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## ***Contesting Hegemonic Gender and Sexuality Discourses on the Web: Latvian and Polish Discourses of Gender Dissidents***

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### **Abstract**

*Embedded in the framework of positive discourse analysis (PDA), this article investigates the discourse of gender dissidents using the example of Latvian and Polish LGBTQ and feminist blogs. It introduces the distinction between narrative and argumentative blogs, the former representing two types of discourse (normalizing and celebratory) and the latter making use of four different strategies of challenging mainstream frames (inversion, complexification, partial reframing and radical reframing), in their ironic and non-ironic variants. The discussion focuses on the latter. The article argues that the discourse of dissidents may be conceptualized in terms of responding to previously raised hegemonic/mainstream validity claims. Any text belonging to the gender dissident discourse is more or less explicitly positioned with regard to the claims of hetero-normativity and/or male dominance (patriarchy). A claim may be accepted, rejected, reversed, built upon, extended or reclaimed. On the basis of a qualitative analysis of 30 Polish and 19 Latvian LGBTQ/feminist blogs, the article revises some theoretical and methodological assumptions made in previous works, as well as suggests more general conclusions pertaining to the social media discourse of gender dissidents in Latvia and Poland.*

**Keywords:** hegemonic discourse, dissident discourse, counter-strategies, irony, validity claims, intertextuality, Polish, Latvian, homosexuality, gender

### **1. Introduction**

The present article introduces and investigates what it suggests to call ‘discourses of gender dissidents’ exemplified by Latvian and Polish blogs. The terms ‘dissident discourse’ / ‘discourse of dissidents’ shall apply to texts of authors self-identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ), as well as feminist bloggers (who either refer to themselves this way or make it clear by taking a specific political/ideological stance with their texts). Referring to all these authors as gender dissidents is admittedly an oversimplification, necessitated by the need of a unified term and justified by the fact that in the predominantly conservative Latvian and Polish societies, calls for the free expression of gender/sexual identity and for gender equality are both perceived as manifestations of the so-called ‘gender ideology’. This ideology is positioned in opposition to the hegemonic discourses on gender – those of hetero-normativity and traditional patriarchy.

Throughout the article, the acronym LGBTQ is used, following the patterns of self-identification used by the authors of blogs themselves. Still, it must be kept in mind that *queer* also refers to a new social movement, seen as a successor of the earlier *gay and lesbian* movement (see Conclusions).

As mentioned above, Latvia and Poland represent conservative, traditional societies in which women's and gay rights have not yet gained stable ground. In spite of apparent successes of individual women, such as the former Latvian president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (1999-2007) or Polish Prime Ministers Hanna Suchocka (1992-1993) and Ewa Kopacz (since 2014), local feminists are concerned with unequal distribution of domestic labor or high levels of sexual and domestic violence, among other things. What is more, several studies have investigated the situation of sexual minorities in both countries and found out similar problems, including expression and assembly right limitations or homophobic statements made by public figures (e.g. Amnesty International 2006, O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2010). It should be noted here that the level of discrimination against homosexual men is directly linked to the position of women in a given society. The more powerful the patriarchy, the more men who do not conform to the ideal of an 'alpha male' are persecuted and degraded (Graff 2010: 108). For these reasons, the present article investigates the discourses of both LGBTQ persons and feminists and pays attention to possible discrepancies in this respect between the two countries.

The article identifies and analyses counter-strategies employed by dissident groups in order to challenge such traditional hegemonic representations. The framework of positive discourse analysis – especially Macgilchrist's (2007) typology of counter-strategies – is considered the most suitable theoretical-methodological foundation for such an analysis, although certain changes informed by patterns found in the data will be suggested.

The study is based on a small corpus of 19 Latvian and 30 Polish blogs by gender dissident authors, mostly – but not exclusively – concerned with the issues of gender/sexual identity and gender equality. The goals of this article are twofold: first, to provide a general description of Latvian and Polish LGBTQ/feminist social media discourse, exemplified by blogs; second, to offer a revised typology of counter-strategies typical of dissident discourse which could be applied also to other languages, genres and topics.

## **2. Theory and Method**

### **2.1 Positive Discourse Analysis**

Positive discourse analysis (PDA) is not as widely known as critical discourse analysis (CDA), an approach to discourse that PDA is supposed to respond to, provide an alternative for; it is impossible to define PDA without referring to CDA first.

Critical discourse analysis may be understood in many different ways. According to one approach, it is 'a study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality'; it focuses 'on the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance' (van Dijk 1993: 249). In CDA, discourse is a social practice, both socially constituted and constitutive; it

helps to sustain the social status quo, contributing to transforming it at the same time (Wodak 2002: 8).

Here, critical discourse analysts take an explicit socio-political stance:

Their critical targets are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice. That is, one of the criteria of their work is solidarity with those who need it most (van Dijk 1993: 252).

