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The Polish Experience of Institutionalized Homo-, Bi-, and Transphobia

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# Psychotherapy in the Shadow of Shame

## The Polish Experience of Institutionalized Homo-, Bi-, and Transphobia

DANIEL BĄK



Daniel Rycharski, *Scarecrows*, 2018–2019. Sculpture, found objects.

Rycharski's constructions allude to the countryside motif of different kinds of strange figures and scarecrows put in the fields to deter wild animals. "Rycharski's *Frights* serve as an alternative archive attesting to the presence of bodies that don't fit within the narrowly-defined confines of identity." Cloths used in this project come from LGBT+ people, who experience day-to-day discrimination. The constructions are equipped with additional objects, for example, razor wire, making a link with torture and violence. *Frights* personify social fears. However, they are also Rycharski's attempt to create his own space for practicing faith in his own way. His work refers not only to Catholicism, but also to every religion oppressing otherness. (Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, <http://rycharski.artmuseum.pl/en/serie/0/strachy>.)

*Today you gazed at me, that spell  
is why I choose to live on.  
God bless you who remind me simply  
of the earth and sky and Adam.*

Excerpt from a poem by Paul Goodman (1994, 115)

Poland has yearned for the fellowship of modern democracies, those countries that respect diversity and human rights, and has been a European Union (EU) member since 2004. Over the years, however, Poland has turned into a stunningly homo-, bi-, and transphobic country (ILGA-Europe 2021). These phobic attitudes toward gender, sexuality, and relationship diversity (GSRD) have taken an institutionalized form of vicious legislative or administrative actions adopted by the Polish Parliament, state government, and local governments across the country. The situation worsened significantly after the 2015 parliamentary election, which was won by a coalition of right-wing conservative parties with the nationalistic and populist Law and Justice (PiS) in the lead. PiS politicians have fueled the anti-EU and anti-immigration moods in Polish society and the anti-COVID 19 vaccination movement, and they present themselves as protectors of traditional family, marriage, and the Catholic faith. Such a political agenda has easily resulted in the strong polarization among Polish citizenry. People say there are “two Polands”: one is anti-European, anti-intellectual, traditionally Catholic; and the second pro-European and more liberal and leftist. The needs, expectations, and rights of the Polish LGBT+ community have long been marginalized. For instance, civil partnerships of same-gender couples were not legally recognized before 2015 (just as they are not recognized at the time of this writing). However, when PiS and its coalition partners took over the government, it marked a turning point in terms of normalizing homo-, bi-, and transphobic hatred. Right-wing parties introduced a new quality of oppression into public life. They demonstrated overtly that it was acceptable to stigmatize, marginalize, and hate Polish LGBT+ citizens. This deterioration of LGBT+ rights was consolidated when PiS and its partners won the election again in 2019. Furthermore, Andrzej Duda, the PiS-nominated Polish President since 2015, has given his signature to almost every legislation passed in the right-wing-dominated Parliament.

## Homo-, Bi-, and Transphobia: Examples from the Polish Field

*Nobody likes to be rejected, but there is a way of rejecting someone that accords him his right to exist and is the next best thing to accepting him. I have rarely enjoyed this treatment.*

(Goodman 1994, 105)

The first veto of the newly elected Polish President Andrzej Duda in 2015 effectively blocked the Act on Gender Recognition. The act was expected to simplify the gender recognition procedure, which in Poland still assumes suing one's own parents<sup>1</sup> (Makarewicz-Marcinkiewicz 2019, 27–29). Shortly afterward, in 2016, a new minister of justice, Zbigniew Ziobro, stopped legislation against hate speech (Kośmiński 2016a), and the Polish Parliament also rejected another law authored by the opposition party, which would have protected one's gender and/or sexuality against hate speech (Kośmiński 2016b). The most current example of cruel and body-

subduing legislation on the state level is a so-called abortion ban, one of the strictest among birth control laws in Europe. According to the verdict of the Constitutional Tribunal (January 2021), a pregnant person, despite the presence of severe fetal defects, has to give birth (Kwai, Pronczuk, and Magdziarz 2021). As the verdict constitutes binding national law, it means that every individual with a uterus lost the right to determine their reproductive plans and control over their own body.

