

“NOT PRIVATE ENOUGH”?

HOMOPHOBIC AND INJURIOUS SPEECH IN THE LITHUANIAN MEDIA

Introduction

Periodic public opinion polls confirm that Lithuania is still one of the most homophobic societies in Europe.¹ One of the last representative surveys conducted in 2006 showed that 68.9 % of Lithuanians would not want homosexuals to work in schools and 50 % objected to their working on the police force. In this survey, 46.6 % of the Lithuanian population agreed with the statement “Homosexuals should be treated medically” and 61.5 %, with the statement “I would not want to belong to any organization that accepted homosexual members.”² These figures indicate that homophobia as an irrational fear of homosexual people which often translates into negative attitudes towards lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people (LGBT) is still rather pervasive in Lithuanian society. As scholars argue, homophobia can range from mild feelings of discomfort in the face of homosexuals to strong feelings of hatred directed towards gays and lesbians.³ Repeated public attacks against LGBT persons in both everyday life and the mass media also point to the presence of discomfort, fear and hatred toward LGBT people.

According to the pronouncements of some Lithuanian politicians and public figures, LGBT people can express their identities and sexualities only in certain places and spaces and to certain people. They must lead strictly compartmentalized private and public lives. Homosexuality is acceptable only as long as it remains private.

The events of May 2007 once again confirmed this view. The Mayor of Vilnius did not issue a permit for the Lithuanian LGBT to celebrate the “Rainbow Days” and to display a rainbow flag on May 25th. This event was to be a part of the wider campaign “For Diversity. Against Discrimination” organized by the European Commission. The European Commission and the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman of the Republic of Lithuania condemned this decision by the Mayor of Vilnius.

¹ *Sexual Orientation Discrimination in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia* (Vilnius: OSI & Kimeta Society 2002); *Homofobija ir diskriminavimas Lietuvoje* (Vilnius: LGL, 2003).

² This representative survey entitled “Discrimination against Various Social Groups in Lithuania” was conducted by the Market and Opinion Research Centre “Vilmorus Ltd.” on July 13-16, 2006.

³ Sheela Raja and Joseph P. Stokes, “Assessing Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men: The Modern Homophobia Scale,” *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity*, 3 (2) (1998): 114.

Moreover, the Lithuanian Gay League was not allowed to display social advertisements advocating tolerance and equal opportunities. Lithuanian drivers refused to drive trolleybuses carrying advertisement with such slogans as “A gay person can serve in the police,” “A lesbian can work in a school,” and “Homosexual employees can be open and safe”. These advertisements were part of the EQUAL project “Open and Safe at Work.lt” conducted by the Lithuanian Gay League and other organizations.⁴ Once again, Lithuanian LGBT people were forced to remain hidden in their privacy. Even the slightest attempts at public visibility were prohibited.

Introduction to the Methodology of this Survey

The events of May 2007 were widely discussed in the Lithuanian mass media, particularly the press. The Lithuanian mass media are another problematic area in which the issues of LGBT people are often turned into controversy, scandal and abnormality.

This brief study will focus on discursive patterns employed by the Lithuanian press and TV to represent LGBT people during the period of February 13, 2006, to May 29, 2007. The few television programs analyzed here fall into the period from March 9, 2006, to May 21, 2007. Four mainstream Lithuanian dailies *Lietuvos Rytas* (*The Morning of Lithuania*, the biggest mainstream daily), *Respublika* (*The Republic*, a daily), *L.T.* (a tabloid) and *Vakaro žinios* (*The Evening News*, a popular tabloid), *Kauno diena* (*The Day of Kaunas*) and the free daily *15 min* (15 minutes) will be examined. The following TV programs will be covered: “Nomedas” (TV3), “Dviguba tiesa” (*Double Truth*, Channel 5), “Savaitės atgarsiai” (*Weekly Echo*, LTV2) and “Srovės” (*Currents*, LNK). Some material from the Internet portals www.balsas.lt, www.delfi.lt, www.lrytas.lt and www.bernardinai.lt will be used in this survey. The latter is known for its conservative and outright discriminatory views on homosexuality and homosexuals. Thus, the main focus will be on the Lithuanian press and Internet portals.