Critical discourse analysts thus concentrate on hegemonic, mainstream discourses of the dominating elites. But it should be remembered that while CDA may be committed to solving social injustice, the researcher's own position is among the privileged – due to middle class affiliation, high level of formal education, knowledge, awareness. While the analyst may take the side of the dominated, taking their *position*, as van Dijk (1993) suggests, sounds too idealistic at best and at worst – resembles choosing to be poor which is a privilege only the rich have.

From another perspective, CDA is above all an area in social studies that subsumes many different approaches whose common concern is 'to ensure more satisfactory attention (...) to 'discourse' as a facet of social life, and to its relation to other facets of social life'; here, language is a significant aspect of all the major issues in social scientific research – economic systems, social relations, power and ideology, institutions, social change, social identity and so on' (Fairclough 2006: 8). Here, CDA 'oscillates' between linguistic analysis of particular texts and the focus on the 'relatively durable social structuring of language which is itself one element of the relatively durable structuring and networking of social practices' (Fairclough 2003: 3). It is concerned with 'continuity and change at this more abstract, more structural, level, as well as with what happens in particular texts' (ibid).

**Change** is thus central in CDA, although in different ways for different theorists. Fairclough sees it as an inherent property of discourses themselves, which are not static or fixed but dynamic, volatile, even capricious; it comes from within them. Van Dijk, on the other hand, seems to suggest that change is the actual goal of CDA, to come from outside the discourse.

Change is also central in PDA, whose goal is to 'focus on the ways in which underlying social changes in society and the local discourses associated with them bring to light the contradictions and tensions within the hegemonic order and so provide the *wiggle room* for naturalising alternative representations that challenge this order' (Bartlett 2012: 10). PDA has investigated discourses which have brought about change, e.g. Martin and Rose (2003) on Desmond Tutu's speeches before and after the abolition of apartheid in South Africa. One may argue, however, that this approach to change does not differ much from Fairclough's version of CDA. The main distinction between CDA and PDA must lie elsewhere.

A recent critique of CDA holds that it is 'preoccupied with demonology' (Martin 2004: 197) and with 'discouraging analyses of oppression' instead of 'heartening accounts of progress' (p. 184). It calls upon researchers to move 'beyond a singular focus on semiosis in the service of abusive power – and reconsider power communally as well' (p. 197). This call has been answered by Macgilchrist (2007), who suggests an approach designed to investigate

counter, marginal discourses, especially in the media, where they contest mainstream frames for reporting the news.

There are, however, some problems with the way PDA is conceptualized here. Macgilchrist understands it as an opposite of CDA which studies ‘the discourse we like rather than the discourse we wish to criticize’ (2007: 74). Such a formulation seems based on a misinformed understanding of the ‘critical’ element in CDA:

The very notion of ‘positive’ discourse analysis (...) contextually presupposes a rather limited notion of what the ‘critical’ in CDA implies (...) – that ‘critical’ discourse analysis is ‘negative’ discourse analysis, which is surely misleading (Chilton and Wodak 2005: xvi).

Using the evaluative *we like* in the definition, Macgilchrist commits this very mistake. In my view, PDA should be a variant of CDA, not its opposite. I would like to see the difference between the two in the **power position** of discourse they study, the former targeting marginal, non-hegemonic discourses and the latter – hegemonic, mainstream ones. It does not mean that PDA studies discourses that are better, righter, truer. If we accept the premise that all discourses have ideological foundations and effects, we must apply it to dissident discourses too. They are not neutral only because they oppose hegemony; they also need to be approached critically. Analysts may commit themselves to promoting more just, liberal public discourses, but they should not pretend that dissident discourse does not do ideological work.

In the present paper, PDA is used as an approach that identifies these power positions of hegemonic and resistance discourses, and focuses on the latter. Although I agree with Bartlett’s critique that PDA is ‘largely *reactive*, focusing on texts simply because they ‘resist’ the hegemonic social structure and its associated discourses rather than analysing how the counter-discourses celebrated can gain a foothold within those institutional contexts in which they will be expected to operate’ (2012: 7), analysing the influence of resistance discourses on the hegemonic order is beyond the scope of one paper. Investigating this interplay between competing discourses – this constant struggle over meanings – and its effect on the existing social relations and structures in the context of the paper’s topic remains an exciting prospect for the future. And, as I argue further, dissident discourses are inherently reactionary – it is their distinguishing feature – so there is nothing wrong with PDA being ‘reactive’, if this is the framework used to investigate them.

## 2.2 Macgilchrist’s (2007) Typology

The typology of counter-strategies developed by Macgilchrist includes: inversion, parody, complexification, partial reframing and radical reframing. *Reframing* refers to ‘shifting an issue away from its conventional ‘location’ within one set of shared assumptions and reconstructing it within a different set of knowledges. In this way the issue is assigned a different interpretation, i.e. comes to have a different ‘meaning’ in its new context’ (2007: 80). Reframing, as well as the other counter-strategies, may be seen as examples of recontextualization (Fairclough 2003).