LGBT+ directed loathing, modeled by the state government, started permeating legislation of local governments across Poland. In the fall of 2020, nearly a third of the country adopted resolutions against the so-called “LGBT ideology.” Formally, those resolutions were aimed at the protection of traditionally heteronormative defined families, based on the notion that the Polish family suffers a constant threat from LGBT+ people. Soon, those Polish municipalities also became known to the world as “LGBT-free zones” (Ash 2020).

The Catholic Church in Poland has always had an important influence in public life as well as in state politics. There is little separation between church and state. After the 2015 right-wing election, Catholic Church dignitaries assumed a broader engagement on the political stage. The most emblematic example is the archbishop of Kraków, Marek Jędraszewski. In his homily from August 2019, he used the phrase “the rainbow plague” to describe the current LGBT+ emancipation efforts in Poland, making an explicit link to the so-called “red plague of Marxism and Bolshevism” in Polish history (Ash 2020). A similar dehumanizing maneuver was used once again by Andrzej Duda in his second presidential campaign in 2020 when he said: “They try to convince us that these [LGBT+ community] are people, but it is simply an ideology” (Tilles 2020a).

Hostility and prejudice toward LGBT+ people, beginning at the state and church level, have seeped into municipalities and the Polish citizenry. In August 2019, a homemade bomb was found by the police among opponents of the Pride March in the city of Lublin. The bomb combined gas containers with firecrackers. According to an expert witness, the explosive device would have compromised the health or even lives of many of the march’s participants. A married couple who brought the bomb to the march was sentenced to merely one year of imprisonment (TVN24 News in English 2020).

## My Gay Citizenship in Poland

*There is a kind of political meaning, I guess, in the fact that there are so many types of attractive human beings; ...*

(Goodman 1994, 109)

I am an accredited Gestalt psychotherapist and a relational supervisor in training. I live and work in Warsaw, Poland. I am a cisgender person: I was assigned male at birth and experience myself as a man; however, my gender role presentation tends to be diverse. I do not meet some of the undisputable sociocultural expectations that men in Poland are faced with. Instead, my expression has frequently shifted toward more stereotypically feminine ways of relating. For example, I express my feelings explicitly, try to stay aware of my emotional states, and let them guide me through the

complexities of relationships with others. Moreover, I perceive myself as part of the interconnected relational field, where my existence stays strongly linked to what happens in the relational context around me. For the record, this emotional, relational, and communal thinking, what I consider to be feminine, was brought into the general psychotherapy field by Gestalt therapy as well as by Jung. Everything I mention here is considered acceptable by the dominant heteronormative culture. Everything, that is, but my psychosexual needs.

I am attracted to men, which—in the most common narrative on sexual orientation—makes me a gay person. After having considered factors in favor and against this label, I decided to adopt it. It was a pragmatic choice. The gay identity makes me relatively intelligible to others and seals my LGBT+ membership, which is dear to me. My theoretical stance is more constructionist than essentialist. I understand that notions of sexual orientations are sexual identities, constructed in a given historical time and space, and not objective qualities of a biological realm. Neither does the “gay” label embrace my whole life experience, nor was I “born this way.” The label describes my process of *selfing* (self-process) at the *contact boundary* with the environment. This last notion draws on the Gestalt theory of self (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman 1951/2006, 372–374). The founders of the Gestalt approach considered the contact boundary a true *locus* of self. Self is constantly emerging from a contact between the organism (person) and the environment. It belongs neither to the organism nor the environment, but is a characteristic of the boundary itself. As the organism and the environment constantly change, the process of selfing continues, giving uninterrupted rise to alternating states of self. And this is how a sense of my gayness continues to emerge. I am taking a ready-to-use, societally constructed label, and I am giving it a unique meaning that grows out of my bodily constitution, life experiences, and cultural narratives on gender, sexuality, and sex. I am tagging myself “gay” with the very here-and-now meaning inscribed in the label, and such a meaning may change over time. This glimmering process of selfing around sexual identity does not necessarily mean that I would de-identify from being gay or become heterosexual. My psychosexual needs are deeply rooted in my body. Parenthetically, this embodied rootedness of one’s psychosexual longings makes the conversion therapy and ex-gay movement a fraud. What is biologically and bodily founded in sexual identity cannot be baffled by conversion attempts. Nonetheless, I cannot be sure how psychosexual needs like mine will be framed by culture in the future. Presently, the so-called pro-life movement in Poland, supported by right-wing politicians and the Catholic Church, strives to strengthen a narrative that equates homosexuality and pedophilia (Tilles 2020b).

