> I got worried when I was driving with the children once, with Przemek and Kasia, Jarek was not there and I thought, "God, and if the police stop me? What will I tell them? Who are these children to me?" Well. I would not have an explanation, and what would a policeman do… and what would the children say? They could send children to the Child Service. What else? Parents are absent. Some gentleman is driving them.
>
> [Łukasz, 27 years old; daughter, 10 years old; son, 6 years old, SF]

Interestingly, this fear and feelings of "uncanniness" of one's parenthood, was absent in the narratives of the social mothers. They rather hoped that in these circumstances, they would pass as mothers. This difference may be

related to the homophobic discourse connecting homosexuality with paedophilia, still common in Poland.

Despite fulfilling parental functions, such as caring, supporting the child financially, and taking an active part in their socialisation, social parents are formally strangers to the child and partners for the society, in view of the law and to public institutions. There are no legal safeguards for their role in their families (even if they marry abroad). This contradiction between actual parental practices and the lack of socio-legal protection leads parents to develop different day-to-day coping tactics to renegotiate their recognition, safeguard their rights, and deal with the above-described uncertainty.

Tactics of Resistance

In the survey, the respondents were asked if they ever tried to secure contact between the child and the social parent in case of the death of the biological parent or separation. In the case of 19% of children, parents attempted to secure such contacts in the future. Answering an open question about forms of such provisions, they specified their forms. In 18 cases, they signed a written agreement in which the social parent was authorised to take care of their partner's child (e.g., "We are thinking about my partner including in her last will a clause in which I would be the person to adopt our child"). In six cases, the respondents presented their plans which would result in the social parent's possibility of obtaining parental rights within the existing legal system. These plans included the future marriage of the social and biological parents or adoption. In eight cases, the respondents declared they had a plan, but it had not been formalised. Some respondents quoted informal agreements with other relatives, such as "my mother has all the information and instructions, I know she will do exactly as we want". In seven cases, the respondents believed that keeping good relations with the child was more important than formal issues (e.g., "we shall stay in touch against all odds. The bond with another person is the most important thing"). Finally, three persons admitted that the matter was complicated and did not know how to solve it. What is interesting, though, is the fact that 81% of respondents declared that they have never tried any such thing (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). Their lack of attempts might be caused by their disbelief that any kind of informal solutions will not be sufficient in the worst-case scenario.

During the qualitative parts, most of the queer parents spoke extensively about the necessity of taking additional precautions to secure their family structure and make up for the lack of social and legal recognition for social parent's contribution. They explained in more detail how they deal with their invisibility and non-recognition on a daily basis. Among the tactics of resistance parents undertake in the context of their constant uncertainty, the most common are those related to the attempt to formalise relations within the family and make informal arrangements, for example, with the

family of origin. Another strategy is the ritual inclusion of the social mother into the kinship structure by giving her the role of the child's godmother. In addition, the parents also consider migrating abroad to protect their families and ensure their access to rights. They also actively seek support from other queer families. All these strategies require extra energy, time, and resources, as demonstrated in the following parts.

Family Contracts and Formal Solutions

Securing the relationship between children and social mothers is one of the most pressing issues mentioned in all mothers' narratives, reflecting all possible preventive strategies used by informants to resist the existing harmful legal situation. Unfortunately, due to the lack of legally proven solutions, no steps taken – whether informal arrangements or a notarial act of will – guarantee that the court will recognise the social mother after the biological mother's death. The absurdity of maladjustment of the legal system to actual family practices is illustrated below by a conversation between social mothers. They consider the use of all currently available legal tools (and any loopholes in the system) to ensure that a social mother is able to contact and adopt a child in the event of the biological mother's death.

ALINA: I wonder if it would not be easier to give birth to a child, give it up, and then apply for adoption with indication because as a biological mother I have the right. I could waive this right but I would always be a biological mother, and there is adoption with indication, I assign to a partner …

ALICJA: But at this point, she must agree as well, I guess

ANGELIKA: But then she is also a single person, and you know that it doesn't quite work this way.

ALICJA: In my situation, Lucjan [biological father] will also have to relinquish his rights.

[Alina, 37 years old; son, 26 years old], [Angelika, 38 years old; daughter, 13 months old] [Alicja, 35 years old; daughter, 6 years old; son, 4 years old]

Anticipating possible break-up or the biological mother's death, families choose "contracting kinship" (Luce 2010) and signing family contracts regarding the future. Establishing such a family contract involves negotiating all potential scenarios within a couple, for example, whether and under what conditions the social mother will have the right to contact with the child:

> We went to a notary public, signed a notarial deed that in the event of death I have priority for adoption, you can sign something like that. ("And still it is the court that decides" another respondent adds) I know that the court decides but there is an indication at this point. Of course, if not me, then also the closest family. There is no problem with

> recovering the child from the family, inverted commas. Recover. God, how ugly that sounds. It means to make this baby just mine. Yes? Well, ours.
>
> [Mariola, 39 years old; daughter, 2 weeks old, SM]

The mothers point out that despite various arrangements they made (sometimes sealed with notarial deeds), they cannot be sure that their will would be respected by the court or the biological mother's family of origin in the event of difficulties or tragic events.

> I do not have any rights to this child. We have notary security; of course, we made various legal arrangements, but in fact the notary said that everything would depend on the judge. Malwina wrote in her will that she would like me to look after Irena, and still, everything will depend on the judge. And that is the biggest problem.
>
> [Angelika, 38; daughter, 13 months, SM]

Therefore, to ensure contact between the social mother and the child, the women invest in less formal arrangements, namely in maintaining good and close relationships with their families of origin. They believe that relatives who like and accept their family configurations would respect their will regarding the child's future. This tactic is often combined with a search for specific formal solutions, as we have seen above. An excellent example of such an accumulation of never certain precautions is the above case of Malwina and Angelika. They currently live in the social mother's home with her mother – the child's grandmother. In addition to informing Malwina's family and relatives about their will in the event of death, the couple also decided to prepare a more formal will.

> I told my family that if anything happened to me, Irenka should stay with Angelika. They respect it, they are all women. However, I showed my whole family the will, I made Angelika the executor. But what will really happen? I do not know. Somebody can object. Someone who will have more rights to her, even though Angelika is the full-fledged mother. However, I don't even want to think about it. We did it; there is a power of attorney, this will, we put it on the shelf and keep it locked up.
>
> [Malwina, 33 years old; daughter, 13 months, BM]

On the other hand, some couples cannot count on good and understanding attitudes of their families of origin. For example, Marta and Pola do not trust that Pola's family of origin would fulfil her last wish. Therefore, they look for other ways to prove the strong bond between the social mother. Marta, the social mother, transfers money to Pola's account, indicating that it is intended for the child's support. The couple hopes that this may be a

piece of good evidence for the court proving that Marta has always contributed to the upbringing so she is firmly attached to the boy.

POLA: I got this advice from the NGO Campaign Against Homophobia that, of course, nothing can be done legally but we must have some hard pieces of evidence that she was involved in every possible way in his upbringing, support, and living with him. Evidence such as photos, recordings, etc. Testimonies of witnesses, such as neighbours, friends, to such things as bank transfers "for upbringing" or "for Henryk's life expenses", etc.

MARTA: It comforts me that I registered him at the Registry Office. The shortened copy does not include this, but I am listed there if you take the full copy.

[Pola, 33 years old, BM], [Marta, 41 years old SM]

Most couples who participated in the research take some, even minimal, attempts to secure their future. Sometimes it is a will, sometimes notarial statements, various authorisations and informal arrangements, including family contracts. However, this type of undertaking alleviates their anxiety only marginally as they still point out in their narratives various unknown hypothetical difficult situations. They frequently mention the information chaos and the lack of a clear interpretation of the law, indicating which signed declarations can be recognised and under what conditions.

Protective and Fictive Marriages

A different type of security was chosen by Amelia with Maja and Marek – the father of the child whose case I have already discussed in part on gay fatherhood. The female couple, together with Marek raises little Marcel. They decided that in the event of Amelia's death, Marek and Maja will get married. This act could at least ensure the continuity of care for their son by the social mother and facilitate the issue of inheritance. Noteworthy, the women have already gotten married in the UK, but the Polish state does not acknowledge it. Therefore, all three parents developed these dramatic arrangements as a way of ensuring the child's well-being.

> We have an agreement that if something happens to me and I die, then as soon as possible Marek marries Maja… and thus they become equal guardians because Marek still inherits from me. This is quite a fascinating thing because Marek, as the father, until the child turns eighteen, inherits everything I own.
>
> [Amelia, 38 years old; son, 19 months, BM]

In other cases, couples sometimes decide to change their surname to a common one. This act might be accompanied by a marriage ceremony – taken

abroad or in Poland – which does not have any legal consequences in Poland. Through the act of naming, the couples can strengthen the social perception of their family ties and facilitate daily functioning. These experimental tactics were adopted by Sylwia and Małgorzata, who, before their son was born, standardised their surnames, which help them contact various institutions.

SYLWIA: However, before Juliusz was born, when I was pregnant, I changed my family name to a two-part surname. Therefore, my name is [two-part surname] and Juliusz also has the same surname.[…] I had no problem with carrying out such a procedure. Therefore, if she goes to the doctor with him, they share a surname.

MODERATOR: Okay, great. It probably helps you to function in everyday life.

S: Yes. We don't have any problems anymore, because this is his mother and he is named after her.

[Sylwia, 24 years old; son, 5 months, BM]

In their case, the shared surname becomes a subject of negotiation within the couple, resembling "everyday experiments" described by Giddens (1993). However, this resemblance is only apparent because their experiments result not from the transformations in intimate relationships but the daily necessity and the struggle with the lack of recognition. It demonstrates that same-sex couples in Poland are very creative in looking for loopholes in the system, making their lives as queer families easier.

Being Like Others

Families often display themselves within the framework of normalcy, that is, as "normal" people who "normally" bring up "normal" children. Due to their specific situation in Polish society, dominated by the lack of knowledge and popular stereotypes regarding the functioning of non-heterosexual families, lesbian and gay parents want to counter this false picture and be considered ordinary. They build their self-esteem based on being normal parents and displaying it to others. According to Jarek, society must gradually get used to otherness by observing the normalcy and similarity of queer families. For this purpose, he uses the concept of "normalising the norms", by which he means families of choice showing positive examples and well-functioning in local communities. At the same time, he emphasises fulfilling this role by his own family and himself, as specific spokesmen for the community. This role is favoured by his social position and his respected profession as a doctor. This tactic reminds the normification described by Erving Goffman as a way of presenting oneself as an ordinary person in order to avoid possible stigma (Goffman 1963).

My position at work makes all these people smile, but maybe (laughs) they don't want to smile. However, I believe that this is a normalisation

> of the norms. That they live, work, know me, and we are together, and we work together.
>
> [Jarek, 37 years old; daughter, 10 years old; son, 6 years old, BF]

Stressing their normality can also become a tacit resistance tactic that, when it fails, might result in more visible moves, such as migration, like in the case of Basia. Basia perceives normality in terms of being the same as others. Discovering similarities rooted in our common humanity is something that, in her opinion, people in Poland still cannot understand and which she has to find somewhere else. Hence, her decision to migrate:

> I said, "ENOUGH!" If I am to be a weed, I'd rather go somewhere else and be a flower, and that's my plan. Because it's a matter of naming, isn't it? In one place someone can say that poppies are weeds, and in another somebody can say that they are simply beautiful. This is a naming issue. Instead of having a common language (…) they just look for differences, and we are all the same, in fact; it's a pity that no one can understand it.
>
> [Basia, 28 years old; son, 4 years old, SM]

I consider the emphasis on being like others a carefully chosen tactic of coping with homophobia in specific geopolitical conditions – living in a society dominated by negative stereotypes about gay and lesbian parenting where only the heteronormative model is considered normal. In such context, displaying or even manifesting one's normality or better ordinariness is an act of resistance, challenging homophobic prejudices and contesting heteronormativity of kinship. A quasi-similar tendency in presenting lesbian and gay parenthood has been already noticed in older Western studies (Wright 1998; Hequembourg 2007). For example, Amy Hequembourg (2007) shows the contradictions inherent in the normalisation strategy adopted by her informants who desired to be like others to overcome the dominant stereotypes, although they were painfully aware of their own otherness. However, this apparent resemblance should be treated with extreme caution of not maintaining a false perception of Poland as "lagging behind the West" which I have already criticised at the beginning of the book and elsewhere (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011). Polish queer parents do not live in the 1980s or 1990s but now, which means that they are aware of the possibility of full inclusion of LGBTQ families in other Western countries. This awareness strengthens their own attempts and display tactics.

Although I argue for reading their pursuing of ordinariness as a way of dealing not only with harmful myths about non-heterosexual parenthood but also with non-recognition of one's family and parental role by public institutions or the family of origin, I do not want to imply that non-heterosexual parents do not feel different – quite the contrary. For the LGBTQ

families in Poland, feeling different has always been an inseparable element of this tactic. Their ways of living are both ordinary in their practices of care and different because these practices take place in non-heteronormative family configurations. Their ordinary and everyday lives are the same, yet there is always an element of otherness that distinguishes them from the heteronormative majority they are fully aware of. As Browne and Bakshi rightly argue, ordinariness might be desirable alongside accounts of being different (Browne and Bakshi 2016). Therefore, there is an urgent need to distinguish ordinariness understood as becoming commonplace (Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013; Brown 2012; Browne and Bakshi 2016) from normalisation to fully grasp the power of ordinariness in the specific context. I will return to this question in the conclusion of the book.

"Stolen Moments" of Passing as a Family

Passing, as described by Goffman, is an identity management strategy for dealing with social stigma and a way of building a positive identity. This strategy allows members of stigmatised groups to present themselves as members of a group to which they want to belong to gain social acceptance and obtain certain privileges that the dominant groups enjoy (Goffman 1963). It is based on an individual's reading of the cultural signs that the person experiencing stigma presents through their behaviour, appearance, style, body language, etc. As a result, an LGBTQ person is perceived as part of society.

Passing as a mother, for example, being considered a child's biological mother, often appears in the narratives of social mothers. They mention with satisfaction all the situations when they were read as a "woman with a child" and/or the child's resemblance to them was noticed; thus, they did not have to explain who they are for the child. Iga explains below her desire to be perceived as a mother, emphasising the "stolen moments" when she was recognised as such. This desire and her passing are described as only temporary, marked by a peculiar impossibility to last.

> It gives me so much joy to go alone with Alek and pretend in front of the world that he is my child, I am a mother, even though I have never wanted to give birth. (…) These are the moments, stolen moments, that we face the world and people turn to me and say to Alek: "because your mother does this or that" […] These stolen moments are cool. It is a pity that this cannot happen every day.
>
> [Iga, 41 years old; son, 7 years old, SM]

In addition to passing as a parent, finding demonstrate a strong desire of passing for a family, which takes place when the family relationship is acknowledged, but the nature of the bonds is not recognised correctly. For

example, Iga and her partner Dana are perceived as sisters. They even changed their surname to a shared one to pass as a family.

> I came up with the idea, before Alek was born, to change my name. I found out that our Polish society often thinks in shortcuts so if I had the same surname, let them figure out whatever they wanted, and nobody would ask anything. Only if somebody asks, I'll have to worry about it. Most often they don't. They assume we're sisters. […] And that's it. I can pick up Dana's mail from the post office because I have the same last name and address. When they tell me to specify the character of the relationship, I write that I am a sister.
>
> [Iga, 41 years old; son, 7 years old, SM]

The fear of not being able to contact the partner in a situation when their health or life is in danger generates attempts to name the relationship between the partners in such a way that state institutions would accept. Indicating the existence of kinship ties allows partners to pass as a family and make their functioning easier in these difficult moments.