During the period of February 13, 2006, to May 28, 2007, Lithuanian newspapers and Internet portals carried a total of 151 news stories and reports about homosexuality and homosexuals. The greatest number appeared in *Lietuvos rytas* (21 articles; hereafter LR). *Vakaro žinios* (hereafter VŽ), a popular tabloid, was not far behind (20). *L.T.* published 14 articles,

⁴ Dalia Gudavičiūtė, “Gėjų vaivorykštė nenušvito” [The Gay Rainbow did not Shine], *Lietuvos rytas* [The Morning of Lithuania], May 12, 2007.

Respublika (hereafter R) – 11 news reports and articles, *Kauno diena* (hereafter KD) -- 4, and the free weekly *15 min* -- 4 reports. Seventy-seven reports and articles appeared on the Internet.

First, let us describe the discursive practices known as hate speech. Recommendation No. R (97)20 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Member States on “Hate Speech” provides the following definition:

The term “hate speech” shall be understood to cover “all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.”⁵

Thus, in the classic definition, “hate speech” is an expression which incites hatred, particularly racial, national, or religious. Some speech that is offensive does not constitute hate speech although it may contribute to prejudice and discrimination against LGBT people and other minorities. According to Helen Darbishire, “such speech would include the tendency by media to report the bad news about minorities when it affects the majority population (...) Equally, depicting members of minorities through clichéd and stereotyped images might be offensive but is not generally regarded as hate speech.”⁶

This study will describe how the topic of homosexuality and LGBT people has been presented and on what modes of representation the Lithuanian press and TV have been drawing when they have represented gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. Not only will it quantify the presence or absence of LGBT people and assess how they are described in the press and on TV, but it will also present a closer rhetorical and discursive analysis of images associated with them. Do any instances of Lithuanian media rhetoric qualify as hate speech? What beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, norms and values underlie the media rhetoric on LGBT people?

⁵[http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/media/4_documentary_resources/CM/Rec\(1997\)020&ExpMem_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/media/4_documentary_resources/CM/Rec(1997)020&ExpMem_en.asp)

⁶ Helen Darbishire, “Hate Speech: New European Perspectives,” <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1129> .

Patterns of Media Representation of LGBT People in Lithuania

It is possible to distinguish several patterns characteristic of the Lithuanian mass media in representing LGBT people. It should be mentioned, at the outset, that these patterns may be symptomatic of a large part of the post-Communist space.

News on LGBT as Unimportant and Often Irrelevant.

Most press coverage of the issues involving LGBT people usually consists of short, sporadic articles covering a particular event or occurrence. Much of the reporting is recycled and repetitive. Tabloids treat the issue of homosexuality as if it were the subject of light humor and entertainment. The headlines of the newspapers and Internet portals claim: “In China – the First TV Program for Gays” (www.delfi.lt, April 5, 2007) or “Folktales about Gays and Lesbians for Children” (*LR*, March 15, 2007). The Lithuanian press is particularly fond of Western and even Russian gay and allegedly gay celebrity profiles (for instance, of Elton John or Dima Bilan) which appear periodically on the pages of the dailies.⁷ The relationship between taking care of one’s body and gayness is also discussed.

The Issues of LGBT as Related to Controversy and Scandal.

The Lithuanian press tends to place LGBT persons in the context of sex sensationalism and scandal and frame stories about them in terms of controversy, violence and deviance. Press reports and some TV programs demonize gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender people and portray their relationships, lives and lifestyles as an aberration. It is suggested that they are evil creatures to be despised. The headlines of such articles tell it all: “Fight and Intrigues in the Lesbian Community” (*LR*, October 2, 2006), “Police will Investigate a Lecture on Homosexuality” (*LR*, March 24, 2007)⁸ and “A Person who has not Changed his Sex Wants a Million” (*LR*, July 25, 2006). The latter article scandalizes the important issues of gender reassignment in Lithuania. It describes a transsexual person who sued Lithuania for not allowing her to complete a gender reassignment process. A woman wanting to change her sex filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights against Lithuania and was invited to state her demands to the government during an open hearing in Strasbourg. In such scandalous incidents, most often the negative attitudes of respondents, political figures or ordinary Lithuanian citizens are cited.

⁷ See, for instance, *L. T.*, February 2, 2007.

⁸ This report features the U. S. lecturer Scott Lively and his homophobic presentation in Kaunas.

Homosexuality as a Disease and an Unnatural Deviant Practice.