As I mentioned before, different dimensions of my gendered and sexual self would be accepted by the heteronormative majority in Poland, but probably not my sexual identity. Calling myself “gay” evokes shame instantly. I have been shamed for not aligning with heteronormative demands since childhood for my gender nonconforming behaviors, and much later, for my interest in men. I had to face homophobia from my long-term psychotherapist (my homosexual desire and needs were questioned and “father hunger” implied accordingly to outdated psychoanalytic theories) and some psychotherapy teachers (approval of so-called conversion therapies, offensive words about homosexuality and homosexual clients, and claims

that child sexual abuse may be an important factor of homosexual identity development), which always resulted in unbearable shame. More current examples of homophobia-driven discrimination and hatred include having objects thrown at me on the street and being insulted on public transportation. Psychotherapy as an institution confronted me with homophobia in its version defined by Pierre Bourdieu as “symbolic violence” (Świerszcz 2013, 38–39). Violence on the streets was less sophisticated with its physical and verbal attacks.

Poland is a shame-driven and shame-evoking environment for LGBT+ citizens. This shame experienced by both myself and my clients is related to the previous description of homo-, bi-, and transphobic actions undertaken by the Polish state. There is a contact boundary with stigma, shame, and hatred going back and forth between the organism and the environment. This is a two-way flow, the circulation of which fosters internalized homo-, bi-, and transphobia in LGBT+ people.

## Shame as a Regulator of the Relational Field

*I don't complain that my passes are not accepted; nobody has a claim to be loved (except small children). But I am degraded for making the passes at all, for being myself.*

(Goodman 1994, 105)

Robert G. Lee (1996, 5–8), a Gestalt theorist and psychotherapist, infers the Gestalt theory of shame from Silvan S. Tomkins's work (1963). For Tomkins, shame is a key regulator of affects he calls *interest-excitement* and *enjoyment-joy*, the affects that make life more enlivened, passionate, and driven by emotional impulses than thoughtful consideration. They relate to our desires, hopes, fantasies, and cravings; they sustain our appetite for life. Lee concludes, in accordance with Tomkins, that by evolution, shame is “a natural process of retroflection, or holding back, that serves a protective function throughout life. It guards our privacies around such areas as friendship, love, spirituality, sex, birth, and death” (1996, 6). A deeply relational nature of shame is obvious. Indeed, shame appears only in the context of a relationship. Even when we stay alone, in solitude, shame can find its way through our relationship with our own feelings, beliefs, thoughts, or principles (7).

The Gestalt model relies on field theory by Kurt Lewin (1953). The field encompasses the experience of both oneself and one's environment, understood together as a relational whole. It means that basic tenets of Gestalt theory are clearly relational, making shame a likely regulator of interactions in the field. Indeed, to grow and develop, enough support from the field is needed. According to Tomkins (1963), frustration in the field results in shame. Lee explains plainly the consequences of severe frustration:

Shame is the experience that what is me is not acceptable, that this is not my world. As such, shame signifies a rupture (or threat of a rupture) between the individual's needs and goals on the one hand and environmental receptivity to those needs and goals on the other. There is a breakdown (or threat of a breakdown) in the self-process, the process of organizing the field into self and other. Under these conditions, resolution of the field can be accomplished only through distortion of the self-other boundary: *the need that is not received by the other is disowned*



*and made “not me.”* Thus, the field is brought back into alignment through *shaming* and, in the process, *disowning* the unacceptable need (establishing a linkage between shame and the need that is not supported by the other or by the environment). (1996, 9)

Shame is a crucial regulator at the boundary between the organism and its environment. Those two ground conditions of the field—shame and its opposite, support—inform us about the possibility of contact in the field. When shame prevails over support, it is a signal to withdraw. On the other hand, enough support encourages us to take risks, stay at the edge of experience and therefore grow (Lee 1996, 10).