> We gave birth together. […] However, because everything happened quickly and it was also related to the troubles with the pregnancy, she was taken directly to the delivery room. There was also my mother-in-law because Kinga simply said that her mum and sister would be there when she called us up. She just said it so quickly to avoid any problems with the entrance, because it was after the hospital had closed for the night, we had to enter through this special entrance and, in general, only one person is allowed and on particular conditions.
>
> [Mariola, 39 years old; daughter, 2 weeks old, SM]

Passing as a parent or as a family facilitates contact with state institutions and makes the family's daily life much easier. Their cost is a constant necessity to either hide the truth in their daily encounters with state representatives which might result in fear and anxiety.

Queering Baptism

Attempts to find legitimacy for the role of the social mother led some of the couples to decide to give her the position of godmother, still crucial in Poland where more than 90% of Poles declare to be Catholic. Interestingly, such decisions concerning baptism are made regardless of religious feelings. During the focus group interview, Julia, considering taking the role of godmother, wondered where this idea came from, since she is not a religious person.

> It is a very strange thing. I am an absolutely non-believer, so in general, it is a bit schizophrenic to me. Well, where did such an idea come from?

> For us, this is my impression, the faith doesn't exist. But I would have the right to be a mother.
>
> [Julia, 40 years old; son, 5 years old, SM]

On the other hand, for Mariola and her partner, although both religious, the most crucial reason for the decision is the possibility of using motherly nomenclature. So, the explanatory and discretionary nature of the given role, and not the religious dimension of the rite matters to them.

> Being a godmother is our way to cheat the system a bit. I am talking about this nomenclature, which will appear somewhere when we get to the kindergarten school, I do not know what the child will call me. Because this is the point, children come up with their own ways to call people. I don't know what it will be like, but in a situation when I would be called MOM, there is an ALTERNATIVE, I may use this argument.
>
> [Mariola, 39 years old; daughter, 2 weeks old, SM]

Undoubtedly, baptism is still one of the most important rites of passage not only in the religious sense but also in the social imaginary of local rituals. From this perspective, it is not surprising that choosing the social mother as the child's godmother functions as a strategy of including her in the family, emphasising her importance, and strengthening the bond. On the other hand, social mothers treat the role of the godmother as a "formal security", a "label", a way of presentation that may seem anachronistic but displays closeness, family bond, "kind of kinship" (Kolberg 1867). This role allows them to maintain closeness with the child, socially sanctioned, understood, legitimised, and respected.

> I am also Jasio's godmother. Somewhere there is always just that, the position of godmother left as my last resort. "Well, who are you for this child? Well, I am his godmother".
>
> [Ala, 40 years old; son, 8 years old, SM]

Gay informants have also used this tactic. For instance, Mateusz's partner has two daughters whom Mateusz treats as his grandchildren (i.e., he is much older than his partner). He is also a godfather of a younger one. He buys presents for both of them on many occasions and is invited to celebrate their birthdays since his partner hides their relationship and lives with his wife. Therefore, the religious ritual has been used to legitimise or formally include him in his partner's family.

The function of a godparent is not only related to Christian religiosity but it is deeply rooted in the Polish tradition as a symbolic, ritual introduction of a child to the community, giving him/her a social position and giving additional importance to the relationship between a godparent, a "spiritual" parent, and a newborn child (Barnaś-Baran 2014; Flandrin 2015). According

to ethnographers, baptism does not only have religious functions as it aims at creating and maintaining a relationship "as if some kind of kinship" between the family and godparents (Kolberg 1867). This exact desire of building an undefined kind of kinship motivates lesbian couples who give the social mothers the role of godmother.

The appointment of a social parent as the godparent draws strongly on the local tradition, uses traditional symbolic meanings, and queers the customary ways of organising kinship ties. It is worth noting that the presence of LGBTQ people and their participation in the sacraments transgress the norm since other rituals that impart bonds, such as marriage, are effectively blocked. Thus, I argue to read participation in baptism and taking the role of the godparents as a particular tactic of finding a loophole in the system that allows, above all, an intersubjective recognition of the family ties.

Building a Support Network

In the survey, the respondents were asked about their contacts with other non-heterosexual families. Women were much more likely to keep in touch with other queer parents than men. Among the fathers, only 17% claimed they had such contacts, while the figure for the mothers was 52%. When answering why they did not maintain such contacts, 75% stated that the lack of such families in their immediate environment was the biggest obstacle; 21% said that they did not feel any such need, and 16% did not know how and where to look for such contacts. A small group pointed out to lack of time and failure of such attempts in the past (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015).

The families participating in the qualitative parts often expressed the feeling of being the only non-heterosexual family in the immediate neighbourhood. They all experience some kind of social isolation, which is undoubtedly influenced by the lack of existence of many LGBTQ organisations focusing on parental rights and organising events for them to get to know one another. In response to the lack of institutional support and functioning in uncertainty, more and more informal groups and networks of queer parents appear. They play an essential role. First of all, they are an invaluable source of information on, for example, queer-friendly doctors, kindergartens, and schools, as well as legal provisions that may partially regulate relations in families. Secondly, they allow queer parents (primarily mothers) to show their children a variety of life models and demonstrate the existence of similar families, thus enduring the feeling of isolation and negative distinction from society. Thirdly, which was revealed during the focus group interviews themselves and was their added value, meeting other lesbian mothers gives a chance to share experiences. Not all the informants had access to such networks, but most of them tried to build friendly relations with other women raising children together. Moreover, the informants said that participation in various support networks and meetings addressed

to queer parents does not automatically mean making friends. Despite the relatively similar situation of the families with two mothers, there are also many differences between them.

The informants build a support network for themselves and the children to secure their future contacts with peers in heteronormative settings such as schools. For instance, Karolina wants her son Konrad to be surrounded by people who accept his family. She wants to be sure that he has someone close with whom he could face the homophobic attacks that she predicts in the future. Therefore, she tries to surround Konrad with peers with whom he could face any inconveniences that he may encounter. Karolina worries about his entry into the social world, so she wants to "arm" him for the future and avoid situations when the child protects the parents (the model prevalent in the literature on children from same-sex families, which she has read). Thus, together with her partner, she reserved a place in the kindergarten where Konrads' best friend Janek will be admitted as well.

> Well, we took last two places, Konrad went with Janek, his friend, the son of our heterosexual friends. They know our family configuration, and they are with us. So we are looking at other parents as if we are a gang (…) I think a bit strategically about this family, I know. I think a bit like in a war, but I do. Well, I prefer to prepare for some things, and if something happens, a bomb explodes, or a conflict breaks out, then we will see, but I have done a little bit of planning and anticipating certain situations.
>
> [Karolina, 32 years old; son, 5 years old, SM]

Finding a support network and other queer families is much easier for those who live in big cities and have sufficient social capital. Nevertheless, even there, there are not enough LGBT activities focusing on their specific needs. Fortunately, nowadays, families have much more contact via the internet. Thanks to that, they organise different events, like picnics for rainbow families, where their children might meet, feel less lonely, and see their family as one of many. Also, investing in contacts with heterosexual allies, like in Karolina's case, might increase the family and children's well-being and the sense of security.

"Buying" Security and Recognition

Some couples can afford to function relatively safely and openly thanks to their capital – social and economic. The narrative of Marzena, who brings up 2-year-old Kamil with Aldona, reflects this tendency. The couple was disclosed in most situations related to planning a child: in the clinic where the insemination took place and during visits to the gynaecologist; at the birth school, however, the partner acted as a close person, but not as a second mother. The possibility of full disclosure of the relationship and the partner's presence during insemination is related to their social capital. The

couple obtained information about who and where to go so that the process would run with a limited risk of homophobia thanks to their network of friends. It says a lot about the link between social capital and homophobia, for example, the possibility of creating networks in which there is no discrimination.

An almost identical pattern appears in Maryla and her partner Marta's experience. In their case, social capital, family contacts, and friendships allowed them to be recognised as a family in all health-care institutions.

> We didn't know about any clinic that could offer anything like that at all. So I decided to do some research. We managed to talk to Aga, and the girls directed us there. […] And Milenka appeared. Well, when it comes to the paediatrician because now, you know, we need all the vaccinations but we are in a perfect situation because Marta's brother-in-law is a paediatrician if something happens and we wouldn't want to go to just any doctor, we always have him. We also go together for the vaccinations. However, they know about it in advance. We go together to this hospital where my brother-in-law used to work, where Marta's sister works, and there is no problem with that.
>
> [Maryla, 29 years old; daughter, 4 months old, SM]

The economic capital is also used to protect the child from homophobia. As a child protection strategy, Marek presents sending his son to a paid community school:

> People in a better economic situation can always ensure better that these acts of discrimination do not occur. […] For example, when we think about schools for Marcel, we think about some paid community schools. There are some schools where there are various children, they also have special scholarships for families in a worse economic situation, where there are children from different ethnic minorities. So we will try to show Marcel greater diversity in this homogenised country like Poland.
>
> [Marek, 31 years old; son, 2 years old]

Also, in the case of Karolina mentioned above and her partner Danuta, their social, cultural, and economic capitals play a significant role. Both women are well educated, come from intellectual and relatively wealthy families. Feeling the fear of Konrad's entrance into social life, Karolina openly says that she stays ahead of threats with the help of money.

> I want to earn much more money because money GIVES me a sense of security, the possibility of educating my child. (…) I know that with money, I will simply find a school that I will pay for it and we will have peace of mind.
>
> [Karolina, 32 years old; son, 5 years old, SM]

Such an attitude, emphasising individualised strategies of coping with various problems, might be an indirect effect of the family-based care model adopted in Poland (Javornik 2014; Krzyżowski 2013; Conkova and King 2019). In this case, the responsibility for the upbringing and solving problems rests with individuals (and their families), and public institutions are not involved in these processes. One of the effects of such neoliberal policies is the belief that the individual should be able to cope with any critical tasks and responsibilities related to bringing up children. However, this model of care is particularly harmful in the case of these queer families who often cannot count on the family circle of care due to familial homophobia, absent or uninvolved father (not only lack of support in the upbringing but also no alimony in case of stepfamilies), as well as non-recognition of social motherhood. It excludes social parents and leaves them dependent, often solely on themselves. It should also be remembered that only the better-off families can provide (pay for) safe space and social acceptance. Most families in a less advantageous position cannot afford to pay for their security and partial recognition.

Migrations

In the discussions relating to their future, the possibility of migration to Western countries, which ensure the recognition of social parenthood and offer formalisation of same-sex relationships, was often taken into account as solutions to family problems. For instance, being disappointed that after 13 years of relationship and 5 years of bringing up a child together, Brygida has no right to care for the son and adopt him in case of her partner's death, she plans to leave:

> For England, because we want to get married there, of course, she wants to adopt Adam, I don't know how it will work out legally yet, but we'll see. If it goes well, we just want to stay there. It is impossible in Poland. […] Nobody keeps us here so much, except ourselves because we are a family to each other. […] I have absolutely no one closer to me after my mother's death than Brygida and Adaś.
>
> [Julka, 40 years old; son, 5 years old, BM]

Ada, in turn, indicates the desire to live in a normal, open, and homophobia-free society. In her case, this vision takes a very specific form because of the completion of the first stage of education by their son who is an active participant in the discussion about the trip and its proponent:

> We are both translators working with English, (…) we are serious about emigration. Staś completes primary school this year because we would like him to finish one stage of his education and possibly start the next one there. It means that if we are not prepared to emigrate now, the next window of opportunity will be in three years' time when he

> graduates from junior high school. My child is very aware (…) he has repeatedly asked the question whether or not we would like to leave and live in a normal society, where we can just get married, and he can normally have two of us married, right?
>
> [Ada, 36 years old; son, 13 years old, BM]

Migrant mothers place great emphasis on the child's well-being and the protection from possible social homophobia, combined with the protection of their right to remain with the social parent in the event of the biological parent's death. In Lucyna's case, she is an adoptive and the only legal mother to the son whom she raises with her partner from the very beginning. During the adoption process, the couple hid their relationship. In case something happens to Lucyna, her partner, although not biologically related, just as any from Lucyna's dysfunctional family of origin, would not even be taken into account as a prospective legal guardian of the child.

> We have been here for three years, Lucek was a year and three months old when we decided to leave. The first reason was definitely that we could not be a family in Poland. My situation is this: I am the only legal guardian, and if something happened to me the right to adopt him is given to my closest kin, mother or sister, so I think that it would be better to kill Lucek then.
>
> [Lucyna, 45 years old, adoptive mother]

Non-heterosexual fathers present a slightly different perspective on migration because of their different involvement in childcare. Ireneusz repeats many times that his children "are most important to him". For this reason, he rejects the possibility of moving with Tymon, his partner, abroad, where he has a better chance of finding a job. Conversely, Tymon, is serious about leaving, wondering what it will look like in the future and assuming that if he fails to find a good job in Poland, he may be forced to emigrate. He only stays in Poland as he knows that Ireneusz will not leave because of his children and the need to contact them. Tymon is aware that, faced with the necessity to choose: going with him or staying with children and parting, Ireneusz will choose the latter. So thinking about the children's well-being prevents some gay fathers from making critical decisions for their relationship. They are ready to sacrifice their happiness and relationships for the sake of their children.

On the other hand, in their reproductive plans, gay couples consider repromigration as the only way to have their own biological child and/or the possibility to adopt one. For instance, Jarek and Mateusz plan to go abroad to adopt a child.

> We think a lot about the future and adopting children. We met a guy who is a lawyer in an LGBT association in London, he told us that among all the countries in the world, their adoption system is the most

> convenient, there are the most children. In Great Britain, gays have equal rights, and therefore they can adopt, it is not easy, of course, and they do not give children to everyone, but it is relatively real. It takes a year to get a residency, then the process takes about two years, so our "pregnancy" will take about three years plus the entire move, and so in five years, we may be able to adopt children.
>
> [Mateusz]

The couple can afford such a move because they speak English and have sufficiently high social capital (a network built thanks to professional contacts, support of the wider circle of Jarek's well-off family of origin) and educational (university diplomas), which would allow them to organise their lives abroad efficiently. Although the idea of adopting children abroad does not translate into their actions in everyday life (in the limited time observed by the ethnographer), Mateusz defines the idea of emigration for adoption purposes as "the closest plan", "bigger life plan". However, the couple stipulates that they would leave if they had certain living conditions provided.

Conclusions: Queering Parenthood in Poland?

In this chapter, I have explored the diversity of experiences of non-heterosexual parents in Poland, mainly focusing on their tactics of resistance related to a specific political and legal context, cultural and social norms of gender, sexuality, and family. In general, their well-being is significantly influenced by factors such as the dominant model of care, the inability to formalise their relationships, the lack of recognition of the social parenthood, homophobia and lack of acceptance from families of origin, and individualised strategies of coping with everyday life and caring for the future, depending on the availability of social and economic capital. I have also demonstrated how their parenthood experience and its legitimisation transgress the binary (homo/hetero)normative/queer demanding particular attention to space and time.