The Lithuanian mass media present homosexuality as an unnatural practice unacceptable to most people. This implies that hatred and mistreatment of gays based on a perceived threat to cultural and religious norms is natural. The tabloid *Vakaro žinios* (VŽ) in particular supports this view. *Vakaro Žinios* journalists often use the words „pervert” and „capon” in the headlines of their articles. “Perverts do not Attract the Attention of the Police” (about the gay club “Men’s Factory,” VŽ, November 7, 2006), “There is no Place for Perverts in the Army” (about the head of the U.S. General Command, VŽ, March 15, 2007), “The Polish Prime-Minister – Supporter of Capons” (VŽ, March 7, 2007), “Lithuanian would not Elect Capons [to the Parliament]” (VŽ, December 8, 2006) and “Capons [gay males] Demand Female Vaccination” (VŽ, February 6, 2007) are usual headlines for this newspaper. Here gay males are called capons and pseudo-men. *L.T.*, another Lithuanian tabloid, described one of the Lithuanian gay portals calling some articles published there “a mockery of people of normal orientation.” It is symptomatic that it cited one of the Lithuanian politicians who openly ridiculed LGBT people and compared them to zoophiles: “We lack only a law defining with what animals people may have intercourse” (*L.T.*, February 8, 2007). This and many other articles imply an inevitable relation between homosexuals and zoophiles. The writer V. V. Landsbergis (the son of the famous Lithuanian politician Vytautas Landsbergis) also put gay parades and anti-family policies that LGBT people supposedly advocate in the context of zoophilia. According to him, “in the whole world, the anti-family, i. e. gay parades etc., becomes more popular. It seems that soon marriage between humans and animals will be legalized...” (www.delfi.lt, April 18, 2007). The commentator of the conservative news portal www.bernardinai.lt Arūnas Pečkaitis wrote:

Perhaps the biggest crime – and I say it boldly – occurred when homosexuality was excluded from the list of disorders. If we call a sick person a patient it does not mean that we assault him. The first step to recovery is recognition that you are sick. [By calling him sick] you show him your sensitivity, compassion and care (“What’s Next after the Legalization of Pedophilia,” June 6, 2006).

Calling LGBT people sick, this writer expresses his most sincere “compassion” for them. The conflation of the issues of homosexuality, drug addiction, alcoholism and prostitution is rather common in the Lithuanian tabloid press. Homosexuality is considered an utmost evil. VŽ

repeatedly quotes right-wing extremists who compare gay clubs and bars to the clubs of murderers, pedophiles, and zoophiles.

Some TV programs follow the same trend: the investigative journalism program “Srovės” (*Currents*, 7:15 p. m., May 21, 2007) attempted to cover the controversial events of May 2007 in Vilnius, including the Vilnius Mayor’s banning of the public action “We are for all colors of life”. The host of the show called the events “funny spectacles” and recited excerpts from some internet encyclopedia in which homosexuality is regarded as a perversion along with zoophilia, pedophilia, necrophilia and others. The interviews with different respondents (among them an MP who supports LGBT rights) were intermingled with shocking images of gay pride parades. Erotic or pornographic imagery used to frame a serious issue of public participation and publicity not only trivialized the issues under discussion but also portrayed LGBT people in sexualized and sexist ways. Giving the limited credibility to LGBT people in the public arena, this program emphasized their alleged threat to the heterosexual population.

It can be concluded that this discursive pattern evident in the Lithuanian press and on television comes closest to hate speech and the incitement of hatred and intolerance.

Homosexuality as Something Exotic and Strange

This discursive pattern is closely related to the above discussed mode of representation. The Lithuanian press and particularly television usually focus on the exotic and exaggerated sides of LGBT people’s lives, such as gay pride parades, Mardi Gras and other festivities. Even serious topics discussed on talk shows are usually interlaced with “exotic” images from LGBT festivals. Journalists sneak into gay and lesbian bars and describe them as strange and fear-inspiring (*L.T.*, January 15, 2007). They also follow Lithuanian celebrities who frequent gay bars (*L.T.*, January 29, 2007) or focus on Eurovision as a gay contest (“Eurovision – Gay Fiesta,” *LR*, May 12, 2007). The dearth of serious, comprehensive and “normal” representations of gay and lesbian characters may suggest that such representations would disrupt cultural norms and televisual codes.