Undoubtedly, the president of Poland, the ruling Law and Justice party, local politicians, and the Catholic Church clergy have sent a devastating message to LGBT+ citizens: what you are is not acceptable; this is not your world/country. It is acutely shaming. There is a strong threatening linkage between shame and LGBT+ personhood. In such a situation, capitulating to the influence of the field may create the outcome of disowning one's LGBT+ identity (Lee 1996, 9). Step-by-step disavowal of one's own homo-, bi-, or trans-self culminates in the sharp increase of minority stress and grave psychological consequences. This exasperating situation for the LGBT+ citizenry in Poland must be translated into a call for action. This appeal is directed also to psychotherapists. The Gestalt model gives a theory, tools, encouragement to act, and hope for sociocultural change to every Gestalt practitioner (and client). For those not associated with the Gestalt tradition, the model contributes to the psychotherapeutics of gender, sexuality, dignity, self-respect, sense of freedom, ability to love, self-acceptance, and how these develop over a lifetime.

## A Psychotherapist as an Activist

*I act that “the society I live in is mine,” the title of one of my books. I regard the President as my public servant whom I pay, and I berate him as a lousy employee. I am more Constitutional than the Supreme Court. And in the face of the gross illegitimacy of the [United States] Government—with its Vietnam War, military-industrial cabal, and C.I.A.—I come on as an old-fashioned patriot, neither supine nor more revolutionary than is necessary for my modest goals. This is a quixotic position. Sometimes I sound like Cicero.*

(Goodman 1994, 108–109)

A processual character of self-formation (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman 1951/2006) and field theory (Lewin 1953) are core components of Gestalt therapy. Together they constitute a useful tool to expose and validate political and social dysfunctions as causative factors in the formation of one's mental health difficulties (Aylward 2018, 30). Since the self is *of* the boundary between the person and environment, it means that environmental components—like those shaping a person's sociocultural background, for example, dominant narratives on gender, sexuality, or acceptable forms of romantic and/or sexual relationships—continuously influence self-formation. The very fabric of self has been woven with political and social threads present in the field. Their clinical importance is then apparent.

Sociopolitical matters have informed Gestalt therapy's theory and practice significantly from the very beginning, especially through Paul Goodman's contribution. He implemented anarchistic ideas into clinical work. This is how one of Gestalt therapy's basic tenets—a concept of organismic self-regulation—emerged (Aylward 2018, 22). Jack Aylward summarizes it clearly:

Anarchistic theory proposes that all restraints imposed on people arise primarily from the laws of nature. Given the self-regulative tendency of the human organism, there is little need nor desire for much in the way of external control beyond that point, particularly those exercised through authoritarian structures. (2018, 29)

Thus, individuals are able to regulate themselves—their behavior and feelings—on the grounds of anatomy, physiology, and uninterrupted access to the environment. Any serious restrictions imposed on the person or the environment, for example, by politicians, will distract this self-regulatory tendency. Poland is a toxic environment for many LGBT+ persons. The political becomes the personal easily and imperceptibly. Politics invades the bodies and souls of Polish LGBT+ citizens. External oppression is being incorporated, giving rise to internalized homo-, bi-, and transphobia. Violent social attitudes are being inscribed into LGBT+ bodies. In my professional experience, this embodiment of dominant culture (Clemmens and Bursztyn 2005, 211–213) and its political outcomes can be recognized, for instance, in a variety of sexual difficulties in gay men. Our body armor, which has been toughened by internalized homophobia, is unable to soften enough to allow sexual and emotional intimacy with other men.

Not only bodies but also LGBT+ souls suffer from the pervasive hatred aimed at the LGBT+ community in Poland. In an online survey among young nonheterosexual people ( $n = 276$ , 13–19 years old) in Poland, 80.4 percent of them declared suicidal thoughts, 17.0 percent reported a single suicidal attempt, and 20.7 percent revealed having attempted suicide more than once (Kołodziej, Kołodziej, and Hartung-Wójciak 2020, 72–73, 76–77). Even keeping in mind the limitations of online research, these figures give a seriously disturbing picture of mental health in the young nonheterosexual population. Among other things, the participants of the survey spoke of their willingness to leave Poland and start a new life elsewhere. They also expressed hope of Poland becoming a more tolerant country for LGBT+ people in the future.