Macgilchrist's counter-strategies may be characterized as follows:

1. inversion – contests the mainstream view by inverting it – in other words, negating it;
2. parody – a kind of jocular 'logical inversion of the dominant stories' (p. 78);
3. complexification – involves presenting issues in all their complexity instead of keeping a news frame coherent by omitting or glossing over contradictory facts (p. 78);
4. partial reframing – involves presenting other perspectives without questioning the mainstream view (p. 81);
5. radical reframing – 'involves not only dialogue with other frames, (...) but also an inversion of the mainstream view of the issue' (p. 81).

For a study of discourse of dissidents, this typology poses certain problems. First, Macgilchrist focuses on alternative representations of Russia in English-language media. This means that while they may be in opposition to the mainstream frames, they still reflect the position of a Western journalist; they may constitute discourse of dissent, but not discourse of dissidents. In Macgilchrist's case, dissidents would be Russians, but they remain voiceless. In this article, a distinction is suggested between discourses of dissent (*dissent* here applies to the positioning of a discourse in relation to the hegemonic one) and of dissidents – in this case, gender dissidents – who resist (gender and hetero-normative) hegemony in their daily lives but do not necessarily produce discourses of dissent.

Also problematic is the strategy of parody. I consider this term too restrictive and suggest substituting it with 'irony' as an optional property of the other four strategies (see 3.3), since it seems that all of them could have non-ironic and ironic variants.

Combining revised approaches to counter-strategies and irony results in a twofold classification of dissident discourses: first, according to the counter-strategies they employ; second, according to whether they are non-ironic or ironic. This classification shall be applied to the analysis of argumentative dissident discourse in section 3.2. The four counter-strategies – inversion, complexification, partial reframing and radical reframing – will be discussed in separate sub-sections and revised where necessary.

### 2.3 Validity Claims and Intertextuality

According to Habermas (e.g. 1998), speakers raise three types of claims with their utterances: claims to truth (of the objective world), to rightness (of the world of social norms) and to truthfulness (of the speaker's subjective commitment). These claims may be verbalized more or less explicitly or presupposed. Hearers recognize them and respond by accepting or rejecting them.

I propose analysing discourses of dissidents in terms of responses to validity claims. Dissident discourses are inherently reactionary – they answer to or comment on previously raised claims. Some of these claims take the form of concrete statements uttered by specific speakers, e.g. politicians or journalists.

Others, however, are much less traceable – bits of common knowledge, hearsay, gossip with no fixed grammatical form or a source to attribute them to. For this reason, it is more useful to conceptualize dissident discourses as responding to validity claims, which are independent of form, than to statements or utterances.

Conceptualizing dissident discourse in terms of responses to validity claims makes it not only reactionary, but also intertextual. ‘Intertextuality’ refers to texts being full of ‘snatches’ of other texts (Kristeva 1986), their drawing upon, incorporating, recontextualizing and dialoguing with other texts (Fairclough 1992, 2003). Intertextuality may be manifested quite explicitly with, for example, reported speech; but also when implicit, it reflects discourse as a historical process in which all texts are linked.

As already explained, dissident discourses interact dialogically with hegemonic ones, quoting not only claims verbalized by specific texts in a fixed form, but also presupposed or implicated by formulas, idiomatic expressions, collocations. To illustrate, examples (1) and (2) challenge the hegemonic understanding of gender roles by responding to a particular text. Example (3), in contrast, lists common stereotypes about homosexuality without quoting any specific text. These stereotypes, and other meanings and assumptions they are associated with, make up a conservative, homophobic discourse on homosexuality. By mentioning and opposing them, the speaker conjures up the entire discourse and challenges it.

### ***3. Analysis of the Material***

It should be noted that finding adequate blogs in Latvian proved a serious problem. While the 30 Polish blogs analysed are just an illustrational fragment of a vibrant blogosphere, the 19 Latvian blogs constitute almost all there is. They also tend to have much fewer posts than their Polish counterparts, and many have not been updated in a long time. Moreover, no strictly feminist Latvian blogs could be found, although some blogs run by LGBTQ persons (both Latvian and Polish) do incorporate feminist claims.

Latvian blogs are fewer in number, smaller in size and predominantly anonymous. Out of 23 blogs with more than 100 posts, 17 are Polish, 6 – Latvian. 6 blogs with the largest number of posts are Polish. Out of 20 blogs with less than 100 posts, 13 are Latvian. The only non-anonymous Latvian blog is run by an openly gay celebrity, for a long time known as ‘the only gay in Latvia’.<sup>1</sup> The Polish community, in contrast, has much more people who are recognizable also outside the virtual reality – Wojciech Szot (BPL2), Yga Kostrzewa (BPL3), Wiktor Dynarski (BPL7) or Marcin Rzekowski (BPL25).<sup>2</sup> Many private bloggers choose to reveal their names too, suggesting openness about their identity within and without the Internet space.