By asking what it means to queer motherhood and whether it is possible at all, Park suggests viewing the term "queer" not as a noun describing an identity but as an adjective. In her opinion, "a queer parent is someone who parents queerly" (Park 2013, 321), who goes beyond the traditional, heteronormative monoparental pattern. Following her understanding, queering parenting may mean that children raised in families led by two women do not grow up with the feeling that there is only one normative way to be a woman and create a family. It also denaturalises gender order embedded in society, leading the children to a more critical stance towards gender inequality, questioning its further reproduction or its inevitable nature in their future lives. According to Sullivan, lesbian mothers undo the gender-based social order. As the author writes, "in lesbian-coparent families, the expansion of intimacy, brought about by a sharing of primary

caregiving, together with the absence of paternal masculinity, might well signal the beginning of a generation free of the psychic costs of gendered power within the family" (Sullivan 2004, 92). An equal division of care and upbringing favours, in her opinion, the development of more "healthy" relationships between the biological mother and the child. If a biological mother has emotional support from another woman who cares for her child equally, she does not invest all her energy in it; she gives the child and herself a more generous space of freedom. In my opinion, the same could be said about queer parenting in general.

As I have demonstrated, parenthood of non-heterosexual people eludes the common dichotomy "assimilation vs. transgression". Sometimes it is "the same" and ordinary, yet always different. Simultaneously, it undermines the norms of gender, sexuality, family (i.e., going beyond gender binarism and monomaternalism; stressing the role of doing parenthood and the social parent) and maintains some normative understandings such as the vision of motherhood based on instinct, unconditional love for the child, and readiness to sacrifice everything for the child's well-being. Its apparent resemblance to heteronormative family practices becomes complicated when differences in similarity emerge and/or it involves particular tactics tailored to the needs of protection of the whole family. I claim that in the whole discussion on normativity and queerness, queer critics too easily forget about local constraints and difficulties in the very existence of non-conventional families. In countries such as Poland, where the desire to have the child is limited and met with homophobic prejudices, queer parents must mitigate/evade the law and look for loopholes in the system to have the child and secure social parents' position on their own. As such, they challenge the heteronormativity of kinship and families promoted by the state.

Moreover, the degree to which queering parenthood might succeed is greatly influenced not only by internal factors (such as age, economic capital, individual gender preferences) but primarily by external one such as legal and social context (Mizielińska and Stasińska 2020). Failure to recognise social parents and no safeguards for their rights to a child may prevent families from becoming more subversive in practices, for example, preferences for anonymous sperm donors observed among Polish lesbian planned families may be more dictated by a desire to avoid the risk of the man's possible claims to the child, rather than by a desire to recreate the nuclear family model, as in those families studied by Ryan-Flood (Ryan-Flood 2009). What's more, the law does not only exclude same-sex families but also determines the model of the family and the division of roles – the social mother, being a stranger to the child legally, cannot take a leave at work, which causes a more significant burden on biological mothers ("chosen" inequality vs. a legally enforced situation). The lack of legal recognition of the role of the social parent makes families maintain good relations with the family of origin and strengthens the importance of kin ties. Informal

family arrangements (and the goodwill of the family) fill the legal gap, and constitute some form of securing the relationship between the social parent and the child. At the same time, their informality causes anxiety and insecurity, and the fear for the future is always present.

Lack of legal recognition, non-biased information about LGBT families in the mainstream discourse, and the current "war against LGBT ideology" waged by the ruling *Law and Justice* party in Poland influence social attitudes towards same-sex families and their coping tactics. For instance, emphasising one's own normality/ordinariness or passing does not mean that the family does not queer parenthood on a daily basis in the private sphere. Simultaneously, in the public sphere, often motivated by the love for the child and the desire to protect them from homophobia, but also by the necessity to defy harmful myths about queer parenthood, the family might choose to display its normality, ordinariness, and sameness. Sometimes, it entails non-disclosure and social invisibility.

To sum up, queering parenthood in Poland means undermining the established and accepted as the only natural model of a traditional family based on monoparentalism, heteronormativity, and a strict separation of the roles of mother and father. Although the question remains, what does being a parent in a queer way mean? The same strategies for practising parenting in a specific cultural context, in the face of hostility and homophobia, can be considered more or less radical and effective. Sometimes parenting practices that, at first glance, seem homonormative, traditional, or non-queer from a Western perspective can be a radical subversion of the norms at each specific context and should always be evaluated with its particular attentiveness. The families' stories show that no matter their assessment, they are often very carefully chosen tactics of survival, aiming to protect loved ones.

Notes

1 In the latter case, they come from ethnic minorities and precarious groups, marginalised and under-represented in mainstream research.
2 In the book, I use the terms "biological" and "social" parent/mother/father (in short, BP/BM/BF and SP/BM/BF) although I am aware that they might not be most adequate and fully respond to the needs and experiences of all families in question. However, I treat them in a similar way as Petra Nordqvist – "as a less-then-perfect but acceptable linguistic shorthand to structurally describe family relationships" (Nordqvist 2015, 498). They also catch more adequately the tendency described in the chapter, visible among Polish gay and lesbian families (particularly families with children from prior heterosexual relations) that still perceive biological connections as important in their daily lives and express the need for such a differentiation. Besides, the distinction between biological, social, and legal parenthood has been deeply rooted in the law terminology and discussed there extensively (Appell 2008).
3 Bożena's phrase.
4 In the case of older generation (55+) of women, they also often decide to leave their husbands when the children are adults. However, they still perform caring and educational functions, even towards their adult children, and they do

not cease to be mothers while entering into same-sex relationships unlike some gay men.

5 Another interviewee, 66-year-old Stanisław, decided to leave his marriage for his 20-year-old partner Kacper at the age of 45. His daughter, with whom he does not maintain contact at all, was about 20 years old then. His identification as a father seems to be relevant only to the period of marriage – after leaving it, he somehow ceased to be a father. He mentioned being a father incidentally during an interview; the interviewer had known nothing about it before. During the first contact with the team, when recruiting for the study, Stanisław did not provide such information; therefore, he was not placed in the category of people with children.

6 Queer Spawn Talks Back

Introduction

The first studies on children brought up in queer families were published in the 1970s and had mainly defensive character, aiming at opposing homophobic prejudices against non-heterosexual parenthood (Fitzgerald 1999; Golombok 2007). Majority of research on LGB parenting compared it to being a parent in a heterosexual relationship focusing on the gender roles of parents, sources of support, and relationships with social institutions. Later research conducted with the participation of children brought up in LGB families took up the topic of their development, sexual identification, and relationship with the environment. Generally, they show no correlation between the sexual orientation of the parents and the sexual/gender identity of their children (Patterson 2000; Tasker 2007; Farr, Forssell, and Patterson 2010b; Fitzgerald 1999; Short et al. 2007; Golombok and Tasker 1996). They also tend to downplay the differences and focus on the similarities with children from heterosexual families.

Nevertheless, some studies clearly indicate the children's greater openness and acceptance towards gender and sexual diversity (Gottman 1989; Fitzgerald 1999; Stacey and Biblarz 2001). Recent studies underline further "positive differences"; for instance, they indicate that children raised by lesbian couples are better socially adapted, more ambitious, and less aggressive than children from heterosexual families (Bos and Gartrell 2010; Gartrell 2006). The large survey carried out by the University of Melbourne on over 500 children raised by same-sex parents proves that the children are healthier and enjoy better relations with their parents than in the case of heterosexual families (Crouch et al. 2014).

In recent years, the literature on the subject has introduced particular terms for children brought up in non-heterosexual families – "queer spawns" or "culturally queers" – by which it emphasises that children are an essential part of the queer community, no matter their sexual orientation (Epstein, Idems, and Schwartz 2009). The researchers emphasise the

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importance of looking at the non-heterosexual family as a whole, taking into account children's perspectives. As Jacqui Gabb rightly states:

> a child-centred approach in LGBT-parent family studies holds great promise because it adds an intergenerational dimension to the picture. Taking account of children refocuses the analytical lens onto lived experience rather than sexual identity politics; it requires that we begin to look at families "from the ground up," demonstrating the value of family practices above and beyond categories of family and family function. From the child's point of view, all parents, kin, and even significant friendship may constitute family.
>
> (Gabb 2012, 331)

It means that not only queer parents/persons can openly define the family, going beyond the conventional blood-based understanding of kinship, but also their children. "New personal stories" (Plummer 1995) about family and kinship might emerge not merely beyond given ties but also within, contrary to some queer critics of homonormativity and repronormativity (Plummer 1995; Duggan 2002; Edelman 2004). In this chapter, instead of seeing families based on choice and families based on blood as two completely different entities, I propose to look at them as interconnected, meshed, with blurred borders. Understanding children's perspectives is therefore crucial to demonstrate this co-existence on different levels of family life.

The chapter begins with reconstructing children's vision of their families and the role of the social parent.[1] It demonstrates that this vision differs depending on children's age and how they acknowledged their parents' same-sex relationships. Drawing on children's narrative reveals the ambivalent position of social parent: as a parent/someone close whose loss one mourns and someone with a liminal status. Then, the chapter moves to the key question of children's tactics to deal with homophobic others, depicting their caution in disclosing to others and fighting homophobic prejudices at schools (particularly during religion classes). Through the chapter, I claim that children's perspectives provide an invaluable account on familial, institutional and peers' homophobia and allows seeing queer parents' attempts to protect their children from a different perspective (i.e., children protecting adults). Children's standpoint also challenges the heteronormative vision of kinship and the depiction of queer families as based solely on choice. On the contrary, it shows queer kinship as based both on choice and blood and queer spawn as essential allies in the LGBTIQ struggle for family recognition in Poland.

Children's Family Picture

Children, either young, adolescents, or adults, often transcend blood ties in their definition of a family. They emphasise that whom they consider a family member does not depend on the biological and structural factors but

on the closeness and quality of the relationships they create. By applying this feature of family life, children included various significant others into their families. They often refer to family practices to show their warm contact with all family members.

> Family is not blood ties, but it is just a person to whom you are closest, it could even be a neighbour if you feel well in his company. For example, with my aunt [social mother],[2] I always spend Easter near [name of the place], it is our tradition, all three of us are there, and at Christmas, we go to my maternal grandmother. All three of us are always there, and it's always so that there we start dinner at 5 p.m. and until 9 p.m. I am there, and then I go to my dad's, and I am there, so it's no problem with that.
>
> [Amelcia, 13 years old]

Karina pointed out that treating the mother's partner as a family is not merely related to liking or accepting her but to a different quality of the relationship and expectations related to care:

> Well, of course, she's my family, well, she pisses me off as much as my family pisses me off. And I have the same resentment and expectations towards her that you have towards family, don't I? If she does not meet them, I am just very dissatisfied then. (laughs) […] For me, she is my mother's partner; the most important thing is that I want her to look after my mum.
>
> [Karina, 26 years old]

Reflecting on the place of the social mother in their families, children both related to family practices and ways of spending time together and attempted to define roles in the family and what families are.

She Is Not Entirely Ours Nor Is She Entirely Alien[3] – Social Motherhood through Children's Eyes

Sometimes it is difficult for children from stepfamilies to define the status of their mothers' partners (social mothers) in the family. These problems can be illustrated by the excerpts from the interviews conducted during ethnography and focus groups.

Regarding younger children (7–9 years and 10–13 years) who have had contacts with their social parents earlier in their lives, they did not question their presence in their family, and took it for granted. For the majority of them, social mothers are essential figures to whom they feel firmly attached. Some of them treat their social mother "on an equal footing" with their biological mother, emphasising that she is "like a mother" (Jacek), others entrust her with the role of a "good friend", always at home and supportive (Michalina), and "a close person" (Klaudia). In their stories, they often refer

to activities undertaken together with the social mum, emphasising her help with homework.

MODERATOR: And how important is she in your life? What role does she play in your life?
JACUŚ: Well, just like mom.
M: Like mom?
J: Yes.
M: Equally with mom?
J: Equally with mom.

[Jacuś, 13 years old]

MICHALINA: I would rather call her a good friend who is at home.
MODERATOR: Yours, or mom's?
MICHALINA: I mean mine, but mom's too. Well, because we arranged it with my mother so that my mother takes care of my brother, she watches over his lessons and his tidiness in the room, and my aunt looks after my lessons and tidiness in my room.
AMELCIA: Well, I have a good relationship with my aunt, she always helps me with my homework and sometimes we plot something without my mother knowing, but sometimes we also argue, most often it is about my homework because I'm lazy, I study well, but I don't like learning.

[Jacuś, 13 years old] [Michalina, 13 years old]
[Amelcia, 13 years old]

The children participating in the ethnographic part were interviewed and observed in their encounters with social mothers, which brought another perspective on their relationships, sometimes revealing that the declarations were at odds with daily reality. In the family of Marzena and Bożena, three out of four of their children (Nadia, Wiktoria, and Jacek) participated in the task revolving around the family map.[4] On their maps, all children placed their social mothers with whom they have warm relationships. In the case of Nadia, Wiktoria, and Adam, the social mother is Marzena, Jacek's biological mother. It is worth emphasising here that she is the one who looks after all four at home while Bożena works for their living. A sample map of 7-year-old Wiktoria might function as the best reflection of their inclusivity. Wiktoria placed both mothers and her siblings, grandmother (but only one), and all their pets (a cat, dog, and a guinea pig). Interestingly, she did not include her father (Figure 6.1).

On the other hand, Gabrysia, Irena's 9-year-old biological daughter, had difficulties with including her mother's partner, Dominika, on her map. She approached the task of drawing "a map of all the people she loves" twice. The first time, she placed mum and dad, and grandparents, in the innermost circle around her; then she added Dominika in the same circle. In the second circle, she put her extended family. However, later she separated Dominika from all the people from the first circle with a thicker line and called them the closest family (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.1 Family map by Wictoria (reconstructed).

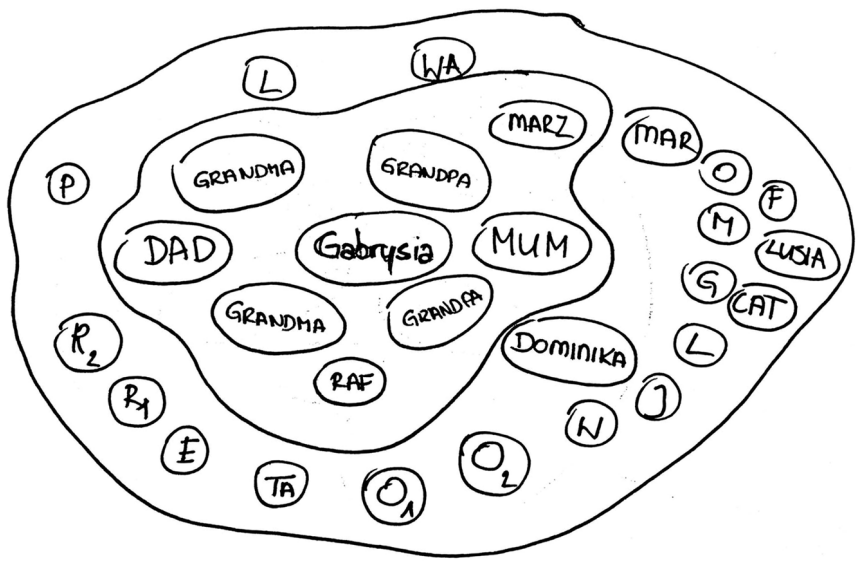

Figure 6.2 Family map by Gabrysia – first approach (reconstructed).

When asked directly by the ethnographer about Dominika, Gabrysia firmly refused to talk about her, justifying it with a ban issued by her mother. In this way, she interpreted her mother's request to be careful whom she talked to about her family, and if she did so, she had to trust the person.

This request was related to the negative assessment of the family by Gabrysia's peer, who, having learned about Dominika recently, asked her if she was not ashamed of her family. According to Irena, her conversation with Gabrysia after this incident was a rather delicate suggestion to be careful in disclosing information about her family to peers. However, Gabrysia internalised it as a prohibition. This advice triggered a certain tabooisation of her relationship with Dominika.