Homosexuality as Linked to Criminality

Some reports on LGBT people are included in the “criminal chronicles,” for instance, a report about the murder of a gay male (*LR*, February 17, 2007) or a report about a man allegedly raping another

man (“Acquaintance between Gays Ended in a Scandal,” *LR*, February 23, 2006). Moreover, the press often associates homosexuality and pedophilia. Ascribing to homosexuals a perverted interest in children, the Lithuanian press contributes to the mobilization of anti-gay sentiments. Consequently, homosexuals cannot be trusted with children, who should be protected from homosexual propaganda. The repeated labeling of male homosexuals as pedophiles and pederasts serves to underline the pathological character of homosexuality and to incite fears and anxieties in readers. It is not surprising that, according to the 2006 population survey, 68.9 % of Lithuanians would not want homosexuals to work in schools.

Lithuanian newspapers and Internet portals report with great pleasure any incident in which LGBT people are called names or degraded (for instance, in the report “Latvian Cardinal Referred to Gays as Prostitutes” [*www.balsas.lt*, May 10, 2007] homosexuality is called an “unnatural form of prostitution”).

Conspiracy Theories. Homosexuals not as Victims but as Oppressors.

Another pervasive trend in the rhetoric about LGBT people, particularly gays, is allegations that the very active homosexual lobby in Lithuania is connected to and financed by the international gay lobby. It is also alleged that influential homosexuals are doing favors for each other. The existence of a kind of global gay conspiracy is implied in this kind of publication. Two years ago a marginal political group entitled the Union for Morality and Nation (Sašauka “Už dorą ir tautą”) distributed, in paper and on the Internet, a leaflet with the following text:

“Appeal to Lithuanian society. Homosexuals are starting a full-scale attack. Gay parades have already taken place in Bucharest, Warsaw, Riga and Tallinn. Gays have been told to take to the streets of Eastern European capitals.... Lithuanian gays receive hundreds of thousands of euros in support from abroad... It is obvious that soon they [Lithuanian gays] will try to organize a parade in Vilnius... We will demand that the City of Vilnius not issue permission to Lithuanian gays to march on Vilnius streets.... If you don’t agree with the spread of this sin, let’s gather on Friday, September 30, at 2 p.m. at the Square of Europe... For Healthy Youth, Strong Family and Children’s Rights.”

A leaflet with similar rhetoric was distributed during another rally of this group on May 25, 2007.

“Stand up to homosexual propaganda!”

We are responsible for our homeland! Democracy is the power of the majority, not a dictatorship by minorities! If the government, pressured by foreign lobbyists, allows itself to promote ideas opposed to the values of the majority, it can no longer represent the nation! And if the government passes laws to suppress criticisms of these ideas it means dictatorship! Let’s

not allow the concealment of dictatorship through misleading tolerance. Such tolerance is in fact a surrender to imminent evil. It [tolerance] cannot be legitimized and declared good!

Partisans, exiles, brave men of our nation did not fight and suffer for the freedom of our homeland for it to be sold again to an imported ideology of evil!

People of Lithuania take responsibility for your country! Build solidarity with other family defenders in Poland, Latvia, Spain and France! Stop the sodomy aggression!

The Lithuanian press echoes similar rhetoric: on May 7, 2007, *Respublika* claimed “The Influence of Gays in Lithuania is Increasing.” According to this article, more gays occupy most prestigious professions and expel from them “normal” heterosexual people. *Vakaro žinios* stated that “The Army of Perverts Attacks Poland” (*VŽ*, March 20, 2007). Similarly, in July 2006 the newspapers reported that LGBT people tried to capture the Lithuanian city of Klaipėda (“Perverts Want to Capture Klaipėda,” *VŽ*, July 28, 2006). On April 4, 2006, the political scientist Andrius Navickas wrote that supporters of “equal rights and opportunities” were preparing for a new attack on the heterosexual majority (“Are Sexual Minorities more Equal in the Face of the Law,” www.bernardinai.lt). In his article “Good Luck in Governing,” Domantas Razauskas ridiculed LGBT people who openly demand the right to be public and want to be elected to governing bodies (*L.T.*, November 10, 2006).

Homosexuality, Family and the Nation

In media rhetoric, homosexuality is most frequently related to the problem of family and nation. The issue of family as central to the reproduction of society and social order features in debates about homosexuality and the regulation of gay, lesbian, and transgender practices and representations. It is alleged that LGBT people want to destroy the “normal” family and the nation.