#### **3.1 Narrative / Argumentative Blogs**

The first conclusion drawn from reading the material was that the blogs could be divided into ‘narrative’ and ‘argumentative’ types. Narrative blogs are concerned with accounts of events taking place in the author’s life; they are descriptive, they tell stories. Argumentative blogs, in turn, do not provide

accounts or descriptions but arguments and opinions that contribute to the on-going social debate. This distinction is rather stable and consistent – argumentative blogs rarely contain narratives and *vice versa*.

Narrative blogs may be divided further into ‘normalizing’ and ‘celebratory’. Normalizing discourse portrays a gender dissident’s life as common, ordinary, regular. There are stories about everyday events at work, school, home, relationship problems, health issues, anecdotes about children and pets. Normalizing blogs can thus be analysed using the theoretical concept of hetero-normativity, which ‘describes the social privileging of heterosexuality and the assumption that heterosexuality is the only natural and normal sexuality’ (Clarke et al. 2010: 261) and requires ‘proving the normality of homosexuals’ (ibid: 15). Normalizing blogs seem to respond to this demand by portraying the authors’ lifestyles as identical to heterosexual lifestyles based on monogamy and family values; they accept its claim to rightness. Celebratory discourse, in contrast, does not adhere to the principle of hetero-normativity (rejecting its claim to rightness) but acclaims, glorifies, celebrates the ‘gay lifestyle’ instead. Authors of celebratory blogs are single, promiscuous, sexually active and proud of it. Instead of describing everyday chores and little pleasures, their texts are full of accounts of weekend entertainments and sexual adventures. They tell the story of a glamorous, carefree life.

There are very few narrative blogs in the corpus. Normalizing discourse is represented by 4 Polish blogs focusing on family life and 4 Latvian blogs focusing on (mostly unfulfilled) romantic feelings; celebratory – by 1 Polish and 1 Latvian blog, plus some instances of celebratory discourse also in predominantly normalizing blogs. Note also that the normalizing discourse, although produced by gender dissidents, could probably not be interpreted as discourse of dissent. For these reasons, the analysis below will focus on argumentative blogs only. This decision is justified also by the fact that argumentative discourse is more likely to abound in counter-strategies introduced in 2.2.

### 3.2 Argumentative Blogs: General Description

One of the reasons why narrative discourses are ‘less’ argumentative is the absence of context. Argumentative discourse is embedded in and informed by a more general social context in which the dissidents live; in narrative texts, this context is invisible. Stories that depict a lesbian family’s everyday life normalizes it – and ideally persuades readers to accept its normalcy – exactly because the context of discrimination, legal complications, social ostracism, etc. is missing. In the presence of such a context, the narrative would have to be at least partly justificatory, even apologetic, because it would need to elucidate these difficulties.

It is this presence of context that makes argumentative blogs reactionary and intertextual. The most explicit case of intertextuality involves responding to reproduced or ‘linked’ texts published elsewhere on the Internet, e.g.:

(1)

*Zasadniczo mógłbym teraz napisać bardzo długą notkę o tym, dlaczego to, co napisał Kosik jest głupie i zwyczajnie złe, ale nie chce mi się. Pozwolę sobie za to mieć dla Kosika pewną propozycję. Pokaż fiutka, Rafale, od razu będzie nam wszystkim weselej. [BPL23]*

‘Basically I could write a very long post right now about why what Kosik wrote is stupid and simply bad, but I do not feel like it. I will allow myself instead to have a certain proposition for Kosik. Show your dick, Rafał, it will make everyone merrier.’

This text is at least formally directly addressed to another Internet user, who committed a sexist online comment<sup>3</sup>. However, since it has not been sent to this user by e-mail or another more private medium, it is also indirectly aimed at anyone who shares the user’s opinion. It is a contribution not only to a single, private debate, but also to a more general, conceptual polemic, in this case – on what counts as sexism. It also rejects a claim to rightness.

Bloggers respond this way also to politicians’ utterances and actions, often addressing them in a similarly direct manner; e.g.:

(2)

*Sztywne reguły i często sprzeczne ze sobą oczekiwania wobec męskich i żeńskich ról (oraz ich niemalże ideologiczne wtłaczanie podczas procesu wychowania) wprowadzają – jak sądzę – zamęt nie tylko w świadomości osób transpłciowych, lecz także w ogólnej świadomości społecznej. Dlatego mam nadzieję, że Pani Zespół stanie na wysokości zadania i podda wspomniany problem stosownej analizie. [BPL7]*

‘Rigid rules and often mutually contradictory expectations towards male and female roles (and their almost ideological injection during the upbringing process) induce – as I believe – confusion not only in the consciousness of transgender persons, but also in the general social consciousness. For this reason I hope that your Team will stand up to the task and subject the problem at hand to appropriate analysis.’