During the research task, Gabrysia decided that the ethnographer must obtain special permission from her mother. It was surprising for the ethnographer because the interview took place in the third week of their presence there. The ethnographer had played with her on various occasions, and Gabrysia had no problem talking about her family during other interviews and research tasks. Because of these difficulties in carrying out the task, the ethnographer talked to Irena, who officially gave her consent, and the interview took place the next day. Gabrysia willingly agreed and quickly drew the map again. However, she did not place a significant number of people from the previous map (including Dominika) and gave the drawing the shape of a tree (Figure 6.3). Only when asked directly by the ethnographer about Dominika, did she put her name back but separated her from the rest of the people, leaving her outside the circle. Even though Gabrysia agreed to be interviewed and the ethnographer obtained her mother's permission, she was still reluctant to talk about Dominika.

Interestingly, in another task, which ended the 30 days of study, when she was asked to draw the family in the form of a gift card for the ethnographer in such a way she wanted the ethnographer to remember it, Gabrysia drew Dominika, her mother, and herself without any hesitation.

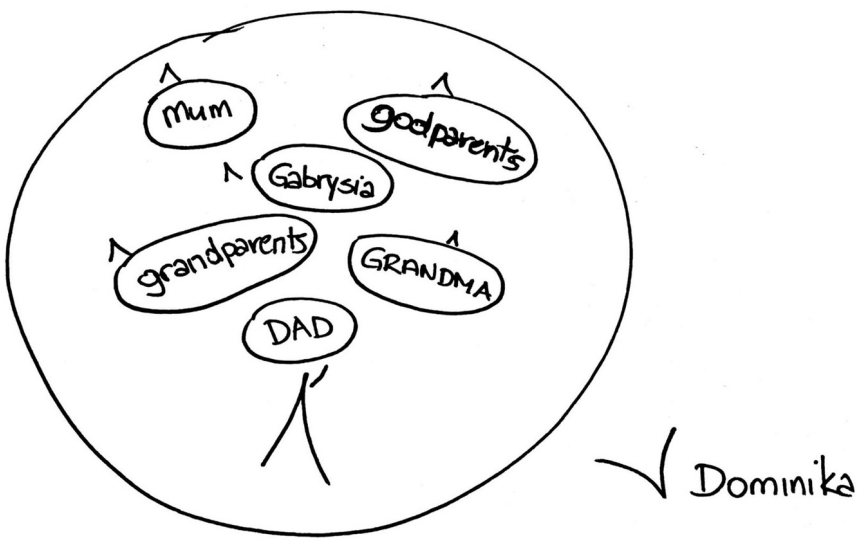

Figure 6.3 Family map drawn by Gabrysia – second approach (reconstructed).

How to explain such an ambivalence? Perhaps the specificity of the task triggered more normative thinking about the family, despite all attempts to avoid it (i.e., asking about people she loves and not directly about family). However, from the observations and interviews, a highly complex picture of the relationship between Gabrysia and Dominika emerges. Gabrysia has a problem with defining the role of Dominika in her life; she cannot decide where she should place her on the map – she is close and distant at the same time. The closeness and attachment are primarily illustrated by everyday relational practices observed and described by the ethnographer, but it was also evident in Gabrysia's declarations during the same interview. When the ethnographer asks her, for example, whom she turns to in certain situations (if she needs help with homework, wants to cuddle, etc.), Dominika appears as her obvious choice. Thus, in the context of everyday practices, expressed in the acts of caring, support, and meeting her needs, Dominika stands high up in the hierarchy, right behind mum and dad.

Gabrysia's traditional perception of the family might be related to her school education and particularly religious teaching (Gabrysia attends religious education classes and her religious father is very strict about checking both Gabrysia and his ex-wife's presence at Sunday masses) and the reluctant opinions about Dominika expressed by her father with whom Gabrysia is very close. Interestingly, Gabrysia's immediate family includes her godparents, with whom she does not maintain close daily contacts and is not tied by any blood ties (the godfather is Irena's friend who lives far away).

During the focus group interviews with teenage and adult children, the participants concentrated primarily on the role and authority of social mothers. If social mothers appeared in their lives when they were already teenagers, they tend to separate their role as the mother's partner and as their parent. It often happened that simultaneously with her arrival in their family, they went through the turbulent process of separation from family (as adolescents) and their parents' divorce. Consequently, it is not surprising that they did not welcome another person to parent them, sometimes reacting with anger to her presence. Magda emphasises that the limit for Grażyna's (the mother's partner) functioning in her life was her playing the role of a mother, to which Magda did not consent. Describing Grażyna's role in her life, she names her a "semi-parent" as she gives Magda strong support daily and is often a damper to conflicts in the family.

> Grażyna for a certain period, tried to be so maternal, didactic at times, and it did not suit me very much, it was the only objection on my part, "You are not my real mother!" (laughs) However, I also love Grażyna very much. She is with us; she is very close. I also have good experiences, for example, when I quarrel over ideology with my mother, we usually do not talk for three days, I call Grażyna, or I meet Grażyna to cry on her shoulder.
>
> [Magda, 28 years old]

Informants agreed that the formation of the authority of the social parent is related to the character of the family as reconstructed after the divorce. Emilia's mother remarried, and her husband did not try to interfere with the issue of her upbringing, which shows the resemblance between same-sex and straight stepfamilies. At the same time, since her father did not introduce his male partners to her, the relationship with her other potential social parent was practically non-existent and sporadic. Emilia met one of them once as her father's friend. Currently, the father and his partner live abroad. The change in the relationship occurred when Emilia visited them with her son and was moved by how her father's partner took care of him.

> My father's current partner won me over. At first, I thought he was a bit of a gruff individual, but when I came to see them because they bought a massive house in Austria, I went there with my son. And he won me over because while my father seemed unable to communicate with my son, his partner, Patryk, who was brought up with a huge number of siblings, had no problem with it. He immediately had such an excellent contact with my son.
>
> [Emilia, 24 years old]

During an interview around the family map, Darek, Manuela's 18-year-old son, uses blood ties as the primary criterion for belonging to the family. Therefore, he does not include on his map Kinga, his mother's partner with whom he has lived for 11 years and who actively participated in his upbringing since he was 7. Let us look at his map (Figure 6.4).

When asked if there is anyone he thought about putting on the map but finally gave up, he mentions Kinga first and then his biological father with whom he has no contact at all. The entire interview reveals his difficulties in determining who Kinga is to him and whether she belongs to his family. As the quoted fragment shows, she is both a stranger (because blood ties do

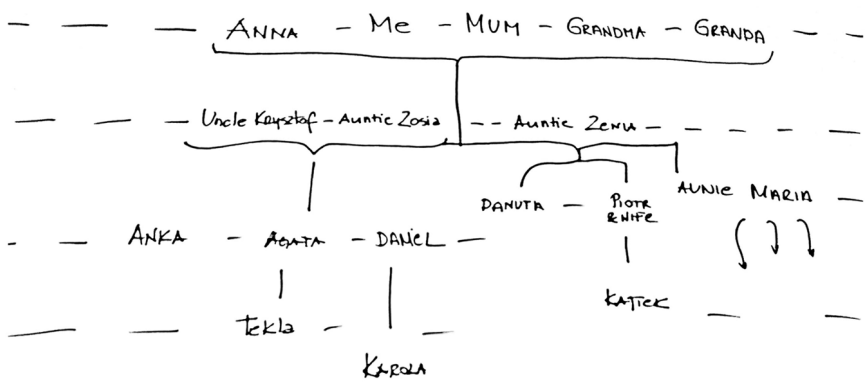

Figure 6.4 Family map drawn by Darek (reconstructed).

not connect them) and she is not one at the same time because during 10 years they spent together, an emotional bond, attachment, and habit have developed between them:

> I was thinking about Kinga, […] but it is difficult for various reasons […] I thought whether to include her or not. Because there is some kind of attachment, too, right? She has been living here for some time and somehow it works, maybe not with all of the genetic family, but with the closest one, from the first row [at the map], generally, she's been here for ten years […] But it is just strange that I cannot define it well and fit her into the appropriate set. […] Is she still a family, is she a stranger, or already a family, or someone between? […], I would not call her a stranger anymore. She is not a person taken from the street who just sits with us. Because experiences and better or worse moments have been part of this relationship, so some kind of emotional bond has already been created.
>
> [Darek]

To conclude, at the level of family practices, social parents are in the framework of the family, and children have close relationships with them. However, if children activate normative thinking about family (family as blood ties – Darek or family tree – Gabrysia) and recreate social taboos related to talking about their own family, then they might exclude social mothers from their family maps and have difficulties talking about their role in their lives. Also, when social parents came into the children's lives when they were adolescents or even adults, his/her authority as a parent could not develop. In this case, s/he might not be regarded as a parent and/or a part of the family.

Mourning the Social Mother?

An interesting motif in the narratives of the older children concerns the insecurity of the relationship between children and social mothers. It touches on the issue of the legal protection of kinship. We called this phenomenon children's unworked, unfulfilled mourning after the loss of a social mother (Mizielińska, Struzik, and Król 2017). In Chapter 5, I have described the anxiety and fear of loss in the case of the breakup or the biological mother's death, expressed by social mothers and associated with their unclear role. The children bring another perspective on the unrecognised relationships between them and their social mothers. The unclear status of the mother's partner in the family may mean that in the event of a couple's separation, children's feelings and emotions (especially when they were born in a mixed-sex relationship) are not taken into account and/or do not become a subject in mothers' narratives. For example, Zosia considered her mother's ex-partner as her family, she clearly remembers the time when they lived together, her presence in their house, spending time together, daily activities, and family practices. Karina describes the separation from her

social mother more emotionally – as despair, the incomprehensible disappearance of a significant person from the life of a child:

> My mom was in two relationships that I didn't know about, the women just lived with us, including the current one. So the first girlfriend, I didn't know they were together then, but she was absolutely my family. I was very attached to her, and just when they broke up, which in my understanding was just that she moved out, I experienced it deeply […] she disappeared from my life […] I couldn't believe it, and I was in despair.
>
> [Karina, 26 years old]

Bartek talks about the loss of his social mother as something that he still cannot understand and handle. For him, the family which they built with his mother's ex-partner was essential, and the story about her is associated with strong emotions. The family consisted of Marysia (Bartek's biological mother), Wera (Bartek's social mother), Krzysiek (Marysia's biological son, brother) and Grześ (Wera's biological son, a child planned in the relationship of Wera and Marysia).

> When it comes to my mother's girlfriend with whom she had a child, she was absolutely family. I loved her too, maybe not like a mother, but it certainly was a strong feeling. I indeed treated their child as my brother. […] I don't know if one can be more of a family.
>
> [Bartek, 19 years old]

In their house, while the mother's partner worked because she earned more, Bartek's biological mother performed a caregiver role for all three children. In his elementary school, Bartek called Wera his mother's friend and was proud when she came to pick him up. When Bartek was 12 years old, the family broke up. Bartek stressed that it was a blow and a huge loss for all family members, especially for his biological mother, who lost her child, while he and his younger brother lost their sibling and stepmother.

> They broke up in such a hardcore and extreme, really terrible way, and Wera just took that baby away and told my mom that she would never see him again. Which, of course, for every mother, because my mother felt like a mother to him, it was a terrible blow, and it took her years to recover. It hit me somehow, and my brother as well. Because of that now I have a huge problem being close to my father's child. We were so attached to this third brother of ours, and we haven't seen him for years and there has never been such a real farewell.
>
> [Bartek, 19 years old]

Bartek currently has no contact with Wera or his brother, but he feels obliged to contact him. He decided to do it when he turned eighteen, but he

still has not due to his mother's request. Bartek emphasises that if contacts of the social mother with the child were legally protected, he would maintain a bond with her and his brother. He supposes that the brother does not know at all that he was raised as a child in Bartek's family, and probably does not know about his existence either.

> It seems that if I could, if my mother had the right, once a month on the weekend, like the most disadvantaged fathers, to see Grześ, he at least would have known that he once had brothers. […] Now he probably does not know about the existence of his family at all, does he? He doesn't remember that because he was too small. […] It's just like losing a family member.
>
> [Bartek, 19 years old]

Bartek's narrative sparked an in-depth discussion about the importance of biological ties and their legal protection in the focus group. Karina emphasised that the history of Bartek's family shows that in families of choice, the mere "choice" may cease, while in her opinion, biology – or its social perception – is a tool that allows maintaining the continuity of relationships. In this context, Emilia drew attention to the child's subjectivity in the family and the possibility of contact with the parent. Bartek's counterargument was that separation in families is a natural process; the only thing missing are the legal tools that allow the relationship to be maintained. He distanced himself from Karina's opinion and put law above biology. However, in all older children's accounts, the support for legal recognition of LGBTIQ families was powerful, making the children the queer allies necessary to acknowledge.

Children's Reaction to Their Parents' Coming Out

In the quantitative part of the research, the parents were asked whether their children were aware of the fact that they were in a same-sex relationship. In 67% of cases, the children knew, in 17% of cases, the respondents were not sure whether the child understood the character of their relationship. In their opinion, the same percentage of children did not know that their parent/s was/were in a non-heterosexual relationship. The respondents who claimed that their children knew were then asked when they learned about it. In the majority of cases (35.4%), it happened when they were in elementary/junior high school (7–15 years old) or kindergarten (25.4%), 17.1% of children knew before they turned 3, 6.1% learned when they were 16–18 years old, and 13.9% when they were 18 or more. They were also asked about the child's reaction to this news. In the vast majority of cases, the reaction was very positive or relatively positive (83%). Children reacted negatively in only 6% of cases. They were a little more likely to react positively to their mothers' relationships than to those of their fathers (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015).

During the focus group interviews, this topic was deepened, bringing a slightly different perspective on the issue of coming out and children's understanding of their parents' relationships. The experiences of the adolescents differ significantly from those of the younger children, who often do not notice the otherness of their family and do not perceive it in terms of sexual identity. Since they are brought up in female same-sex relationships from an early age, they do not question their family situation and take it for granted. A group of teenagers and adult children more often raised the issue of family otherness and talked about sometimes-complicated emotions accompanying the parents' coming out and complex relations between them and their parents' same-sex partners. The group of children over 18, brought up by non-heterosexual persons, often referred retrospectively and critically to their childhood and relations with their parents, but appreciating their efforts to protect them.

Some children experienced the presence of their mother's partner from an early age, accepting the relationship in a sense "naturally", but not necessarily linking it with queerness. On the other hand, others did not learn about their mother's relationship until their teenage years, hearing about it often at the time of her departure from marriage. This path of disclosure was different in the case of Emilia, the only gay man's daughter participating in the study. Her father hardly ever revealed his orientation to her directly until her daughter met his partner as an adult. As a child, Emilia guessed that her father had a partner, and then learned about her father's orientation during an argument with her mother's then-partner.

Trajectories of Unnamed Experience and Sudden Change

The manner in which relationships were disclosed had a significant impact on the children's perception of the relationship and their attitude towards their parents' partners. Despite differences in their experiences, all the adolescent participants agreed the earlier a child learns about the mother's relationship and sexuality (and thus – the role and place in the family of her *friend* or *aunt*), the better. Nevertheless, they did not indicate a specific age or situation where such knowledge should be shared with children. The children argued indirectly that providing information on the mother's relationship with another woman earlier would help avoid the "shock" of discovering the actual nature of this relationship later on. Conversely, one of the participants noted that even though she had obtained information from her parents about her mother's relationship at the time of their separation when she was little, today she interprets the experience as unclear and unreadable for her at that time.