The Lithuanian press often quotes the opinions of high Church officials on the issue of homosexuality and the family (“Archbishop S. Tamkevičius: ‘The Church Condemns Homosexual Relationships’,” *VŽ*, November 26, 2006). It presents the Catholic Church as a defender of morality and family values, contrasting it with “deviant” and “unacceptable” homosexuals. During the celebrations of Independence Day in 2007 Cardinal Audrys Juozas Bačkis stated: “Hiding behind tolerance, we let family substitutes to prosper among us; and we refer to them in the neutral terms of partnership and union, among them even a same-sex union. We create conditions for the irresponsible satisfaction of desires and selfishness” (*LR*, February 17, 2007). Homosexual unions

and homosexuality here are conflated with irresponsibility and selfishness. The right-wing MP politician Irena Degutienė proclaimed that “we have never acknowledged and [will] never acknowledge partnerships; we [will] never acknowledge gay marriage because it is not a real family” (a report from the press conference “What Family Policy does Lithuania Need?” www.delfi.lt, April 25, 2007).

The discourse on family values prominent in Lithuania regulates and distinguishes “appropriate” Lithuanians from others (particularly LGBT people). In the public sphere, a fight for the family is often presented as a fight for the Lithuanian nation. It is assumed that the health of the nation or society is directly dependent on its ability to exclude what is considered unhealthy and deviant, namely LGBT people and other minorities. The MP of the Homeland Union (Conservative Party in the Parliament) V. Aleknaitė-Abramikienė openly proclaims: “A gay and lesbian parade in Lithuania would humiliate the Lithuanian nation.” Moreover, she argues that even the planned 2007 ILGA-Europe conference in Vilnius will “degrade the Lithuanian nation and the opinions of the majority of the Lithuanian people” (www.delfi.lt, November 4, 2006).

One feature article entitled “From Alleged Love to the Ruins of a Family” and published in *Lietuvos rytas* on June 17, 2006, deserves particular attention. The author quotes women who supposedly suffer because of their gay husbands. Throughout the article, the stereotypes of gay pedophile and perverted gay are repeated. Gay men are symbolically described as vampires sucking the blood of their poor wives. The author presents women seeking “traditional family values” as victims of gay men.

It is suggested that state authorities, following the example of crisis centers for abused women, create centers for women who have lived or still live with gay men (husbands). The judicial basis defending such women should also be created, argues the author Laima Lavaste. The article ends with a very symptomatic sentence: the author states that sooner or later Lithuanian society will have “to answer the question: how to defend legally and morally the rights and dignity of those humans who value traditional marriage between a man and a woman” (Laima Lavaste, “From Alleged Love to the Ruins of the Family. Three Women Dared to Tell “Lietuvos rytas” about their Marriage to Gay Men,” *LR*, June 17, 2006). Manipulating the well-established stereotypes about gay men, the article offers a solution: in order to defend the nation and the family, it is necessary to identify gays who oppress heterosexual women and isolate them from society morally, legally and perhaps physically. Only this act could save the Lithuanian nation.

Homosexuality and the Issues of Privacy and Openness

The Lithuanian press often describes homosexuality not as an issue of human rights and citizenship but as an issue of “private matters of what one does in bed.” It privatizes the issue of sexual orientation suggesting that LGBT people should remain in the private sphere and should be open about themselves to a very limited number of people. Among homophobic Lithuanian politicians, the above-mentioned MP Irena Degutienė is quoted as saying: “I am not against gays but I wish they would not demonstrate their views” i. e. would not show publicly what they really are (L.T., February 13, 2007). When a greater number of articles or news stories on LGBT people and the issues of sexual orientation appear in the media, public and political figures start to complain that massive propaganda about homosexuality has started.

One of the indications of the issue of privacy/openness was a nation-wide scandal about photographs depicting non-traditional forms of partnership and family, among them gay and lesbian ones. In February 2006, the curator of the Juodkrantė Art Center Kristina Danilevičienė did not allow these photos to be exhibited. The Lithuanian Gay League submitted a complaint to the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsman. The Ombudsperson Aušrinė Burneikienė issued a warning to the curator of the Center for the violation of the Law of Equal Treatment. However, this decision met with a strong outcry from the Catholic Church and even some politicians. They stated that society, and particularly children, should be protected against “homosexual propaganda.” Some MPs suggested that they would initiate changes in the laws regulating the dissemination of information by including a clause prohibiting “homosexual propaganda.” Privacy, silence and the “closet” are the only solutions offered by these political figures and Church officials.