Being anarchist and queer himself, Paul Goodman would most likely be more than flabbergasted by the Polish state's efforts to control the lives of LGBT+ individuals. Up-to-date research-based sexual education is absent from the Polish school, leaving nonheteronormative children and adolescents without greatly needed support. In family life, civil partnership and marriage are not available for same-gender couples; unions legalized abroad are not recognized in Poland; surrogacy is not legally defined; and adoption by same-gender couples is impossible in practice. In the realm of desire—in spite of homosexuality having been formally depathologized a few decades ago in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) and International Classification of Diseases (ICD)—so-called conversion therapies have strong advocates among key Polish politicians and members of the Bishops' Conference. Clearly, in such circumstances, the organismic self-regulation, as postulated by Gestalt theory, is futile or at least hardly achievable. Instead of obtaining various forms of support, LGBT+ citizens in Poland are marginalized and strictly controlled under the guise of righteous legislation.



Having said that, I second Jack Aylward in his claim for a Gestalt psychotherapist being “a psychosocial activist” (together, actually, with a client in the same role; Aylward 2018, 55). For him it means that “the therapist plays a dual role in directing awareness to both the healing of personal and social disruption, thereby momentarily taking on the role of social activist, in the service of restoring an individual’s innate self-regulative potential” (41). He regards it as a paradigm with a new opportunity to design clinical interventions aimed at both psychological and social reform (54). For some professionals merging clinical practice with social reform may sound preposterous. However, arguing that the sociopolitical domain be separated from psychotherapy for the sake of proper clinical practice sounds hypocritical.

Psychotherapy seems to be entangled in social issues and politics in at least two ways. First, psychotherapists are active players in the politics of mental health. Together with other professionals we create diagnoses, deciding on what is considered disordered or ill and what is not. The vicissitudes of such diagnoses like homosexuality, transvestic fetishism/fetishistic transvestism, or gender identity disorder/transsexualism in DSM and ICD show how research and patient narratives from everyday life may not be enough to overcome sociocultural biases based on prejudice and stereotypes. Second, psychotherapists co-create the politics of possible/available/acceptable identities, with gender, sexual, and relationship identities among them. I try to be mindful of all these issues while working with clients. I tend to direct clients’ attention to personal and sociocultural phenomena to help them restore their capacity to self-regulate. What is more, I am aware of what I would call “a clinician’s privilege,” the one associated with the power of specialist clinical knowledge and possibility to diagnose. With clinical labels “in hand” I am responsible for their ethical use, as assigning them to clients can change clients’ life context completely, leading to stigmatization or, on the contrary, self-empowerment. This is my privilege: I co-create clients’ life experience from a position of authority, protected by the way mental health professions are seen by the public—as objective tools to understand and support human psyche. It seems I have become a psychosocial activist.

## **LGBT+ Social Activism and Shame-Driven Relational Field**

*Yet it is true that an evil of the hardship and danger of queer life in our society, as with any situation of scarcity and starvation, is that we become obsessional and one-track-minded about it.*

(Goodman 1994, 114–115)

This year I was invited to be a panelist in a webinar on psychotherapists’ and clients’ self-care management in LGBT+ hostile environments. I spoke about my personal and professional struggles with the Polish field, using the Gestalt shame theory as a frame. To structure my experiences for myself and participants, I compiled a list of my own various self supports. To my surprise, the list included only examples of shame-coping mechanisms (deflection, rage, control, striving for power, internal withdrawal, and denial). At first, I was perplexed, because, by definition, shame-coping mechanisms serve to disconnect oneself from unbearable shame (Lee 1996, 6–7). From Gestalt theory’s point of view, shame-coping mechanisms keep shame unconscious, and as a result, shame cannot be directly supported and then healed. I judged

myself with thoughts of being an immature psychotherapist: I should be able to confront my own shame. But later, at the moment of self-tenderness, I realized that I do live through insufferable shame on a daily basis. Obviously, I have been coping for years. Interestingly, I was still able to see my listed actions and thoughts as important ways of self-support, for instance, always expecting unconditional respect for me and my sexual identity instead of mere tolerance (rage) or temporarily stopping reading the latest news from Poland (internal withdrawal).