The example comes from a post formulated as an open letter addressed to Polish MP Beata Kempa, who founded a parliamentary team ‘Stop to gender ideology’ (*Stop Ideologii Gender*) in January 2014. It is not clear whether she has ever read it (probably she receives many such letters in reaction to her political activities). It may be claimed that the direct form of address in such cases does not fulfil its usual function – it is rather a stylistic choice associated with the genre. A letter’s named addressee is hypothetical; the actual addressee is a much broader audience, comprising all participants and observers of the social debate on gender (ideology) taking place in the public sphere, of which the Internet is a part.

Interestingly enough, no examples of open letters were found in the Latvian material, and Latvian bloggers always refer to other texts’ authors in the third-person form. That Latvian bloggers do not, while their Polish counterparts (sometimes) do refer directly to authors of quoted texts does not necessarily mean that Latvians are less confrontational or that the intended addressee is different (general public rather than a specific person). It may be motivated by



divergent stylistic requirements of the debate genre in these languages (see Chojnicka 2013). In any case, it does not make the texts any less intertextual.

After this brief introduction of argumentative dissident discourse, we may now turn to describe specific counter-strategies employed by it.

## 3.2 Analysis of Counter-Strategies

### 3.2.1 The strategy of inversion

Consider the following examples:

(3)

*Nezinu, cik reizes var atkārtot un atkārtot, bet laikam jau daudziem lēni pielec. Homoseksualitāte un pedofīlija nav sinonīmi. Ja vīrietis pedofīls uzmācas zēniem, tas nenozīmē, ka tas vīrietis ir homoseksuāls. Un homoseksuāļi nav bīstamāki bērniem, kā heteroseksuāli vīrieši. [BLV4]*  
 ‘I don’t know how many times I can repeat and repeat, but apparently some get things slowly. Homosexuality and paedophilia are not synonyms. If a man paedophile is molesting boys, it does not mean that this man is homosexual. And homosexuals are not more dangerous to boys than heterosexual men.’

(4)

*‘Wielu gejów stała się heteroseksualna’  
 Nie jest znany ani jeden potwierdzony przypadek zmiany orientacji. Osoba może zmusić się do określonych zachowań seksualnych, jednak pociąg seksualny, obiekt pożądania, pragnienia, myśli i fascynacje pozostają niezmiennie. [BPL12]*  
 ‘Many gays have become heterosexual’  
 Not one single confirmed case of a change of orientation is known. A person can force themselves to certain sexual behaviours, but the sexual drive, the object of attraction, desires, thoughts and fascinations remain unchanged.’

As these examples show, the strategy of inversion is used to respond to claims interpreted as incorrect or unjust. Both examples are cases of rejecting a claim to truth. In example (4), the claim in question is quoted and the grounds for its rejection are provided. Example (3) is a simple negation of the rejected claim which is not provided, as it is retraceable (by eliding negation markers, underlined).

I would argue that inversion represents the first phase of the history of gender dissident discourse – voicing the demand for affirmation. Most LGBT (later queer) and feminist movements have now moved beyond this stage – beyond asking for acceptance – in the direction of more concrete demands, e.g. marriage equality, hate crime legislation, etc. Thus, inversion is not used anymore except as an emotional response to particularly frustrating recurrent representations that threaten the already gained ground – see the first line in example (3). This would explain its low frequency.

Macgilchrist (2007) criticizes this strategy for being too radical, too straightforward to be printed. This problem does not apply to my corpus. Here, inversion is used to refute claims that have already been rejected by more liberal mainstream discourses (which does not necessarily imply the

society's majority). For this reason, inversion is used to refute hearsay rather than mainstream frames, which is another reason for its scarcity. After all, dissident discourse is about taking up topics on which its position diverges from the mainstream position.

### 3.2.2 The strategy of complexification

Consider the following examples:

(5)

*Neesmu manījis, ka jautājums par latviešu tautas izmiršanas draudiem tiktu aplūkots globālā kontekstā – ņemot vērā pārpadzīvotību pasaulē kopumā, kas, manuprāt, ir cilvēces lielākā problēma. Cilvēce nevarēs mūžīgi patērēt tik daudz resursu kā patlaban, un nav daudz variantu, kā iespējami lielākam cilvēku skaitam nodrošināt cilvēcīgu dzīvi – bez kara un bada. [BLV5]*  
 'I haven't noticed considering the question of the threat of extinction of the Latvian nation in the global context – taking into account the world overpopulation, which, in my opinion, is the biggest problem of humanity. People cannot eternally waste so many resources as till now, and there are not many ways to secure a decent life for as large a number of people as possible – without war and famine.'