> I was seven at the time, so I didn't understand much, I could barely tell black from white. So when I found out, I didn't understand any of this. It was like my mother had a girlfriend, it was like "hmm, some have girlfriends, others have a boyfriend, okey, maybe".
>
> [Justyna, 14 years old]

A typical scenario for learning about a mother's same-sex relationship was a story about divorce and separation of parents, followed by friendship and the presence of an aunt in family life. At some stage, not immediately after the parents broke up, the child found out that their mother and her friend were a couple. The case of Krzysiek and Bartek reflects this trajectory. Both brothers concluded that in their immediate environment, the same-sex relationships of their mother was not the subject of disputes, conflicts, or talks.[5] Therefore, they accepted it, not directly named by the family, as a transparent experience and a part of a change in their lives. However, they did not relate this fact to the concept of homosexuality at that time. Bartek declared that his mother never told him directly that she was a lesbian, and he never named it this way because the relationship between his mother and her partner was not a problem for him, somehow taken for granted. Krzysiek also emphasised that his family world has changed over the years – he was aware that both his father and mother had different partners, and for him, there was no fundamental difference between their relationships.

> As for me, for a long time, I did not realise that my mother was a homosexual person. I never really thought about it. Just like my father had female partners, so did my mother.
>
> [Krzysiek, 15 years old]

> My experiences are very positive. So my mom simply lived with another woman, then she lived with yet another woman, and they regularly told each other that they loved each other and so on. But I was never told directly when I was tiny that my mom was a lesbian, I mean, she didn't tell me. […] I don't know, it probably results from my mother's character and the fact that I liked my mother's partners a lot. […] I didn't see it in terms of heterosexuality or homosexuality at all, they were just people you live with, right?
>
> [Bartek, 19 years old]

Zosia talks about her experience in a similar way, emphasising an absolute "naturalness" of building her family world, in which, when she was a few years old, her aunt– mother's partner appeared.

> It was more or less like in Krzysiek's case that my parents divorced when I was six, more or less, that's when I found out, and I didn't think about it, because I just started to live with my aunt, I used to call her by her first name, she was like an aunt for me.
>
> [Zosia, 14 years old]

Findings clearly show that children who grow up in the presence of their biological mother's partner have vague and uncertain knowledge about the relationship. It is rooted in the experience of everyday life and daily family

practices rather than in reflection on the mother's same-sex relationship. Moreover, in the past, the children did not associate this relationship with the concept of homosexuality, even if they became attached to social mothers and treated them as very close persons, part of the family. Such a type of experience of disclosure was coined as *the trajectory of an unnamed experience* (Mizielińska, Struzik, and Król 2017). This concept emphasises a particular connection between the lack of a clear definition of the parents' non-heterosexual relationship and the presence of the mother's partner in the lives of children.

The situation is different when the children learn about the mother's sexual orientation and her relationship with another woman already in their teens and in an unexpected way. In such cases, they usually did not experience being taken care of by the mother's partner. Their narratives present information about the nature of the women's relationships as a sudden and unexpected change in their lives. This change causes various reactions from complete acceptance and understanding to strong negative emotions and rejection of the mother's partner. Although there are internal differences in this trajectory, it is characterised by a relatively clear division into the time before and after learning about the relationship. This disclosure experience was coined as *the trajectory of sudden change* (Mizielińska, Struzik, and Król 2017). Often, in this trajectory, the parents' decision to come out coincides with the parents' divorce, which, according to other researchers, may have a significant impact on the further development of the relationship between children and their parents (Lytle, Foley, and Aster 2013).

In her narrative, Kamila, who found out about her mother's relationship when she was about 13 years old, presents a strong adverse reaction to the sudden change in family life. Her story is dramatic, and she still has great difficulty accepting her mother's same-sex relationship. For her, learning about her mother's relationship had several stages. In the beginning, there was stress related to guessing, followed by shock as a reaction to the mother's coming out, and consequently a feeling of disgust towards her, shame, and tabooing the mother's relationship, and finally work on acceptance. The only person she spoke to about this was her father, who shared her negative view of the relationship.

> It was suspicious for me that my mom spent so much time with Elżbieta. And I found out about it when I went on a trip to Paris with my mother, I remember that for a few months or two years, I had been accumulating such negative emotions in myself, because I guessed it, but I was not sure. I was so nervous about it. Finally, then, I could not take it any more and asked my mother directly. And she told me. It was a massive shock. I remember well, really, I almost collapsed (laughs) when I found out about it. And then, for a few months, I felt a kind of disgust with my mother. It was so strange for me. Of course, it is gone now, because I have always had good contact with my mother and I still do. But just

> during these few months after I found out, I felt such disgust towards my mother, and I also felt terrible about it myself.
>
> [Kamila, 23 years old]

Although a surprise, shock, and strong negative emotions towards the mother's relationship might result from homophobia, usually children speak about anger due to being cheated by the mother. Kamila admits that her motivation to accept her mother's relationship is led by her will not to harm her mother. She emphasises that she tries to accept the family situation, but she still finds it difficult. She uses the category of mourning to describe the period after disclosing the relationship and her attempts to reconcile.

> I accepted it because I knew that she [mum] was hurt when I argued with her, or I didn't accept it. But deep in my heart, it is hard for me to understand it, and I have tried not to think about it for a long time because when I found out about it I was probably twelve or thirteen years old, and it was a massive shock for me. And then, for the first year after I found out, I felt like, I don't know, going through some kind of mourning. And then I tried to forget about it, and in fact, I didn't think about it at all.
>
> [Kamila, 23 years old]

Surprise, despair, and inability to cope with the news about the mother's relationship with another woman also appear in the story of Malwina. Here too, the context of obtaining this information played a crucial role – first, she learned about the relationship of her mother's godson with another man. Malwina accepted this information, although she received it with great surprise. It was more difficult for her to accept her mother's relationship with another woman about which she found out a little bit later. The reluctance towards the relationship and the lack of acceptance was reflected in her objection to the partner's visits to their home which resulted primarily from the fact that Malwina knew her mother's girlfriend as her best friend's mother.

> I cried for two days, but I cried all this time. The worst thing was that it was my best friend's mother. Her son Michał is like my younger brother, we often went on vacation with him and his mother together. I always called her "Auntie", now I say "Michał's mum" because somehow "Auntie" comes hard to me. […] when I found out, I was crying, lamenting, of course, I was angry, very angry… And since then she does not come to our house. I mean, I told my mom that she must not come.
>
> [Malwina, 14 years old]

After recognising the relationship between her mother and her friend's mother, Malwina builds a distance from her mother's partner not only by refusing to consent to her presence in their home but also by changing the way of addressing her from "her aunt" to "her friend's mother". Symbolically, in this change of naming, the relationship between the girl and the mother's

partner disappears, which is also consistent with other narratives. However, the story of Malwina shows, above all, the complicated nature of disclosure. Because of the immaturity of her friend, Malwina's mother forbade her to inform the boy that their mothers are a couple. For the girl, this ban and not being able to tell her friend about it is a kind of injustice that puts her in a challenging situation.

While discussing her story, Malwina – like other participants in the study – pointed out that in her opinion there is not a good time to tell the child about the mother's relationship but it is the sooner, the better for the family relations. Thus, she disagrees with her mother, who convinced her that it was too early for Michał to have such a conversation.

> My mother says that Michał is still not mature enough for it. I don't know when his mother wants him to mature. Soon it will be too late, he will be sixteen, he will have his own life. He should find out now when he is still relatively young.
>
> [Malwina, 14 years old]

The two different ways of experiencing disclosure mentioned above – *the trajectory of an unnamed experience* and *the trajectory of a sudden change* – have a significant impact on shaping relationships within a family. While in the first case, teenagers talk about the "naturalness" of the presence of the mother's partner in their lives, the feeling of a strong bond between the mother and her partner, and slowly getting used to the relationship of women, the second group mentions the shock caused by the news. Experiencing the mother's coming out may also be strengthened by a sense of being cheated by the parent. Some children felt disappointed, lost their trust, felt that they had lived a lie with their loved ones. However, it should be noted that it was temporary in the case of some interviewees and did not influence their further relationship with the mother. The situation is somewhat different when the child does not accept the news about the mother's relationship. Then usually the child's relationship with the mother's partner gets worse. Sometimes, like in Malwina's case, from a close person, she becomes distant, even named as if she was a stranger.

Children's perspectives shed new light on a fundamental question that queer parents often ask themselves: how to talk about their relationships with their children? From the point of view of people brought up in same-sex relationships, prior knowledge of the relationship guarantees a life of honesty, which is a value in itself for children. Knowledge, however, did not mean a clear, verbal message "your mother is a lesbian". For many children, observing the relationship of the mother and her partner, the closeness and love they expressed towards each other constituted this message. On the other hand, the very way of displaying affection did not always mean clear understanding on the part of the children. While lesbian mothers sometimes say that their children feel the nature of their relationships, children's perspectives reveal the complexity of this feeling. Children might interpret a

relationship differently, not necessarily as a relationship or family, and often need a more explicit message from their mothers. They also need time to process this information, going through different stages of mourning their heterosexual parents and slowly coming to terms with a new situation, noticing its merits.

Familial Homophobia

The focus group interviews with younger children presented a relatively idyllic picture of their families of origin. They described mutual understandings and cooperation between both biological parents and their new partners. This picture contrasts with the observations of younger children during the ethnographic study and their descriptions of the often-encountered incidents of homophobia from their families of origin. For instance, Nadia and Gabrysia have already experienced family violence motivated by homophobia. Gabrysia, whose father openly questions the role of her social mother, witnessed her father's violent, homophobic, and aggressive behaviour towards her mother and mother's partner. In Nadia's case, the grandmother held her against her and her parents' will for a few months. This way, she wanted to protect her from the "immoral space", the house where Bożena lived with her partner Marzena shortly after parting with her husband. It affected Nadia a lot, and now she is afraid of visiting her grandmother to avoid the repetition of this situation.

The older children (14–16-year-olds and adults) who took part in the focus group interviews were more aware of various types of arguments, quarrels, and dislikes expressed by close relatives about their mothers' relationships. They also drew attention to, for example, micro-inequalities, which did not refer directly to the rejection of their mothers' relationship but to minor tensions expressed concerning the same-sex relationship. Children from stepfamilies who had contact with their other biological parents often witnessed their open reluctance to the non-heterosexual relationship. Especially children who had difficulties with accepting their mother's same-sex relationship (or from whom the relationship was hidden for a long time), indicated a very close relationship with the other biological parent and reported his support in this matter. For example, in Kamila's narrative, her father appears as a vital reference figure, supporting her when she was going through the most challenging moments with non-acceptance of her mother's relationship:

> I mean, it wasn't a big deal, just a simple conversation. However, it gave me a lot to be able to tell someone [about my mother's relationship with another woman]. Well, then I also got closer to my dad.
>
> [Kamila, 23 years old]

It often happens that children are pulled into conflicts between their parents. For example, Magda does not feel a strong bond with her father and

considers him a person of a different values system from hers. When her mother decided to part with him, the daughter accepted it, but the father tried to change his daughter's mind. He even contacted his ex-wife's sister, telling her about seduction, domination, "entrapment" by a lesbian to regain control over the situation.

> I was never too close with my father because he is very different from my mother and me, so our relations were quite formal. He asked me questions. I didn't know what to say because the divorce of my parents was good for me. Once, he said "But can't you see, GRAŻYNA [mother's partner] IS A LESBIAN!" and I said, "Well, okay, but so what?" My father was in such a shock that he even tried to talk to my mother's sister, who lives abroad, […] he was trying to make some monster of Grażyna.
>
> [Magda, 28 years old]

Adult and adolescent children are also aware of the homophobia surrounding them and the reluctance of some members of their extended family towards their mothers' relationships. They often witness homophobic opinions expressed by their significant relatives. For example, in the case of Monika, her dad's mother expresses her disapproval of her mother's relationship openly. Due to negative opinions about her mother, the teenager stopped contacting her father's family at all:

> It was such a big gathering, the whole family got together, probably someone's birthday. She [grandmother] just spoke badly of my mother, and I just ran out and cried, and since then, I have not been in touch with anyone at all.
>
> [Monika, 15 years old]

On the other hand, despite some acceptance, Monika's other grandmother refuses to talk about it and demonstrates that she disapproves of her daughter's life choices. She might be an excellent example of transparent and family closets (Švab and Kuhar 2014).

> I also think that grandma might even be ashamed of it in some way, she didn't tell anyone, not even her friends or her son, anyone. It just seems that she may also be ashamed of it.
>
> [Monika, 15 years old]

In some cases, grandmothers act as people who refuse to accept their daughters' relationships at all, introducing disharmony, trying to convince their grandchildren of the impropriety of the mother's behaviour, and using openly homophobic language as in the case of Magda's family:

> I am going to tell you an anecdote about my [other] paternal grandmother. Once I was sitting there talking and told her about some events.

> Moreover, she asks, "And this Monika, doesn't she hit on Rafał?" I said, "No, Monika is a lesbian" And grandma "ARE YOU DEALING WITH LESBIANS?" (group laughter) "Yes, grandma, I hang out with lesbians. So what?" "But they are mean," she said.
>
> [Magda, 28 years old]

Kamila's maternal grandmother is also against her daughter's relationship, which manifests itself in the fact that she tries to cure her daughter of homosexuality by referring to religious practices. Below, Kamila described her grandmother's attempts to perform an exorcism on her mother. She even asked Kamila for help in these activities, but Kamila refused. Kamila described her dilemma regarding her relationship with her grandmother. She does not accept her own mother's same-sex relationship but she does not want to upset her.

> Grandma even wrote to an exorcist from Germany. (group laughter) Recently, she asked me to get a current photo of my mother because that's what she needed for the exorcisms. I don't like it that my mother is with Edyta, but I accept it because I don't want to upset my mother. I'm so torn. I don't know what to feel or think. Because I try not to think about it, I haven't thought about it for ten years. I keep telling my grandma to accept it, I try to talk to her, explain, but she is old-fashioned. She will never accept that. […] Grandma suffers terribly in general. She is sorry and continuously prays for my mom to get healed.
>
> [Kamila, 23 years old]

Stories told by teenagers and adults show that religiosity and the influence of the church on public discourse regarding non-heterosexuality are often a problem for them. However, there is no simple correlation of religiosity with the lack of acceptance and secularism with openness regarding family relationships. For example, Zosia talks about her grandmother as a very religious person who currently treats her mother's partner as a daughter.

> My maternal grandmother and grandfather know. My grandma is so religious that she goes to church every Sunday, but somehow she accepts it, and it does not bother her. She treats my mother's partner normally, like a daughter. She has good contact with her when she comes to us […]. Grandpa knows from dad's side, but grandpa has always liked my mom, and he doesn't mind. Well, grandma also knows but it bothers her. Well, she always has a different opinion than someone else. She constantly argues, so I argue with her about it, and when she runs out of arguments, she stops talking to me. She always knows for sure she's right anyway.
>
> [Zosia, 14 years old]

The children who face the homophobia of their relatives realise that they play an essential role in maintaining relationships between different family

members, so they often try not to antagonise their relatives. On the contrary, they want to ease disputes and tensions. They learn how to exist in different worlds and value systems, trying not to repeat negative opinions of others who are important to them and hide specific facts if necessary. For example, Nadia, whom her grandmother had kept for a few months, only once admitted that she heard from her that she should be ashamed of her own family. Although spending time with her as a favourite granddaughter, she probably had heard many negative opinions about her mother.