How is it possible if shame-coping mechanisms, through permanent shame avoidance, should lead to lack of acknowledgment for shame itself and underlying needs? I hypothesize that shame-coping mechanisms may still be supportive but only to people who have already worked with their shame. Then experiences like rage or internal withdrawal can be internalized in hindsight as compassion and protection for one's suffering self in the relational field governed by shame. I try to confront my shame on a regular basis with my own psychotherapist and important others. They support my coming face-to-face with my shame. Shame permeates my life experiences as an LGBT+ person. I am aware that my psychosocial activism in psychotherapy is hugely directed at the LGBT+-shaming relational field. Under such circumstances two essential questions arise: to what extent does shame inform LGBT+ activism in Poland, and how does it influence clinical work?

### ***Who Wins When Love Wins?***

*Given the usual coldness and fragmentation of community life at present, my hunch is that homosexual promiscuity enriches more lives than it desensitizes.*

(Goodman 1994, 111)

For many people love is an obligatory condition for having sex. Only feelings of love, a sense of attachment and commitment to a relationship, seem to justify sexual activity between people. Nevertheless, sex and love do not necessarily coincide. Such is the case among asexual people living in sexless relationships who love their partners, or people of diverse gender and/or sexual identities who have casual sex only for pleasure and play. Narratives about the importance of love, marriage, and family are common in the Polish LGBT+ activist movement and among fellow LGBT+ community members. They undoubtedly reflect the needs of some LGBT+ people, although surely not all of them. Why are they so prevalent then? Attempting to answer this question, I will focus on male homosexuality, for I identify as homosexual myself and gay men are the majority of my clients. In the presence of same-gender desire, love is only one of many interpersonal qualities that can occur. In the activist discourse, however, homosexuality seems to be frequently reduced to love only. Probably, one could be persuaded to accept this strategy due to its pragmatic approach. Indeed, love is not easy to marginalize, pathologize, or sneer at, and consequently the heteronormative majority might be convinced to look upon homosexuality in a more accepting way.

Nonetheless, I propose the explanation for equating homosexuality and love should be deepened. I suggest that the "love focus" also helps to avoid shame. First, it helps one to escape shaming by the heteronormative majority. Second, it helps to suppress self-shaming that results

from internalized homophobia. Third, it helps to bypass shaming by other members of the LGBT+ community (for instance, the fairly common slut-shaming among gay men). Establishing love as the key value serves the purpose of hiding sexuality and lust. Mainstream descriptions of male gayness by the heteronormative majority and nonheteronormative minority are saturated with sexual drive, fantasies, and pure lust. But for social projects this picture seems to be sanitized with silent hope for approval from the heteronormative majority. Male homosexuality may signify, for example, monogamous relationships, parenthood, a nuclear family, or love understood in a conventional/mainstream way. However, it may also signify multiple sexual partners, only-for-pleasure/fun sex in the form of barebacking, kink, or dark-rooms adventures—in short, everything that disgusts the heteronormative Social Narrator (dominant culture) and a homophobic and/or sex phobic part of the LGBT+ community.

So who wins when love wins? Since being able to love and set up a family became a proof of humanity in contemporary Poland, I find proving my humanity to the heteronormative majority a deeply shaming and dehumanizing process. Human fellowship of LGBT+ people should be unquestioned. Love and family are by no means the only or major way to embrace the whole LGBT+ community with its diversity of gender and sexual identities, forms of relationships, or ability and readiness to love. As expected, however, “the love narrative” has not won physical and emotional safety, social respect, and support in Poland. I can see how it drives self-stigmatization of LGBT+ people and shaming inside the LGBT+ community. The winner seems to be hardly identifiable.