(6)

*Sara jest blondynką. Przynajmniej tak twierdzi, choć sprawdzić tego nie można, ponieważ od chwili ślubu dokładnie zakrywa włosy (...). Oboje z mężem z niecierpliwością oczekują narodzin ósmego dziecka. Oprócz dużej rodziny i kolekcji nakryć głowy Sara ma też doktorat z Harvardu, jest w zarządzie szkoły talmudycznej dla kobiet w Jerozolimie oraz organizatorką modlitw tylko dla kobiet w lokalnej synagodze. Jest również feministką. [BPL8]*  
 'Sara is a blonde. At least that's what she claims, although you cannot check that, because since her wedding she covers her hair carefully (...). With her husband she impatiently awaits the birth of their eighth child. Except for a large family and a collection of head covers Sara also has a doctorate from Harvard, is in the board of Talmud school for women in Jerusalem and an organizer of prayers only for women in a local synagogue. She is also a feminist.'

Both examples illustrate presenting a given issue from an unusual, surprising standpoint. In (5), one of the most prevalent anti-gay arguments in Latvia – that homosexuality contributes to the negative growth rate of this already tiny nation – is criticized from the perspective of global overpopulation. The author asks if Latvians have any right to promote population growth in the context of an overburdened and overexploited Earth. In a country with very strong nationalistic discourses and sentiments, this is certainly a fresh outlook.

(6) reflects the feminist movement's internal diversification by introducing an untypical adherent. In mainstream media, the complexity of LGBTQ and feminist communities tends to be ignored. In this respect, the strategy of complexification serves to abolish hegemonic representations of a 'typical gay' and a 'typical feminist' for the benefit of the general audience. But it is also used in more internal debates between different strands of these communities.

For instance, a text in BPL22 regards the discussion on motherhood that has recently divided the Polish feminist community.<sup>4</sup>

Such texts, while certainly presenting a diversified image of a community, may also create an impression of it being split, divided into almost hostile camps that have little in common. Other corpus texts depict another stance – without denying diversification, they criticize categorization as such, either defending the need of the community to form a unified front, or representing the queer rejection of any labels whatsoever. For instance, a post in BPL26 exposes the absurdity of distinguishing between ‘bisexual lesbians’ and ‘homosexual lesbians’ in a discussion at a Polish lesbian online forum.<sup>5</sup>

As Macgilchrist notes, using complexification results in lengthy, elaborate texts that might put off ‘casual readers’ (2007: 80). Still, it is popular both in her and my corpus. One difference is the speaker’s positioning: while in her study this strategy presents two (or more) perspectives without picking sides, gender dissidents tend to introduce them and then align themselves with one. This difference may stem from the distinction between discourse of dissent (Macgilchrist’s authors are observers, bystanders, not sides of the conflict) and discourse of dissidents, as introduced in 2.2.

Note that this strategy uses other texts not by responding to them, but by building upon them; rejecting a validity claim is thus not in focus. The mainstream frame is similarly irrelevant – it is neither supported nor inversed (rejected).

### 3.2.3 The strategy of partial reframing

In Macgilchrist’s study, this strategy involves drawing on alternative frames without directly questioning the mainstream view on an issue (2007: 81). Having examined my corpus for such examples, I must conclude that the mainstream *view* is never preserved unquestioned, which is rather unsurprising, as it would make dissident discourse self-contradictory. Still, I would argue that the discourse of dissidents does use a strategy of partial reframing, just a slightly different one. Here, the mainstream *frame* is preserved, in a sort of extended sense. For the sake of simplicity, let us assume that anti-gay and anti-feminist arguments may be framed in two ways: by presenting what is associated with gender dissidents negatively or by presenting what is *not* associated with them positively. Instead of rejecting these frames, dissidents may choose to extend them, claiming that negative representations apply also to those who are *not* dissidents (‘you, too’) and that positive representations apply also to those who are (‘we, too’).

(7)

*Parādieks pats kā savu ģimenes modeli ir izvēlējis divsievību.* [BLV4]  
 ‘Parādieks himself has chosen double matrimony as his family model.’

This example responds to the ‘homosexuality is immoral’ argument by pointing out that heterosexual persons may also be immoral (‘you, too’). It rejects a claim to sincerity, suggesting that Parādieks, reported to have two wives, is in no position to lecture anyone about morality.

The next example argues that Polish gender dissidents are also good citizens and patriots: they celebrate Independence Day, sign the anthem and display the national flag ('we, too'). Note that nationalistic/patriotic arguments constructing the nation, country, homeland as the most important values belong to the strongest 'weapons' of anti-gay discourse in Latvia and Poland (see Chojnicka, in print).

(8)

*To jest też MÓJ kraj i to jest też MOJE święto i MOJA flaga.* [BPL23]  
'It is also MY country and it is also MY holiday and MY flag.'

Patriotism is a powerful intersubjective norm. Example (8) does not reject it, but rather argues that whether people obey or violate it has nothing to do with their sexual or gender identity. In other words, it does not reject a claim to rightness – but usurps it.