Disclosure to Peers

Children of same-sex parents develop different strategies of disclosing information about their families to their peers and closest environment. Some have already experienced incidents of homophobia (often from members of their family of origin) or have been teased by their peers. Therefore, similarly to their parents, they know that it is not always wise to come out to everybody. The youngest children, when asked whether they talked about their family, gave two types of answers. The first one is characterised by the attitude of reluctance, reserve, discretion, and fear of talking about their families at school. For instance, Arek is cautious and avoids situations that may lead to talking about family life. Paula emphasised that she did not know how to talk about family life, about whom she lives with because it is difficult for her. The second type of answer refers to the lack of a real opportunity to talk about family, which Filip mentioned, emphasising that no one had so far asked him about his family.

MODERATOR: What do you say about your families at school? Do you talk a lot with your friends?
AREK: No, only during breaks.
M: And does anyone ask you about your family?
AREK: They do, but then I run away because I don't want to answer.
PAULA: And I don't know how.
M: Paula, what don't you know how?
P: How to answer.
M: And what questions don't you know how to answer? What are these difficult questions?
P: Whom I live with and so on.
M: Why is this a difficult question when someone asks whom you live with, Paula?
P: Because it is difficult.
M: Antek, is it also difficult for you to answer the question of whom do you live with when someone at school asks you?
ANTEK: Yes, because I don't want to answer.
M: How about others? Filip?
FILIP: I don't know if I like it because nobody has asked me about it yet.

[Arek, 7 years old], [Paula, 7 years old], [Antek, 9 years old], [Filip, 7 years old]

In contrast, in the narratives of the older children, the main feature of their disclosure strategies in school and among peer communities (described below) is caution in talking about one's own family life and respecting privacy. Trust is an essential trait in all the strategies –teenagers and adult children want to share information about their lives only with those they consider close and trustworthy.

The first strategy, "I do not show off – I do not hide" was used by the teenagers who do not always speak openly about their mother's relationships. Simultaneously they think that if asked – in the right circumstances – they would have no problem telling about it.

KRZYSIEK: As for me and my relationship with the school, I am neither showing it nor hiding it, I only told my teacher once and my friends know it and absolutely…

MODERATOR: Do you think everyone knows? Private school is a smaller environment.

K: The school is one thing, but there is also the fact is that I have no reasons to tell my acquaintances either. It's just that I have a group of close friends, so for example, I say that my mother went somewhere with her partner and they say it's okay. I do not hide. If someone asks me, I tell the truth. Well, in the beginning, a year ago, I hesitated a bit about that. However, once they earned my trust, I told them. Especially that now I have a friend who is gay.

[Krzysiek, 15 years old]

The second strategy, which could be called "I tell only the inner circle", consists of creating a circle of close friends who, after gaining their trust, are involved in all intimate matters of the informants. Close friends also act as a source of significant support in difficult moments. A specific caution in speaking openly about the mother's relationship and the need for trust in the people with whom they shared this information plays a significant role. Below Malwina and Kamila emphasise the role of close friends as a source of support and keepers of their secrets. Kamila additionally draws attention to the fact that after learning about her mother's relationship, she could not talk to anyone about it for 6 months. She also takes a protective stance with her mother by not telling her about her own struggles, anxieties, and difficulties. The first person she talked honestly with was her close friend.

MALWINA: I have a best friend, she is great. She lives very close, so we meet just every weekend. She was very supportive, and she was like, "don't worry, there are people like that, and you should accept it." […]

KAMILA: I rather stifled it inside because Maja, that first friend, found out only after six months. I told my mother that everything was ok, only that it was a new situation for me and I thought about it a lot. My mother helped me, but somehow she thought everything was all right, so I didn't get a lot of help.

[Malwina, 14 years old] [Kamila, 15 years old]

In the group of adult children, Emilia admits that becoming friends with a gay man was very important for her. Thanks to him, she understood many processes related to being gay, which her father probably went through, including difficulties with disclosure.

> In my high school, I happened to make friends with a gay boy. So I talked directly with him about certain things. He also gave me much support and somehow explained a few things to me. I also saw a lot on his example because I was going through some things with him, because I experienced with him, among other things, coming out of the closet and the fact that he came out to his parents, and so on. So, I started to understand and see that my father's situation was a difficult one. I started to understand why and what feelings might accompany it.
>
> [Emilia, 24 years old]

Some informants use disclosure strategically, sharing the information with people beyond the safe circle of close friends to check how the person reacts. Karina sometimes plays with the stereotypical mixture of femininity and lesbian culture and uses information about her mother's relationship as a tool to question sexism. Her strategy helps her to differentiate between friends/allies and enemies.

> I differentiate a lot, to whom I tell and what. I can tell a lot to someone pretty quickly, but I can also say absolutely nothing if I feel uncomfortable. Sometimes when I come across someone who seems to be some kind of conservative moron. Sometimes I have such a style that I like to wear dresses, high heels and generally, people make various assumptions of it and sometimes I just like to say that "my mother's girlfriend has a different opinion" or something.
>
> [Karina, 26 years old]

Sometimes children decide to hide their mothers' relationship completely, resorting to lying to others. For instance, while living with her mother and her partner, Kamila avoided inviting guests. Currently, she lives with her father, which solves the problem of possible talks about the relationship on a daily basis. When asked directly by her friends about her mother, she lies.

KAMILA: I don't tell my friends about it. They ask me because they know that my parents are divorced. They ask if my mom has someone or if my dad has someone. My dad is single, he is a loner, so it's kind of normal for him to be alone. And they just ask how about my mom. I say that my mom is single too, that she lives on her own. Well, I'm lying a bit, but I'm kind of ashamed of that. Honestly. However, I do not talk about it even to very close friends.

MODERATOR: Do you think they can guess? Is it so?

K: No, no, because when I was living with my mom, [earlier] I didn't invite them home, precisely because I didn't want them to see that Elżbieta lived with us.

[Kamila, 23 years old]

Children also internalise adults' fear of disclosure. Their adopted coping strategy is often a reflection of the strategies used by their mothers, which was particularly evident during the ethnographic observation in families with children. During a family map interview with 18-year-old Darek, Manuela's biological son, Darek talked about how he was confronted with concealment of the true nature of his mother's relationship with Kinga from an early age. Since then, he has been afraid of any questions regarding her and presented his mother as single by choice. While explaining his attitude, he gave reasons for non-disclosure similar to those mentioned by Kinga and Manuela. He says that he wants to avoid being stigmatised by other people:

I mean, it was weird. It was so uncomfortable for me because I couldn't tell either, I couldn't name it either. Because it was so different, and I was just afraid of that stigma later on. All in all, I don't think any of my friends know about it. Until now, and I hope they won't find out because I won't tell them. What for? Who cares? This could be weird for my future girlfriend because she will find out sometime. It cannot stay hidden all life long either. It just depends on what kind of person I meet.

[Darek]

Only one woman declared speaking openly about her mother's relationship. Her own non-heterosexual identity probably influences this openness. However, even in her case, a certain level of cautiousness is preserved as she avoids situations when talking about it might put her in some kind of danger.

I generally feel at ease somehow, don't I? When I sense a situation, that there is something wrong, some awkwardness, I just avoid the subject diplomatically, but generally, I speak normally about it, don't I? Just sometimes, someone will ask the question, "Say what? Who?" and then I say, "Come on, my mom's girlfriend." Sometimes it is a bit of a shock. Sometimes someone asks some more questions. Sometimes they don't. Generally, it's cool.

[Magda, 28 years old]

The children's narratives on their disclosure strategies show their level of uncertainty and anxiety. All of them were very careful and chose to talk about their family situation within a close circle of friends. Interestingly, in their narratives, the incidents of open homophobic peers' harassment were not present, which might suggest that their management of secret works very well in given circumstances.

Religious Education as Lessons of Intolerance and Discrimination[6]

While talking about possible discrimination at school, teenagers raised the problem of how priests and catechists tackle issues related to homosexuality and same-sex relationships during religious education classes, and more broadly, in the teaching of the Catholic Church. Their experiences show that these classes are the place where hate speech and homophobia occur at schools most often.

> During religious education classes, it was just so stupid when Sodom and Gomorrah were discussed, and they say "oh no, how bad these homosexuals are, what a sin it is that …". Then I started discussing it with the teacher, and told him that my mother is a lesbian or something like that. I asked him why he thinks that such people do not have the right to live. Isn't it that Christianity should be a religion that loves all people, so the church proclaims. Then why they want to put homosexuals, transsexuals in gas chambers? Well, I don't know what I believe because if that's what it is, I'm not going to believe what I think is wrong for those who are different. It is not just about homosexuals; there are just people who feel like a man in the body of a woman, and that is OKEY! We should understand them.
>
> [Malwina, 14 years old]

Faced with homophobia during religion classes, teenagers adopt various strategies of resistance. For example, Krzysiek admitted that he had long discussions with people of opposing views. However, if someone wanted to use force against him, he preferred to give up such contacts. He emphasised that he was not discriminated against because he avoided such situations by not maintaining contact with people who disliked him. Kamila agreed with Krzysiek's strategy, that is, avoiding contact with homophobic people and situations. However, she notes that it is impossible to isolate oneself from the whole class and sometimes it is necessary to participate in conversations characterised by contempt for LGBTQ people.

Children do not always share information about homophobia experienced during religious education classes with their parents. As Justyna pointed out, her mother, if she found out about the way people talk about LGBTQ issues during these classes, she would undoubtedly intervene at school, demanding a change in the current situation. The teenager herself did not want the publicity that could be associated with this kind of "fuss" and therefore preferred to keep her experiences to herself.

> I mean, I would never tell my mother. Because my mother is such a person that whoever says something about us, about this topic, or sexuality at school, she would indeed run to the principal and say "Please … this is incompetent." Then my life at school and probably in half of Poland would simply be over.
>
> [Justyna, 14 years old]

In turn, during the focus group interview, Kamila repeatedly stated that she did not want to worry her mother with problems at school and tried to deal with them herself.

During discussions about homophobia at school, the teenagers often showed that they knew many sources of information about homosexuality, and the messages they heard at school were often inconsistent with the current state of knowledge.

KAMILA: The teacher showed us the movie about a gay man who wrote a book about being cured of homosexuality. Moreover, the teacher said that it could be cured, you only need to have a strong will.
KRZYSIEK: and an electric chair (everyone laughs)
KAMILA: Yes, but it turned out that the guy who wrote this book, later on, said that it was impossible to convert because he returned to it anyway, so the teacher didn't even know the facts that the man who wrote it …
MALWINA: Maybe she knows, only uses those which suit her.
KAMILA: So, in fact, these are only lies.
MALWINA: When there is such a movie or something like that, or when we talk about it in class, I can't just sit and listen. I immediately engage in discussion with the teachers. And they end up running out of arguments, don't know what to say, so I say: "let's not talk about this anymore".

[Kamila, 15 years old], [Krzysiek, 15 years old], [Malwina, 14 years old]

Epstein, Idems, and Schwartz (2009) list the following strategies adopted at school by children raised by non-heterosexual parents whom they studied: confront, deflect, diffuse, poke back. They emphasise that homophobia and heterosexism are deeply rooted in school culture and that anti-homophobic programs are needed to prepare teachers adequately. Whereas in Anglo-American contexts, such programs are standard nowadays and protect children and their families, there is a lack of such programs in Poland. Religion as a subject taught at schools (from primary to secondary) is full of stereotypes regarding sexual minorities. Its curriculum is not supervised by the Ministry of Education but the Catholic Church hierarchies. Despite many efforts to prepare children for the challenges of potential stigmatisation expressed by queer parents, family efforts are often doomed to fail due to the lack of other (more institutional) forms to help children withstand negative evaluations of their family by others.

Community and Private Schools as Protection against Homophobia

The issue of choosing a community school appeared in the parents' narratives as one of the ways of protecting children from homophobia. However, such a solution is elitist and available only to a small group with adequate resources. The interviews with the children themselves shed new light on the effectiveness of this form of ensuring children's safety. As their narratives show, the very decision to send a child to this type of school becomes a

space for negotiating the rules of openness with the child. This was the case with Bartek and Karina. The fundamental difference noticed by the respondents who attended community schools when comparing their experiences with others is their certainty that if homophobia does occur, the school will support the person who experienced homophobia. However, this choice does not guarantee full protection because, as they emphasise, homophobia occurs regardless of the type of school.

KARINA: Certainly, there were very affluent children, sometimes homophobic. Money can be made in various ways, and you can still be very homophobic. So it would be an exaggeration to say that there can't be intolerance in community schools. Because there are idiots everywhere, they are convinced of their superiority over the whole world because of their wallets. Except, of course, the atmosphere is set at the top, and the condition of being in this school is tolerance, and if something unpleasant happens, then the perpetrator is always in trouble.

BARTEK: Well, you know which side the school will take in such a situation.

[Karina, 26 years old], [Bartek, 19 years old]

At one point, Bartek's family decided to transfer him from a community school he attended to a public school. It was a conscious action that aimed to immunise the child. It was related to the perception of the community/private school as a safe space, the rules of which, however, differ from everyday reality. In the new school, Bartek experienced symptoms of homophobia every day. He admits that he had no tools to oppose it. After 2 years at this school, he decided to return to the community school.

> It's not so that I just decided, "Mom, send me to a community school immediately because I can't make it here anymore". Well, there was a number of conversations. However, I also had a feeling that if I changed this school too early, it would be my failure that I just couldn't handle it, as if I was finally thrown into such a reality, pushed into such deep water, and I just ran away again, I wanted to be in this environment as long as possible. However, I realised then that I would be taking my final exams soon, and this school had a low level. If it were any different, I would probably have stayed, I would have had the feeling that I managed for these three years. The change was mainly due to the level.
>
> [Bartek, 19 years old]

Children's perspectives on community and private schools show that they are not a safe haven regarding their policy towards queer families. However, in comparison with public schools, the authorities and teachers there attempt to fight open homophobia and create a school environment that supports queer pupils. They oppose the current government policy, which is against any gender and LGBT+ anti-discriminatory programs at schools.

Conclusions

Taking into account the voices of children from different age groups allows us to look at families of choice intergenerationally, including the perspective of time and the dynamics of changes in the relations between different family members. In the youngest age groups, the children take for granted the fact of growing up in a family that others perceive as different. They are protected by adults who often hide from them conflicts, anxieties, and homophobia. Therefore, they might often not see and/or encounter a reluctance of their closer or distant surroundings. Relationships with the social mother are said to be fair and warm. However, most often, she is not called a mother, mostly because children came from previous heterosexual relationships and the fathers are present in their lives.

Contrary to the quite idyllic image of the family presented by the younger children, the older children (teenagers and adults) are more aware of the homophobia of the environment and the lack of social acceptance for their families. Their relationship with their families and bonds with their parents are also mediated by the way they learned about their parent's non-heterosexual relationship. In the case of the *trajectory of unnamed experience*, during which they become accustomed to the presence of their mother's partner in their lives for years and are aware of the intimate (though not directly named) nature of their relationship, the final naming in the form of a declaration by the parent is accepted with understanding and intra-family relations are good. The closeness developed over the years between the child and the social mother is preserved. In the case of *the trajectory of sudden change*, when the child suddenly finds out that the mother has a female partner, often when she leaves a heterosexual marriage, the reaction can be turbulent and sometimes even violent. Feeling deceived, children might reject the social mother, even when they once used to be close (the case of Malwina).

Additionally, children can find allies supporting their unfavourable reactions in their immediate vicinity, which does not alleviate conflicts. However, despite the tensions arising from the sudden change, most children finally accept and support the choice of their biological mothers (which is also related to the selection of the sample). Regardless of their experience and age, both teenagers and adult children agree that the earlier the children find out, the better. Therefore, they are all in favour of transparency within the family, which, in their opinion, translates into the quality of relationships and the well-being of the whole family. It also improves their relations with the family of origin; they do not have to keep their parents' relationships secret, manoeuvring between openness and secrecy in contact with their relatives.