### *The Affirmative Approach as a Lack of Psychotherapeutic Depth?*

*St. Thomas, who was a grand moral philosopher though a poor metaphysician, says that the chief human use of sex—as distinguished from the natural law of procreation—is to get to know other persons intimately. That has been my experience.*

(Goodman 1994, 110)

Having been a psychotherapy teacher for many years with Polish and international students, I have observed a worrying phenomenon. When it comes to gender and sexuality, psychotherapists, declaring themselves to be LGBT+ affirmative, and LGBT+ activists quite frequently behave alike. They perceive the client's gender and sexuality only through the prism of the here-and-now client's declaration, as if gender and sexuality did not have their own history in the client's biography and as if there was no possibility for further identity evolution. When gender and sexuality are understood in this way, they become a subject of psychotherapeutic or activist intervention, without any additional need for understanding and reflection. As a result, what from a Gestalt perspective is a process (gendering, selfing around sexuality) is petrified in a form of a stable trait. It seems that the LGBT+ affirmative approach may, for some practitioners, denote a lack of psychotherapeutic depth and reflection. I have found that my questions to students or supervisees about their client's gender and/or sexuality were recognized at times as improper and an attack on a client and their identity. I understand this as a shame-driven process. In the homo-, bi- and transphobic environment, some might feel that a question

about a client's gender or sexual history may create polarization and indicate that the concerns are directed at "repairing" what is seen as defective. In response, strongly essentialist narratives, such as "I was born this way," are forced. Surely, life-long unchanging nonheteronormative gender and sexual identities are experienced by some, but not everyone. However, such solid and immutable statements occur to thwart any further questions or attempts to manipulate one's gender or sexuality. In such circumstances two different LGBT+ needs must interfere with each other: longing for physical and emotional safety in a hateful environment ("I was born this way. Leave me alone!") and craving to freely express and live their gender and sexual selves. It creates an uncanny blend of modern essentialism and postmodern fluidity. From a paradigmatic point of view, it must result in failure (Aristotle's principle of noncontradiction). A ban on questions and curiosity is dangerously apsychochemical.

However, according to Gestalt theory, every psychological characteristic is a process shaped at the organism/environment boundary. Such also is the case with gender and sexuality, which must have their own histories in the life of every person. In-depth work on one's gender and sexual autobiography can bring a sense of congruency, especially to those with significant doubts about identity. Above all, psychotherapy is a way of searching for the healing meanings and narratives. It can be damaging and dangerous to LGBT+ clients when unrecognized homo-, bi-, and transphobia influence a psychotherapy process. When shame is a primary psychological issue, an LGBT+ client feels they must fight for themselves (occasionally battling against LGBT+ fellows). Sometimes also an LGBT+ affirmative psychotherapist or supervisee takes on the role of a client's protector, especially if they are LGBT+ individuals themselves. Instead of engaging in these shame-driven dynamics, the affirmative approach is a way of working with a client where shame is revealed, named, and healed with support. Furthermore, I appreciate a formulation of the affirmative stance given by the American Psychological Association in the context of ego-dystonic homosexuality (2009, 60): "An affirmative approach is supportive of clients' identity development without an a priori treatment goal for how clients identify or live out their sexual orientation." It assumes a psychotherapeutic encounter being radically respectful of the client's process.

I understand the psychotherapist's role as being the client's companion on the journey, the one whose efforts and interventions are based on scientific knowledge and high ethical standards. This companionship does not invest in any specific psychotherapy goal associated with gender or sexuality and rejects the harmful practice of gender/sexuality conversion and repair. Such a psychotherapist is a safe object to a client. A psychotherapist hopefully keeps an affirmative stance in a way typical of a therapeutic position, being a supportive and compassionate observer of the client's process.

## What Would C. G. Jung Think of Me?

In the intrinsically homo-, bi-, and transphobic Poland I intend to be a psychotherapist-psychosocial activist. I hope to reveal the social importance of shame as a factor shaping one's capacity for contacting and self-regulation in the relational field. A way to understand

Jung's alchemical *calcinatio* is as: "All thoughts, deeds, and memories that carry shame, guilt, or anxiety need to be given full expression. The affect liberated becomes the fire that can dry out the complex and purify it of its unconscious contamination" (The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, n.d.). When I try to translate the Gestalt realm into the Jungian one, "a shadow practitioner" seems to be a proper counterpart for "a psychosocial activist." For Jungian analysts a shadow

represents what the ego has disavowed, repressed, or disregarded as unworthy . . . . Another way to think about the shadow is that it represents all of our un-lived life from when we were born—this could be what we perceive as either negative or positive aspects of ourselves. In some cultures, the shadow is viewed as the "bad part" of the person that is feared, while in Western culture it is viewed as what we project onto others and are unwilling to own as ours. (Swan-Foster 2018, 41)

In the context of this article I understand a shadow practitioner as someone who helps to uncover shame, which is part of the individual and collective shadow. A psychosocial activist serves as a connection between the personal in a client and the sociopolitical domain of the field. Having this in mind, I would consider a shadow practitioner being more concerned with the collective shadow than the personal one. In terms of working through shame, a self-aware shadow practitioner practices shadowing as in guiding, supporting, or accompanying someone.