### 3.2.4 The strategy of radical reframing

According to Macgilchrist, this strategy pertains to 'utilising the space offered by the dominant frames to achieve a wider dissemination of marginal views (...) to grab media attention' (2007: 83). In the case of dissident blogs, the motivation must be different – rather than achieving wider dissemination or media attention, their interest is to give full, unabridged, unrestricted expression to marginal views. The word *radical* thus describes not only the extent of reframing, but also content of those views.

Radical reframing has two variants. In the first, labelled here 'inverted positioning', mainstream representations of dissidents are not questioned but rather 'twisted' to apply to the majority. The two groups switch places – the dominating majority becomes dominated, getting the chance to see 'what it feels like'. In the other, labelled 'provocation', these mainstream representations are simply accepted and reclaimed with a sort of proud in-your-face attitude. Similarly to complexification, radical reframing does not reject validity claims but builds upon them. Instead of making them more complex and intricate, however, this strategy twists them in a kind of controversial, provocative, manifesto-like move; e.g.:

(9)

*Mnie tam też hetero nie przeszkadzają, póki się nie afiszują ;-)* [BPL14]  
'I am also not bothered by hetero, as long as they don't parade around ;-)

It is an example of inverted positioning – a gay author writes about heterosexual people the way heterosexual authors 'normally' write about gay people, the way they 'normally' question public demonstrations of gay love.

The following example illustrates provocation:

(10)

*'Samobójstwo z nienawiści' Gorąco popieram taką formę protestu: czy reszta prawicowych wariatów nie mogłaby pójść w ślady Monsieura Vennera?*  
[BPL11]

“Hate suicide’ I strongly support such a form of protest: can’t the rest of the right-wing maniacs follow in the footsteps of Monsieur Venner?’

The text is a reaction to the suicide of Dominique Venner, supposedly motivated by the legalization of same-sex marriage in France. Instead of trying to deny the connection between his death and gay-affirmative politics or otherwise repair the damage to the public image of LGBTQ, the text provocatively urges other homophobes to choose this particular form of protest too. By doing so, it implicitly confirms the connection (and thus the mainstream frame), but also asks – ‘and so what? Who cares?’

Consider also the following, surprisingly similar examples. In the first part of (11), the author seemingly agrees to ban homosexual propaganda in Latvia. The mainstream view is preserved, and one of the most prevalent frames of anti-gay discourse – that of children’s rights – is apparently accepted. What follows, however, is a kind of sarcastic twist on the concept of children’s rights in homophobic discourse. In (12), the norm of Catholic morality is similarly provocatively reinterpreted. These examples are radical, because they criticize some of the most fundamental, taken-for-granted norms and values of Latvian and Polish societies.

(11)

*Jāaizliedz arī, protams, bērnu dēļ. Pirmāmkārtām bērnu dēļ. Jo bērniem ir tiesības uzaugt pasaulē, kurā valda naidis, aprobežotība un aizspriedumi.*

BLV4

‘It must be prohibited also, of course, for children’s sake. Above all for children’s sake. Because children have the right to grow in a world ruled by hate, ignorance and prejudice.’

(12)

*A polska ‘moralność’ katolicka to twór złożony z nienawiści, nietolerancji, pychy I obłudy. BPL26*

‘And the Polish Catholic ‘morality’ is a creature composed of hate, intolerance, pride and hypocrisy.’

Radical reframing is fairly popular and often takes very interesting, elaborate textual forms. In the most common variant of inverted positioning, as discussed above, homosexuals and heterosexuals temporarily switch places. This may involve creating a whole alternative world where heterosexuals are the oppressed minority. For example, a story in BPL26 describes a scene where a man who is starting a new job discusses with his wife how to hide his heterosexual orientation in the workplace not to risk being fired.<sup>6</sup> In other variants, the absurdity of some specific forms of discrimination against LGBTQ persons is shown through replacing an element of the real world with an element of an alternative world. For instance, a story in BPL24 describes a gay couple’s futile attempts to adopt a cat (substituting a child).<sup>7</sup>

The examples above show that this strategy is radical also in terms of demands it voices. Here, dissidents no longer ask for acceptance or equal treatment – in the world their texts create, power relations between groups are reversed, not abolished. The group that is commonly held to be immoral claims moral superiority over others – those subscribing to the fundamental,

normative understandings of sexuality and gender. Its representatives are more tolerant and open, less prejudiced and hypocritical. Thus they do not need the others' respect: those who hold different views simply do not matter.

Radical reframing is the only strategy that apparently addresses the in-group of dissidents, not the general audience. Still, it is a superficial reading, as writers are aware that anyone can 'eavesdrop' on their texts. Such a clear demarcation between 'those who are with us' and 'those who are against us' may, unfortunately, render radical reframing conspiratorial, suspicious. A literal reading of example (10), for instance, may just reinforce the majority's mistrust or hostility towards the gay community.