Positive Representations of LGBT People

It would be unfair to say that the Lithuanian press and television do not present “positive” representations of LGBT people. At least 20 articles during this period focused on the complex experiences of being gay, bisexual or transgender, the issues of gays in the army and physical violence against homosexuals in Lithuania (for instance, “Double Life,” *KD*, November 18, 2006; “Transsexual who has changed his Sex Demands a new ID,” *LR*, March 7, 2007; „Brutal Execution for Being Homosexual,” www.alfa.lt, August 9, 2006). Due to the activities of Lithuanian LGBT activists, particularly the Lithuanian Gay League and the projects conducted by them, the coverage

of “serious” topics on LGBT people has increased in the last couple of years (“Homosexuals Feel Discriminated against at Work,” www.delfi.lt, March 13, 2007).

The same could be said about international news on LGBT issues. The main dailies, particularly *Lietuvos rytas*, usually copy international news from foreign publications and present it in a sensitive and comprehensive way (research on homosexuality, gay marriage issues, homophobia in the army, etc.). Another very important trend consists of the polemical articles of Lithuanian intellectuals such as Nida Vasiliauskaitė, Andrius Bielskis and others. Their articles are usually posted on Internet portals (www.delfi.lt, www.alfa.lt, www.lrytas.lt) and focus on in-depth issues of LGBT people in a both positive and polemical way.

Such talk shows as “Savaitės atgarsiai” (*Weekly Echo*, LTV2, several broadcasts focusing on homophobia and “Lithuanian values”, LGBT rights, etc.), “Nomeda” (TV3; the March 2, 2006, broadcast about being a gay and the April 13, 2006 broadcast about men who want to undergo gender reassignment) and “Dviguba tiesa” (Double Truth, Channel 5, the June 4, 2006 broadcast about homophobia and other phobias that heterosexuals hold) attempt to discuss LGBT issues sensitively and comprehensively. They allow for a full-fledged discussion of opposing views and positions.

Conclusions

The mass media play a critical role in the depiction of LGBT people. Articles and broadcasts that deal with the issue of homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism help to shape the way the Lithuanian public thinks about LGBT persons. Media representations not only reflect but also create collective understanding, status hierarchies, resistance, and the conflicts that exist in Lithuanian culture.

As our analysis demonstrates, the Lithuanian press and TV often exacerbate homophobic and heterosexist definitions of LGBT people. Although it cannot be classified as hate speech, it is an immensely homophobic discourse or “injurious speech.” This speech attempts to humiliate LGBT people and to assign a subordinate place to them. Name calling and violent abusive terminology (“capons” and “perverts”) fill the pages of Lithuanian tabloids. LGBT people are categorized negatively and described as morally degenerate. In many cases, the Lithuanian mass media define gay people completely by their “problem” and construct homosexuality to appear morally wrong.

Some TV programs make a scandal of the issues of homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism. LGBT people are portrayed in sexist, sexualized and sometimes pornographic ways (frequent imagery from erotic movies, gay pride events, etc.) LGBT people, and especially gay men, are still strongly associated with sexual promiscuity and deviance. The tendency to ridicule and diminish LGBT persons is still quite obvious in the Lithuanian media. They are placed in the framework of the dominant media discourses of heteronormativity and heteronormalcy. The Lithuanian media are very slow in validating serious news and reports about LGBT people. Serious representations of LGBT persons are infrequent. The gay events and opinions covered in the newspapers and TV are overwhelmingly trivialized. It can be argued that the media contribute to the oppressive discursive reality of LGBT people.