The immanent beauty of the word *shadowing* emerged to me instantly while I was looking for a word to describe the action of restoring hope and personal growth in the shame shadow. I understand shadowing as a deeply relational process in which a psychotherapist who knows their own shame and has truly worked through it, is able to teach a client how and where to look for environmental and self-support. However, shadowing can be more reciprocal than this one-direction teaching/learning mode. Shadowing assumes the existence of the one who learns and the one who teaches. Notably, a psychotherapist and client can take on any of those roles. A client can also teach their psychotherapist how to manage shame.

Shadowing, as a reciprocal process, could have one more meaning rooted deeply in the psyches of the psychotherapeutic dyad. A psychotherapist projects their shame shadow onto a client and *vice versa* (not necessarily at the same time), becoming each other's shadows. It opens an opportunity for growth for both parties. In a shadowing dance individual projections can be untangled through genuinely relational work over the course of sessions. These dancers may need support from the psychotherapist's supervision. Shadowing in each of its forms brings the unconscious to consciousness, which may make the client's life lighter and simpler. A good example would be a psychotherapist exposing the sociopolitical mechanisms of medicalization to a client. For example, many homosexual individuals (maybe the psychotherapist as well?) have fallen victim to the medicalization of homosexuality, where the social phenomenon of same-gender attraction "was transferred" to the domain of medicine and became a diagnosis for decades (was medicalized). Once the origins of self-hatred are externalized, the client feels relief and can own all their parts.

The Polish collective shadow consists of homo-, bi-, transphobia, sex phobia, and misogyny—understood as hatred not only toward women but also the feminine in general. Politicians try to obscure those prejudices from the EU and this part of the Polish society for which

democracy and human rights are indispensable values. Some aspects of the collective shadow are directly projected onto the LGBT+ community. The individuation process is a rough challenge when you are an LGBT+ citizen in Poland. Psychosocial activists (the Gestalt realm) or shadow practitioners (the Jungian realm) provide indispensable support. I hope I am one of them. Paul Goodman would second me on this endeavor. And Jung, hopefully, would understand how it feeds my Soul.

#### ENDNOTE

1. “Legal gender recognition procedure ... is not based [on] self-determination. It is a peculiar example of a procedure, which has not been regulated in legal provisions but is based solely on the precedent judgments of the Polish Supreme Court. A person applying for a legal gender reassignment has to bring a civil lawsuit against their parents based on [article] 189 Code of Civil Procedure. According to this article the plaintiff may demand that the court determine the existence or non-existence of a right where they have legal interest therein. Where either parent is dead or cannot join the proceedings, a curator (appointed to act on behalf and in best interest of a person without legal capacity or absent) is involved. Final court decision is the basis for correcting an entry in the relevant Civil Register Office records by making an additional remark in birth certificate. In other words, no new certificate is created, only amendments are made to the existing one” (Knut 2018, 79).

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#### ABSTRACT

The author reviews current examples of institutionalized homo-, bi-, and transphobia expressed by right-wing politicians and the Catholic Church in Poland. He uses the Gestalt theory of shame to understand the psychological consequences of this systemic oppression and analyzes internalized homo-, bi-, and transphobia; "the love focus" in activist narratives on homosexuality; and the lack of psychotherapeutic depth when working through gender and/or sexuality issues with clients. A psychotherapist's role as a psychosocial activist (the Gestalt realm) or shadow practitioner (the Jungian realm) is suggested as a crucial support for an LGBT+ client.

#### KEY WORDS

activism, diversity, field theory, Gestalt, gender, GSRD (gender, sex, relationship diversity), homosexuality, LGBT+, Paul Goodman, sex, sexuality, shadow, shame