Teenagers and adult children are also more aware of homophobia inside and outside the family. It is excruciating for them when homophobic opinions about their family are expressed by their relatives. Sometimes, in order not to worry their parents, they do not inform them about the

homophobic incidents. Homophobic behaviour on the part of the closest family is often condemned by children and affects their distance towards relatives. Teenagers and adult children also use different strategies of openness towards their peers, friends, or acquaintances. They often resembled those used by their parents (i.e., the more open parents, the less hiding strategies used by their children – i.e., Darek's case). It is worth noting that all of them (except for one case of declared semi-full disclosure) share caution and selectivity, which also shows the extent of fears of potential homophobic behaviours in these groups.

As Wright writes, children do not only feel their own fears related to the hostility of the environment towards their families, but they also experience the anxieties of their parents: "When parents are protective toward children, children may experience fear as a result" (Wright 1998, 154). Often, parental fears might assume "a kind of victim paranoia" that stresses children more than actual homophobia, occurring much less frequently than their fears would indicate. Wright situates these concerns not so much in the experience of discrimination (i.e., being openly teased by their peers), but in the pervasive school heteronormativity, which has a significant impact on shaping and maintaining children's anxieties. There they learn that they should not talk about their families and on no account mention the "elephant in the room" (Wright 1998, 152). Nowadays, most Anglo-American schools adopted in their curricula some anti-discriminatory courses/workshops and the situation of queer children and/or children brought up by queer parents has improved, although there is still a need for further actions (Epstein, Idems, and Schwartz 2009; Gustavson and Schmitt 2011; Payne and Smith 2011; Streib-Brzic et al. 2011).

Children participating in the study have already experienced homophobia at schools, mostly during religious education classes. Some find enough strength to fight the homophobic teaching, but some do not have sufficient tools to fight back and stay silent. Some internalise their parents' fears in such situations. For instance, they might interpret their parents' request for discretion as a ban on speaking about their families (Gabrysia's case) and/or, knowing how much their parents worry about the reaction of the environment, they keep incidents of homophobia hidden from them. This way, they want to protect parents by silencing the problem instead of discussing it openly. Children also develop various strategies of coping with possible homophobic reactions from the environment. On the one hand, they might avoid talking about their family. On the other hand, they might talk about it as something obvious (mainly younger children), and ignore any adverse reaction of their peers. Regardless of their coping strategies, they are very much on their own since there are no other sources of support and acceptance than those given them by their parents and a group of close friends. They do not get any positive images about their families from society. There are neither special curricula nor sets of good practices promoted at schools. Public schools in Poland do not offer any protection for LGBT children or children raised by LGBT parents. This often results in

the latter choosing paid community schools to keep their children safe, something which not all families can afford.

It should also be emphasised that adolescents and adult children support postulates of introducing same-sex partnerships law and challenge the traditional definitions of family and intimate relationships, considering them exclusive and unfair. In their opinion, the right to love and freedom of choice takes precedence over thinking about relationships in terms of the survival of the species. Also, their own experience shows the necessity of better protection of ties between them and social parents to end their current vulnerability and the possible ungrievable loss. Therefore, queer descendants play the role of allies and are a significant part of LGBT families, based both on chosen and blood ties. Seeing queer families through the eyes of children who are/were brought up by queer parents blurs this duality. It challenges the dominant image of same-sex families/relationships – both the one presented in the media in Poland, where non-heterosexual persons are treated as if they had no other possibilities to have children than external adoption (i.e., the children come from the outside) and in the canonical part of the literature on families of choice, which focuses on their necessary subversion and difference from the conventional understanding of kinship (Plummer 1995; Duggan 2002; Warner 1993; Lewin 2009).

This chapter and the previous one demonstrate that non-heterosexual parents are neither radically different nor the same, and their value lies in the symptomatic mixture of the given and chosen ties. Focusing on children's perspectives and treating them as active agents in family creation is of great significance. They are essential queer allies who can contribute to social change and defy myths about queer families. Contrary to those who perceive the possibility of subversion only in queer contestation of norms and going beyond family/blood bonds, I believe that the possibility of changing/transforming meanings related to the family and widening its societal understandings do not depend solely on non-heterosexual chosen family members, but also their children.

Notes

1 Except for one participant who has a gay father, the other children were brought up in women's relationships.
2 Young children often use the term "aunt" to refer to their social mother. According to the survey results, most often (61% of cases), children address their social parent by their first name, 31% choose "aunt" or "uncle" (Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015).
3 Excerpt from Darek's statement about Kinga, his social mother.
4 In the original, the starting question in this interview concerned the placement on the map of all the people who are the most important to the child and whom the child loves, in order to avoid the activation of normative thinking about the family, transmitted outside the home, at school, or by significant others.
5 They are brothers and both participated in the focus group interviews but were assigned to different age groups.
6 Fragments of Kamila's opinion.

7 Conclusions

> Seemingly doing "how" is doing differently, but it only makes sense when you do the same thing
>
> – Vinciane Despret, *Our grateful Dead: Stories of Those Left Behind*

Often, when I send my articles on different aspects of familial lives of non-heterosexual people in Poland to various highly ranked journals and/or do presentations at international conferences, I receive similar responses that suggest that the situation in Poland in 1989 regarding sexual minorities reminds the readers of the situation of gays and lesbians in the US in 1969 or that current lack of same-sex marriages resembles pre-marriage age in the US or UK; thus, I am not saying anything new. These reactions, in my opinion, reflect a deep misunderstanding of specificities of both time and place, biographies, and geographies of LGBTIQ communities. Poland in 1989 was not the US in 1969. In fact, it was very different. Discourses regarding LGBT emancipation that appeared in the US in 1969 started to be available in Poland before 1989 despite the Iron Curtain, which was not so impermeable after all (Szulc 2018). Moreover, after 1989, these discourses functioned simultaneously with others as demonstrated in the book on de-Centring Western sexualities where we criticised the Western teleological progressive narrative of CEE post-1989 transition (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011). Poland is not a "clone" or a younger sibling in need of paternalistic and mansplaining treatment from its big Anglo-American brother. It did not step back in time but has its own past, present, and future. Then, 1989 signified in Poland something different than 1969 in the US.

I have noticed that similar rhetoric is sometimes used by older persons who recognise their traits from the past in somebody younger. They also tend to say "Oh, you remind me about myself when I was 10 years old". However, usually, in this case, they never assume that this somebody is the same and will have a similar life trajectory; they see their differences as well as similarities. They know that the world has changed so this person might carry specific characteristics, but since they live in different times and places, they become entirely different. Their faults are only their faults, their

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achievements as well. Therefore, saying "I will tell you what you really feel, or I will tell you how things are for you" would be not only inappropriate but also rude and patronising.

Queer families living in Poland now, although not legally recognised, have knowledge about current achievements in other countries, which is reflected in their marriage and reproductive plans (see trips abroad to get married or preferred ways of conception which I have examined in Chapters 2 and 5). Although at very first sight, the reproductive problems of Polish LGBTIQ people might look like old Western problems; this resemblance is misleading. Their inclusion of reproduction in their life trajectory is comparable to Western queers. The lack of choice and reproductive rights (i.e., restrictive ART's legislation) does not stop them from pursuing their plans (i.e., having children) but instead forces them to look for other possibilities to pursue their dreams, that is, mitigating the law[1]. Therefore, the question of choice as taken for granted and central in Western debates (focusing on possible abuses/failures, reproduction of race, homonormativity) becomes for them imaginary as in their daily lives, they must struggle with limits of choice (Mizielińska 2020).

The above-described knowledge about possibilities and obvious achievements of Western LGBTIQ communities changes not only their aspirations but also expectations towards the state. For instance, as EU members, they can get married abroad, which leaves them in a very ambiguous position in relation to the state, on the one hand, not recognising their marriage but on the other hand, involved in many legal suits undertaken by Polish queer married couples before European Court of Human Justice. LGBTIQ families also very creatively look for loopholes in the system to allow them partial recognition, that is, queering baptism. They might also choose to migrate and live in countries that recognise their family. So their situation is very different from queer couples researched by Anglo-American scholars both in the past and in the present, not to mention that their means of communication changed dramatically. Even if their needs are not supported by the state and met fully by Polish LGBTIQ organisations, they might build their "invincible communities" virtually, finding support and necessary information there. Despite challenging and often homophobic circumstances, they know their rights and often claim them. Polish queer families are not an inferior version of families from the Anglo-American past but currently living entities, which should be recognised in all their uniqueness. Here and now matter. Space and time matter, have local colours, and influence how queer kinship is conceptualised and practised.

I treat the above arguments of Western/Anglo-American critics as an excuse for not getting involved on a deeper level in discussions concerning social, cultural, and spatial specifics of the CEE region and unwillingness to question some taken-for-granted ideas (i.e., binarism queer/conformist) and concepts. The perception of seeming resemblance reflects thinking about family practices and sexuality in terms of progress and merely a copy of the West ("they are where we used to be"). This type of thinking, as I have

shown elsewhere, does not only sustain "the hegemonic temporality of West" with its progressive narrative (from "old-primitive" to "new-advanced") but it forces "Western present" as "CEE future" to be achieved simultaneously forcing "CEE present" as "past". However, since 1989, "CEE present" is also a "Western present". This knotting also shows that, although the two temporalities "collapsed" into one dominant Western narration, they are still discursively maintained as "parallel" and separate, and at the same time portrayed as "one" (Mizielińska and Kulpa 2011, 17). It seems that nothing has changed since then. Thinking about CEE in terms of time and not place (Tlostanova 2012, 2015; Kulawik and Kravchenko 2019) often results in ignorance of local specificities. As Tlostanova claims,

> the almost overnight vanishing of the second world led to a typical Western understanding of the post-Soviet as a time, not as space. It is the time after socialism and not the dozens of millions of rendered irrelevant lives of those who inhabit the post-communist space.
>
> (Tlostanova 2012, 132)

As I have demonstrated, acts and practices that look similar at first sight might be completely different. Not only do they take place in local cultures where people attach dissimilar meanings and values to certain ways of living, have specific gender/sex and family norms and beliefs, etc., but also in specific social, economic, and political conditions, including the post-communist legacy. I am fully aware that the strategies of keeping family ties, negotiating visibility and bringing the partner home, legitimising the other parent and doing parenthood, looking for intelligible turning points in life trajectories, defining and displaying families, and home-making practices presented in this book might sometimes look familiar, normalising, and (homo)normative from the Anglo-American perspective. Still, their occurrence in particular geo-temporal circumstances makes them unique, queer, and worth studying as they complicate the hegemony of the progress narrative dominating in the West and concepts taken for granted.

Legal regulations change queer ways of doing families and bonding with important others, as Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir (2013) showed on the example of the new generations of British queers who got married. As marriage has been made available to queer couples in most Western countries as well, it has become a key turning point replacing other essential events and private ceremonies (Jones and DeFilippis 2018). However, LGBTQ people's desire to get married is deeply contextual, burdened with social and cultural meanings of marriage and kinship systems in different localities as studies show (Tang, Khor, and Chen 2020). I do not want to imply that nowadays marriage is the most determinative factor shaping how queer people build families in countries with same-sex partnership law. Nevertheless, I am convinced that to have the right to marry and decide not to use this opportunity (for different reasons, either because of fear or because of political rebellion) is not the same as not having it and struggling

to be recognised as a family in other ways and/or perform marriage ceremonies that are not legally valid, as queer couples in Poland do. Moreover, assuming that life without these rights looks everywhere alike is misguided, which studies on queer families in different geo-temporal locations clearly show. What might be learned from them is their respect towards local socio-political contexts and the incredible inventiveness of queer people worldwide in making their relationships meaningful, recognised, and liveable, even in the most challenging circumstances.

Beyond "Either/Or" Paradigm or What (Queer) Resistance Might Mean?

In the book, I have been polemical with a vast amount of academic literature about queer families/kinship written from and about Anglo-American context, and dominated by the "either/or" dilemma, that is, whether these families are intrinsically radical/subversive or assimilative/conformist and reinforcing the heteronormativity/homonormativity (Duggan 2002; Edelman 2004; Carrington 1999; Hicks 2011; Lewin 2009). By doing so, I have joined the already existing criticism displayed by some Anglo-American but also post- and decolonial scholars (Moore 2011; Decena 2011; Acosta 2013; Lewin 2009; Hicks 2011). In my analysis, I have demonstrated that there is no fundamental opposition between "queerness" and "family". Moreover, in the Polish and, more generally, in the CEE context (but also many others), to stress this opposition would mean to yield the battlefield to conservatives who still think that same-sex couples cannot build families and limit their ways for reproduction (Takács 2018; Zhabenko 2014; Sobočan 2011). It would also ignore many LGBTIQ people's brave struggles to have their families recognised in different geopolitical locations (Zhabenko 2019; Kantsa and Chalkidou 2014; Santos 2013; Béres-Deák 2019). Cheshire Calhoun argued, "putting same-sex marriage […] and the formation of lesbian and gay families at the margins of a lesbian and gay political agenda, looks suspiciously like a concession to the view of lesbians and gays as family outlaws" (Calhoun 2000, 154). In fact, when we think about family as a cultural category (therefore differently conceptualised and practised in different locations), we see that doing it cannot be perceived as either assimilationist or transgressive *per se* since LGBTIQ people are immersed in the same cultural framework and reach for commonplace tools to display their relationships, gain recognition and respect (Schneider 1997). Looking at the above dilemma from the perspective of my findings and my situated knowledge, I perceive the urgent need to reconceptualise ordinariness. I find inspiring work distinguishing "ordinariness", understood as commonplace, from normalisation and claiming political potential of being ordinary (Weeks 2007; Heaphy, Smart, and Einarsdottir 2013; Browne and Bakshi 2016). While drawing on them, I want to underline the role of the context, which strongly influences what is ordinary/normal/assimilationist and queer.

Family practices must be understood within their own specific frame of reference, including cultural, social, historical, and geopolitical contexts. In some localities, the claims of ordinariness and normality made by queer parents challenge the mainstream pathologising discourse and might be considered as queer acts of resistance. For instance, my informants often emphasise their families' normality and their similarity to others, wanting to enter into a broadly understood norm from which they are excluded. Randomly chosen quotations below reflect this dominant tendency: "Indeed we are the same. In our everydayness" [Pola]; "We function in the same way. There is nothing special about us" [Jurek]; "Except for the fact that we are gay we don't differ particularly" [Klaudiusz]; "We are normal. We eat, go to the loo, we argue sometimes, we have better and worse days, but we are a normal family" [Ela].

My findings demonstrate that the expressed need for being perceived as normal and ordinary has nothing to do with replication of heteronormativity and the acceptance of normalising discourses—quite the opposite. Claims of ordinariness can co-exist with claims of being different. Ordinariness can be strived because people continue to be excluded and still have to face "the pervasiveness of heteronormativities" (Browne and Bakshi 2016). The need to be treated as normal/ordinary is more about inclusion and acceptance regardless of differences. It is about becoming commonplace as any other human beings with all their differences (in attitudes, inclinations, tastes, desires, etc.). Therefore, I propose to read accounts of normality and ordinariness as ways to fight exclusion and homophobic prejudices, spreading in the contemporary dominant discourses in Poland. They reflect LGBTIQ people's frustration with the ways queer families are portrayed there and their demands to be seen and treated as legitimate families.