Representations of LGBT people in the Lithuanian mass media reproduce distinctive hierarchies of nation and sexuality and construct a low *Other* in an oppositional hierarchical relation to the majority. In this present climate, homosexuality (and LGBT people in general) is either being erased and reduced or constituted as a “site of radical homophobic fantasy”⁹ since it presents a threat to established social order. In media discourse, it is assumed that the health of the nation is directly dependent on its ability to exclude what is considered unhealthy and deviant, namely LGBT people. “Portrayals of minorities as defiling and threatening have for long been used to order society internally and to demarcate the boundaries of society, beyond which lie those who do not belong.”¹⁰ It can be argued that in most cases the Lithuanian mass media are involved in a deliberate shaming that results in “silent inequalities, unintended effects of isolation, and the lack of public access.”¹¹

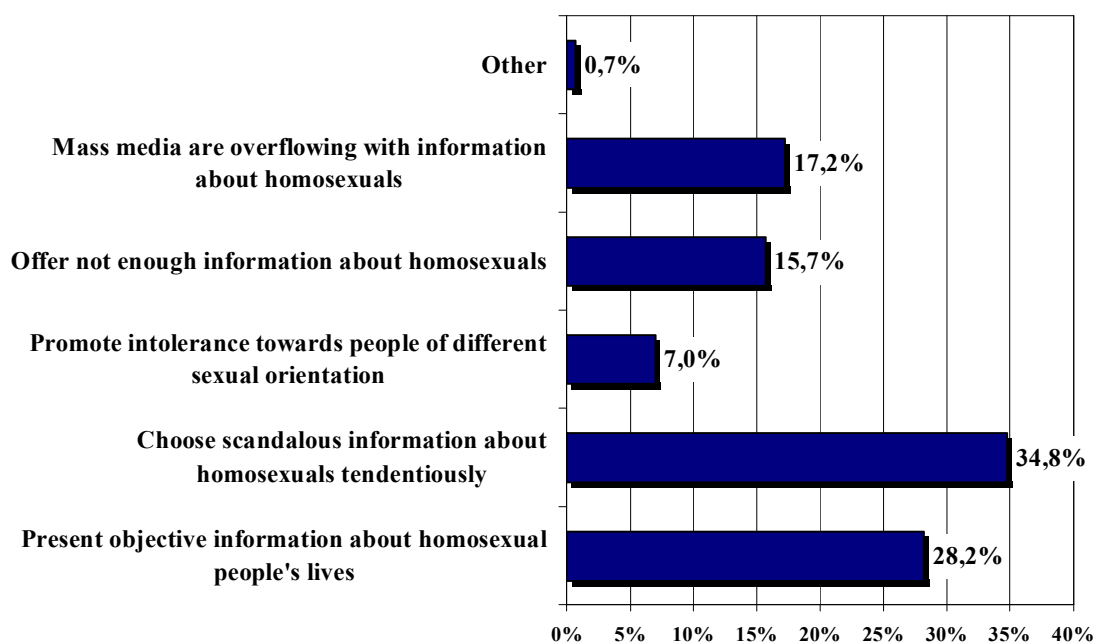
It is symptomatic that when asked about the position of the Lithuanian mass media towards homosexual people, Lithuanian citizens respond in the following way:

⁹ Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in Diana Fuss, *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 20.

¹⁰ David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.49.

¹¹ Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999), p. 7.

Chart no. 1. How do you evaluate the position of the Lithuanian mass media towards homosexuals?¹²



34.8 % of the Lithuanian people say that the Lithuanian mass media are biased towards homosexual people, 7 % say that the mass media promote intolerance towards them, and 15.7 % state that there is not enough information about homosexuals. In all, 57.7 % of the Lithuanian citizens are not happy with the media's attitude towards sexual minorities.

This media analysis and the events of May 2007 demonstrate that both the Lithuanian political elites and media professionals still do not realize that a strong democratic culture entails a commitment to publicity, meaningful dialogue and debate. As the political philosopher Iris Young correctly emphasizes, "No persons, actions or aspects of a person's life should be forced into

¹² The representative survey "DiscriminatiPRIVATEon against Various Social Groups in Lithuania" (July 13-16, 2006).

privacy; and (b) no social institutions or practices should be excluded *a priori* from being a proper subject for public discussions and expression.”¹³ Thus, the question of public participation and openness remains crucial for Lithuanian LGBT people because of their constant exclusion, silencing and marginalization. Once and for all, the idea should be implanted in the minds of the ruling elites and media professionals that sexual orientation is not a matter of private concern. It is an issue of human rights, first of all, LGBT people’s right to have a public identity in a variety of public spaces, among them the mass media, without the fear of being stigmatized, repressed, ridiculed and victimized.

¹³ Iris Marion Young. *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), p. 120.