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Homosexuals (LG) and their Siblings in the Family

An Overview of Power and Emotions involved

4th Midterm Meeting
Section Sociology of
Emotions ESA - Berlin

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Preface

- interest on that topic came nearly one year ago
- surprising experience - forums in internet transport depressing and despairing reactions
- couldn't imagine that our open atmosphere in society does not influence the individual impact on that cognition
- available literature in British library (Cambridge University) and all the German published books
- sexual orientation is quite an unusual issue dealing with in psychological and sociological debates

- Interesting results of the ongoing occupation with this subject
- Summary: further empirical research is necessary

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Introduction

- nobody knows exactly the reasons for emergence of homosexual orientation (mixture of genetically, prenatal and social influences)
- 2-5 % of humans are concerned
- beginning in the early childhood
- adolescence is the mainly attracted time for recognizing that inner notion
- nowadays there is a growing sensibility about sexual variety of humans (included intersexuality and transsexuality)
- differences between male and female siblings (LG)

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Knowledge about siblings relationship and emotional quality 5

- spend more time with one another - more than with parents or peers
- clearest form of socialisation is formal and informal instruction that children provide to their sisters and brothers
- internal representations of siblings as well as of parents
- “Greater sibling support was associated with less loneliness, higher self-esteem, less depression, and more positive school attitudes.” (Milevsky, 2011)
- „... elder siblings may be the best authority for learning how to succeed in the world of peers. ... older siblings learn from their younger siblings - for example, as younger sibs bring unique talents and interests to the relationship.“ (Kramer & Conger, 2009)

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Sexual development in the family 6

- “As they are repeated over and over again during the course of childhood, gender-typed practices contribute to the development of gender differences in expectations, values, preferences, and skills.” (Leaper & Friedman, 2007)
- „Privacy is an important part of separateness. Children need to learn to respect each other’s physical and psychological space.“
- „They develop sexual characteristics, they begin to learn how to manage their sexual feelings and start establishing a sexual identity. They may engaged in sexual behaviours. They need privacy, respect and information.“ (Parker & Stimpson, 2002)

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Sexual development in the family

- „There is, then, definitely lateral sexual attraction both homosexual and heterosexual. I would argue that the distinction between the two - lateral homosexuality and heterosexuality - is relatively unimportant. (Mitchel, 2003)
- erotism of sibling relationship can be healing and can play an essential part in every relationship of love, even, between grown up people
- “.. healthy narcissistic reflection that siblings do give each other and not least the immature erotic attachments that manifest themselves in erotic play.” (Lewin & Sharp, 2009) - linked to an holding environment
- girls and woman are more fluid in sexual attractions, practices and relationships

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Sisters and brothers

risks

- gender-typing pressures tend to be more rigid for boys - higher status, more power (males in society) “Although cross-gender-typed behaviour can sometimes enhance a girl’s status, it typically diminishes a boy’s status.” (Leaper & Friedman)
- boys have more negative relationships, more conflict

advantages

- Siblings model behaviour in accordance with masculine or feminine roles
- Self-confidence will be stronger in adolescence
- Siblings help each other in transitions and crises

familiar atmosphere promotes a variety of positive models of sexuality/gender identity

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Emotions and intimacy

- emotional support by siblings very powerful
- “Although studies do report a decrease in intimacy between siblings during adolescence, possibly due to the more central role played by friends, a close sibling relationship during this stage continues to be advantageous.” (Milevsky, 2011, S. 46)
- “Stability in sibling intimacy differed along with gender constellation; whereas same-sex siblings reported consistent levels of intimacy, mixed-sex siblings reported less intimacy between middle childhood and early adolescence with an upswing in middle adolescence.” (Kramer, 2010, S. 81)

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Emotions and intimacy

- Public creation of identity is more visible and open to attack than in the protected space of family life
- acceptance and tolerance (positive emotions) are influenced by family climate and intimacy in the relations

Sexual identity → Sexual orientation

Physical staging verifies the inner notion of the self Emotional staging verifies the inner notion of the self

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Overview about experiences of lesbian and gay young people

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- sexual experiences similar to those of their heterosexual peers
- first sexual contact with so. of different sex (14% gay men, 45% lesbians)
- many sexual experiences with same sex before disclosure of sexual orientation
- when the new relationship is a homosexual one this may be even harder to take for the sibs
 - same sex partner - depends on the gender constellation of the siblings' pairs

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Overview about experiences of lesbian and gay young people