Through the book, I have argued for greater sensitiveness to the specificity of local context, which demands serious reconsideration of the popular thinking about assimilation and its criticism. In some geopolitical conditions, what at first sight looks assimilationist might be an act of resistance from within, hiding an agency in ordinary daily practices in a particular context. In my thinking about assimilation, I am inspired by the reflections of Michel de Certeau, the French philosopher and anthropologist. He wrote on misinterpretations of the act of consumption, warning against identifying assimilation with "becoming similar":

> it is assumed that assimilation must necessarily mean 'becoming similar' to what is assimilated, and not to 'make' these things to what you are, to do something on one's own, to appropriate it for the first time or to appropriate again.
>
> (Certeau 2008, 165)

Certeau disagrees with such a reading and notes the importance (in some cases even the necessity) of surrendering to some order, entering into it,

accepting some practices, particularly when one does not have a choice and/or for instance, as in many discussed in this book, cases the preservation of kin ties is on stake. The repetitions of certain practices and/or their re-appropriation are not without reflection and do influence this order. They might be a tricky use of imposed behaviours or practices in ways other than those originally envisaged. Thereby they might offer the opportunity to overthrow them from the inside – not by rejection or transformation, but thanks to the myriad forms of using them for one's own rules, habits, and beliefs. Thus, those who seemingly become the same, metaphorise the dominant order, as de Certeau puts it, make it function on a completely different scale. "Others remained within the system that they assimilated and which only assimilated them externally" (Certeau 2008, 33).

It is interesting how de Certeau's points resonate with queer ideas developed in a different context and in regards to a different sphere of life as if all speak in a similar voice. Yet, their voice is not heard and/or does not transcend into the theoretical approach that could go beyond persuasive dichotomy, either/or, origin/copy, assimilation/subversion. For instance, Judith Butler arrives at similar conclusions, stating that repetition of gestures, behaviours, and bodily practices related to sex does not mean to produce the same effect and the origin because imitation is the possibility of resistance and subversion, undermining the imaginary "original" by "copy" (Butler 2011, 2006). Similarly, José Muñoz, writing about disidentification as a survival strategy for minority groups, shows that they neither assimilate nor reject the dominant ideology but use them tactically, work through cultural codes in this way simultaneously joining the mainstream while undermining it (Muñoz 1999). According to Homi Bhabha, mimicry is the recognisable Other's ambiguous strategy. Its effects are almost the same but not entirely, and to be effective, it must continuously demonstrate its slipping of meaning, its excess, its difference (Bhabha 1984, 126). As such, it becomes both a similarity and a threat to the dominant discourses. Looking at the normality/ordinariness/assimilation categories from the above perspectives allows seeing polyphony of motivations and functions, imbued with social and cultural meanings. Therefore, a simple invocation of "normality/ordinariness" is much more than assimilatory and contains elements of rebellion, resistance, or subversion, while maintaining the purpose of living a liveable life in a not very friendly reality.

My understanding, which follows the above theoretical frameworks, challenges the anti-normative/homonormative turn in queer (kinship) studies and encourages further work towards full recognition of different family/kinship practices of resistance in other locations. In order to achieve this, we need to contextualise the norm of family and kinship, and capture what families mean, how they are experienced, understood, done, and displayed in particular geographical contexts. What is the relation between family as a concept and family as a practice? What is perceived as normal and what is not? We need to have a closer look at daily, small, tacit ways of

doing families rather than expect grand gestures and heroic acts of transgression, subversion, and resistance that might have been effective in the US but even there mostly among the most privileged queer people there (Moore 2011; Acosta 2013; Montegary 2018). In other locations, these grand gestures could result in severe consequences that only few families can afford.

Judith Butler in *Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life?* stated, "the concerted action that characterises resistance is sometimes found in the verbal speech act or the heroic fight, but it is also found in those bodily gestures of refusal, silence, movement, refusing to move…" (Butler 2012, 16). I read her words as a call to recognise signs of resistance in materiality, temporality, and emotionality of everyday lives. I interpret the fact that my informants try to build families despite difficulties and against state promoted vision, display or hide them, and want them to be recognised and protected by demonstrating their normality and ordinariness not as a blind embracement of heteronormative institution but as a reflexive way to fight back, even if their daily acts of resistance are tacit. These acts consist of many nuanced micro-practices that are hard to describe because they are contextual and material, depending on possibilities, resources, and moments in one's life. My informants' ways of living a normal life in abnormal circumstances (i.e., without recognition, facing homophobia) are by no means homonormative because, as I have often claimed in this book, queerness (of kinship/family/relationships) might mean something different in different geopolitical locations. In some, family practices do not aim directly to challenge/subvert the heteronormativity but concentrate on daily care for family well-being, looking for loopholes in the system in their fights for building families and their survival. Sometimes breaking free from the pressure of dominant ideology is impossible, which does not equal the willingness to conform and/or assimilate entirely into it. In Poland, a simple individual act of calling oneself a family and presenting one's way of living is still perceived as controversial and as such, might disrupt normative assumptions about the so-called traditional and heteronormative family. So it becomes a way of queering it.

Tactics as the Art of the Weak

Certeau's distinction between tactics and strategy might be beneficial here. He described tactics as

> a calculated act characterised by the lack of its own place. It is impossible then to isolate the externality which is a condition of autonomy. The place of tactics is the place of the Other, so it must use the territory imposed and organised by a foreign law of force. It is therefore not possible to create a comprehensive action plan for oneself or to tame an opponent in another, visible and objectively existing space.
>
> (Certeau 2008, 37)

According to de Certeau, what distinguishes tactics from strategy is the relation to power. The absence of power characterises a tactic that is blind but at the same time penetrating, controlled by accident. In contrast, a strategy is based on the assumption of the existence of some proportion of power. Certeau shows the inability to go beyond the knowledge/power system described by Foucault (Foucault 1990, 1995), but contrary to him, he sees a chance to change this system from the inside by trickery.

Diverse family practices presented in this book which might be judged as homonormative/heteronormative and/or delayed/lagging behind according to the subversion/assimilation and progress/delay paradigms reveal particular ambivalence I propose to read as specific tactics. Showing one's normalcy and ordinariness, deploying care practices, calling oneself a family, doing parenthood, displaying certain gestures and behaviours in different contexts and structurally other families, become a queer act of replication/re-appropriation from which many opportunities to change the dominant pattern emerge. Family practices of non-heterosexual people create something resembling de Certeau's "wandering lines" – "obscure, seemingly insane trajectories of reality" (Certeau 2008, 36) – which slowly transform it in front of our eyes. Tactics is the art of the weak, the ones who are deprived of privileges, discriminated against, treated as foreign, and other.

> It adapts to the situation. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, not having a base to gain the advantage, increase ownership, and plan attacks. It does not keep what it achieves. This lack of space guarantees its specific mobility, which, although dependent on the passage of time, makes it easier to grasp the opportunities offered by the moment. It is forced to use, with all caution, the deficiencies that individual economic trends reveal in the supervision of ownership. It trots in them. It sets traps. It can be found where nobody expects it. It is a trick.
>
> (Certeau 2008, 37)

As such, it offers hope to many queer people and their families in the current political situation in Poland and beyond.

Note

1 For instance, nowadays, more and more women look for the potential donor on the internet. Those who decide to use the services of infertility clinics go there with their "false" partners, often a befriended gay.

Appendix
Methodology

This book draws on the findings of my mixed and multi-method research project, Families of Choice in Poland (2013–2016). Its main aim was to show the variety of family and intimate arrangements of non-heterosexual persons in Poland and understand the challenges they face in everyday life. The project had an interdisciplinary character and was a mix of many different methods, both qualitative and quantitative. It was carried out in various ways and divided into several stages during which not only different methods were employed, but also different experts joined my research team.

A quantitative survey was conducted during the first year of the project as the most effective method for investigating a large number of non-heterosexual people. Qualitative methods (critical discourse analysis, ethnographic research, in-depth biographical interviews, and focus group interviews [FGIs]) were used to generate a deeper understanding of people's strategies for building their relationships and coping with daily family life. In this book, I refer to selected findings from 4 stages of the research: a quantitative survey conducted with 3038 people, 53 individual biographical interviews (half with 2 partners individually), an ethnographic study conducted with 21 non-heterosexual families that included 30 days of participatory observation of each family and several thematic and narrative interviews (such as biographical interview, interview on significant photos and objects, and interview on important places – all with the couple, individual interviews on family maps, and closing-up), and 22 FGIs with different types of participants (mostly with queer parents but also with members of their families of origin and children raised by non-heterosexual parents).

The Research Sample

The research sample in all stages of the research was as diverse as possible. In **the quantitative study**, the data were collected for 3038 people in relationships (for details, see Mizielińska, Abramowicz, and Stasińska 2015). The respondents included 56% women and 44% men: 43% were lesbian, 41% gay, 16% bisexual, and below 1% heterosexual. Most of the respondents (89%) were less than 40, 8% were 41–50 and 2% were 51–60 years

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old. The respondents lived mostly in towns and cities (72%), 7% lived in the country, and 12.5% in small towns of up to 50K inhabitants. The majority had higher education (58%). Half of the respondents were in relationships lasting for more than 3 years, 19% were in a relationship lasting for 2 years, 17% in a relationship for less than a year, and 7% of the respondents had been in a relationship for more than a decade; 9% of the respondents had children.

Most of the participants who gave **biographical interviews** were women (28), there were 22 men, 2 respondents identified as transmen and 1 as a transwoman. Women identified mostly as lesbians (25 persons), 2 identified as bisexual, and 1 as queer; 24 men and 2 transmen identified as gay. The majority of the respondents (36) were between 31 and 50 years old, 8 below 30 years, and 5 people were over 55 years of age. Most of them (44) lived in cities. Seven of the participants lived in small towns and 2 lived in the country. Most of them had higher education (39), 4 had secondary education, 8 had completed vocational schools, and 1 had elementary education. Twenty people were in relationships lasting no longer than 5 years (but longer than a year), 10 between 5 and 10 years, and 20 for more than 10 years. More than half of the participants had raised children (20 women and 8 men).

Within the **ethnographic study**, families were closely observed (5–8 hours daily) by a team of ethnographers (who often lived with them) for 30 days, during which the family members were interviewed several times together and separately (for more, see Mizielińska, Stasińska 2021). Only during this stage of the project, 127 thematic interviews were undertaken. The research sample consisted of 42 adult participants (12 female and 9 male couples) and 8 children. All the men declared as gay, 10 women declared as lesbian, 4 as bisexual, and the rest as other sexualities. Most of the participants (14) were less than 30, 22 were less than 40, 6 participants were 41–50 years old; 32 participants had higher education, 6 secondary, and 4 vocational. Most of the families (14) lived in cities, 6 in towns, 1 family lived in the country. About half of the relationships (11) lasted 2–10 years, 10 lasted for more than 10 years, and the longest lasted 21 years.

FGIs were organised in 3 different locations throughout Poland (Warsaw, Cracow, and Gdańsk) to enable diverse sampling. Altogether 22 FGIs were conducted in which 153 persons took part, including 113 women, 40 men; 128 adults and 25 children. There were 5 FGIs with non-heterosexual biological mothers, 4 FGIs with non-heterosexual social mothers, 1 FGI with non-heterosexual fathers, 4 FGIs with children raised by same-sex couples (in 4 different age groups: 7–9 y.o., 10–13 y.o., 14–17y.o., and 18+ y.o.). Three FGIs with parents of persons living in same-sex unions, 3FGIs with siblings of persons living in same-sex relationships and 2 FGIs with persons 55+ having a same-sex partner (1 with men and 1 with women).

In the project, **the perspective of children** was included in the ethnographic study and FGIs. In the ethnographic part, 6 families with children participated. Two couples raised children up to 2 years of age – as they were

too young to complete the research tasks, the researchers focused on their observation. Two couples raised 18-year-old sons, but only one of them decided to participate in the research. Two families with adolescent children (under 12) took part: Irena and Dominika raised their daughter Gabrysia and Bożena and Marzena – 4 children – Nadia, Wika, Jacuś, and Adaś. In their case, apart from the daily observation of children, it was possible to carry out some research tasks with them, appropriately adapted to their cognitive competencies.

The FGIs were conducted with the participation of children raised by same-sex couples in 4 age groups: 7–9, 10–13, 14–16, as well as those over 18 years of age. All children came from lesbian stepfamilies, and only 1 adult woman had a gay father; however, she was brought up by her mother after her parent's separation. Each interview was adjusted to the age and needs of the participants, and constituted, in a sense, a separate research tool. Despite significant differences in the methodological approaches applied to individual groups, all interviews contained some common elements (e.g., questions about everyday family practices, relationships with parents' families of origin, social mother roles, or contact with peer communities).

All participants gave informed consent. In the case of children, they were informed by their parents who officially gave their consent. All interviews were anonymised (i.e., not only the names were anonymised but also details from their biographical trajectory to avoid possible recognition; also their "family maps" were reconstructed and anonymised). During all the qualitative stages, a process of thematic coding was deployed, which has its roots in grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). We used MaxQDA software to facilitate the whole process. We developed the coding tree, which was then tested independently by members of the research team. Afterwards, the coding tree was modified for each part of the research as new issues/themes started to appear and demanded different codes. We also used *in vivo* coding that emphasises the actual spoken words of the informant.

Ethics and Positionality

The ethical dimension of this challenging research was essential. Using mixed and multi-method approach meant different challenges connected to investigation and disclosure of layers of subjectivity and aspects of familiar life and relations. It also meant different ethical concerns related to each method. In all stages, however, given the sensitivity of the research topic, particular attention was paid to the issues of disclosure, confidentiality, and the degree of anonymity. As a result, many precautions were undertaken in honour of the trusting research relationship. The closest for my team's understanding of the research ethics was the feminist idea of "ethics of care" that implies not only respecting basic rules of an ethical research (Atkinson and Hammersley 2010; Atkinson 2009) but also paying particular attention to researching vulnerable groups (Elam and Fenton 2003) and the

degree to which research intrudes on individuals' private life (Brannen 2013, 1988; Edwards and Mauthner 2002) which is especially pertinent in family research. Usually, most of the empirical researchers in the field tend to work *with* formalised ethical codes (Daly 2007) since they know that addressing the complexity of possible "ethically important moments" (Rooney 2015) may be impossible. In the feminist ethics of care model, the researcher is committed to the work and caring for the research participants. Therefore it enhances knowledge production but also the researchers' integrity (Edwards and Mauthner 2002).

In all stages of the research, I felt that my project had political value for me and the whole LGBTQ community in Poland. Hence, in such a context, the responsibility to conduct ethical research had even greater importance. In Polish social sciences, there is no need to receive approval from the ethics committee when doing empirical qualitative studies within disciplines such as sociology and ethnography. However, it is necessary for disciplines such as psychology. Although the project had an interdisciplinary character, it was sociological primarily. Consequently, when conducting research, we developed an ethical code that was a guideline for all the parties who took part in the research. It was based on guidelines contained in ethical codes prepared by professional, scientific societies such as the Polish Sociological Association, the Polish Psychological Association, the British Sociological Association, and the American Anthropological Association that regarded not only handling issues of anonymity and confidentially, but also relationships with research participants during and after the fieldwork.

In the process of analysing and disseminating data, I particularly cared where, what, and in what shape I publish/present or how it may be understood in a different context. I apply different rules when publishing/presenting in Polish and in English, in less accessible academic journals, scientific books, and more obtainable mainstream media to protect informants' individual identities. Therefore, I undertake multiple strategies of anonymisation to present the family lives of the informants in such a way that enables avoiding their possible recognition. It does not mean that I restrict my interpretation and/or characterisation or sanitise it in order to show a more ideal picture. In Poland, I often use this opportunity to show the ordinary character of non-heterosexual families to debunk homophobic stereotypes and prejudices, still popular in the mainstream.

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