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- “... women are socialised to privilege emotional and affectionate (but not sexual) aspects of relationships with other women, which opens up the potential for unexpected experiences which blur the boundaries between love, romance, friendship and sexuality.” (Clark et.al., 2010)
- boys and men go through a more difficult way of living in emotional occupied situations - especially in regard to sexual affected occasions
- climate of prejudice is experienced by the young people: homophobic bullying, heteronormative society

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Important aspects of coming out



personal struggle and lack of self-acceptance - slow and painful process to recognise the awareness of same-sex interests and feelings

- young people reject labels 'in defiance of social identity labels which would suggest the primacy of sexuality in their personal identities'
- choice to come out (or not) is quite complex - needs time for most
- sometimes going public by chance - friends discover or a unintended occasion
- is seen as a journey of self-discovery
- ability of family to respond positively to a coming out depends on characteristics of family itself

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Important aspects of coming out

- model of four main elements:
 1. Awareness of homosexual feelings
 2. Exploration of homosexuality
 3. Taking on board a lesbian/gay self-identity
 4. Integrating one's lesbian/gay identity into one's broader sense of self

Young people with heterosexual orientation are also looking for their sexual identity and can be irritated in the confrontation with parts of their own uncertainty and tend to project that emotion towards homosexuals.

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Family dynamic

- sibship is an advantage - because it can counterbalance parents' powerful attitudes
- siblings can feel more closeness or otherwise alienation
- anxiety about social reputation because of deviating from the normativity - homophobia
- negative parental responses overwhelming - esp. fathers
- family-based resources - pre-existing beliefs and attitudes, problem-solving abilities



„Sibling affection may curtail the level of internalizing behaviour problems faced by children experiencing significant stressful life events.“ (Kramer & Conger)

„Siblings“ (KRAMER & CONGER)

Hypotheses

- Accepting the partner is a special challenge - belonging to the family - intimate affection between members of the family attached
- Differences between sisters and brothers - lesbian and gay siblings are expected (cross over the sex and with the same sex)
 - Boys are forced to behave masculine, low tolerance
 - Girls are allowed to behave masculine, greater tolerance
 - Brothers experience more rivalry and aggression
 - Sisters are used to communicate and to show empathy

Siblings more empowering than (or without) parents

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- improvement in parental down-regulations was indeed associated with gains in sibling relationship quality
- attitudes from sibs often quite different from their parents
- sibling supportiveness and hostility are predicted by parents' behaviours
- sisters act in a less pleasant manner when engaging their brothers than sisters
- more warmth in sister relationships and participants with a female - more warmth to as with a male



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Siblings more empowering than parents

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- compensatory function of sibling support in the absence of parental support: - forced to form their own supportive social structure
- "In cases where parents are underinvolved with the raising of their children, the bond and the loyalty of siblings intensify." (Milevsky, 2011)
- modelling sex-typed behaviours ... that firstborns were more influential than parents on second-born's „Thus gender role socialization, in the case of sex-typed personal qualities, may be characterized by a pattern in which children model the sex-typed attitudes and personal qualities of sequentially higher-status family members.“ (Tucker & Updegraff, 2009)

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Ambivalence increases the closer the relation is – first result

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clear opposite of sexual preference

possibly strengthen the ambivalence because of living the own hidden wishes

Exclusively heterosexual behaviour

Incidents of same sex attraction

bisexuality

Incidents of different sex attraction

Exclusively homosexual behaviour

Kinsey-Scale - slightly reduced

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Ambivalence increases the closer the relation is – feelings come nearer

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how deep sb. is concerned is influenced by levels of irritation

personal

parental/family

peer-group

collective

Open attitudes in society

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Emotional rules influence the behaviour – ambivalent reactions

personal	• Irritation about the own sexual identity - angry?
parental	• Irritation about failures in child-raising - guilty?
siblings	• Irritation about their own status - insecure?
peer	• Irritation about group-norms and self-image - anxious?
collective	• Irritation about strange behaviour, minority and non-conformity - deviation?

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Summery of the main messages

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graph TD
    A[emotions of homosexuals LG]
    B[Sibship could be a protective factor] --> A
    C[individual and personal challenges] --> A
    D[hierarchy of irritation in social groups] --> A
    E[individual and personal challenges] --> A
    
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“Despite the lack of research on the social and psychological benefits of disclosure to family and friends, it is commonly assumed that affirming one’s identity is a positive step.”
Clarke et. al.

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Conclusion and outlook

- Sexuality is not a one-dimensional construct
- looking for an more LG-affirmative societal climate
- parental and sibling responses to coming out can all have a significant bearing on the young person’s subjectivity
- Siblings can be supportive

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Choice of British literature

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