### 3.3 Ironic Discourse

It has been suggested that Macgilchrist's term 'parody' is too restrictive in the light of this study. Firstly, parody is 'a humorous imitation of a text', which makes it a manifestation of intertextuality; but as such it requires the audience to be familiar with the original text to fully appreciate 'the ways in which it is being ridiculed' (Berger 2004: 27). Secondly, it involves 'an echoic allusion and a dissociative attitude' towards a form (Sorea 2002: 283); but dissident discourse targets content (i.e., validity claims) rather than form. Thus, irony serves the present purposes better, as

in irony the echo [i.e. echoic allusion and dissociative attitude] is related to content, as certain words or chunks of discourse are reiterated in a context which makes them sound absurd. In other words, irony involves interpretive resemblance or resemblance of content (Sorea 2002: 283).

What exactly is irony? Grice writes that in ironic discourse

it is perfectly obvious to the speaker and the audience that what the speaker has said (...) is something he does not believe, and the audience knows that the speaker knows that this is obvious to the audience... (1989: 34).

Further, the ironic tone in which utterances are made 'signifies that they are to be taken in reverse' (1989: 53). In Grice's theory of conversational maxims, irony involves breaking the maxim of quality, concerned with being sincere – saying what one knows is true and not saying what one knows is false (in terms of validity claims, it means making a reversed or 'faked' claim). Two types of irony – jocular, where speakers tease one another in humorous ways (Gibbs 2000: 12-13), and sarcasm, which gives an expression to the speaker's hostile attitude or evaluation (Grice 1989: 53) – will be discussed.

Table 1 groups examples provided so far into non-ironic or ironic (and further sarcastic or jocular), according to the strategy they represent.

	ironic		
strategy:	non-ironic	sarcastic	jocular
inversion	(3), (4)		
complexification	(5), (6)	(2)	
partial reframing	(8)	(7)	
radical reframing		(1), (10), (11), (12)	(9)

**Table 1.** Classification of examples of argumentative discourse

No ironic inversion examples were found. There are, however, long and complex texts that could be claimed to combine inversion and complexification and classified as sarcastic. For instance, a text in BPL16 rejects common myths about bisexuality (inversion), makes the issue more complex by introducing various ‘types’ of bisexuality, and contains sarcastic fragments.<sup>8</sup>

The strategy most commonly combined with irony seems to be radical reframing. The so-called ‘gay manifesto’, penned by Michael Swift in 1987, may serve as a well-known example (translated into Polish in BPL13).<sup>9</sup> A similarly interesting illustration is the ‘Exclusive Interview with the Daemon of Homosexuality’ in BPL6.<sup>10</sup>

Coming back to Grice’s maxim of quality, most examples classified as ironic here probably cannot be interpreted as breaching it. The only exception which clearly does is (11). Its author does not believe that ‘children have the right to grow in a world ruled by hate, ignorance and prejudice’ – this statement should definitely be taken in reverse.

Examples (7) and (12) are similar in that the speaker’s lack of sincerity applies not to the entire utterance but to one word/expression. In (12) it is even made obvious by scare quotes – the author does not believe that the noun *moralność* (‘morality’) really goes together with the adjective *katolicka* (‘Catholic’). Both examples are intertextual in the sense that they quote fixed formulas used uncritically by conservative discourses (‘Catholic morality’, ‘family model’). These examples cannot breach the maxim of quality, since here only single words/expressions may be described as ironic while the maxim applies to whole utterances.

Next, examples (1) and (10) are directives, expressing a command and advice/suggestion respectively. As such, they have no truth value (they can be neither true nor false). They are ironic in the sense that their authors are not fully committed to or sincere about them; they are exaggerated in order to make a point.

These examples show that sarcasm is not only concerned with marking a faked claim to truth or with the speaker’s hostile attitude. It is also about incorporating formulas and expressions from other discourses (that the speaker disagrees with) in a way that conveys the speaker’s contempt towards them without affecting her/his sincerity about the rest of the utterance. It may also be about making an exaggerated, provocative statement in order to prove the absurdity of another claim.

Note that there are much more examples of sarcasm – hostile, aggressive type of irony – than jocularly. The latter, less judgemental and antagonistic and more humorous, is rare in the corpus, comparatively frequent only in BLV13 and BPL26.

#### 4. Conclusions

One of the goals of this article has been to apply and revise Macgilchrist's (2007) typology of counter-strategies used by discourses of dissent (here dissidents). Table 2 compares her typology to the one proposed in this article:

Macgilchrist's framework	Proposed framework	Further divisions
inversion		inversion
complexification		complexification
parody	irony	- jocularly - sarcasm
partial reframing	partial reframing	- 'you, too' - 'we, too'
radical reframing	radical reframing	- inverted positioning - provocation

**Table 2.** Macgilchrist's typology (2007) revisited

The study has confirmed that:

1. inversion (negation) is not a frequently used strategy. This may be due to the fact that Latvian and Polish discourse of gender dissidents has 'moved beyond' a mere rejection of claims detrimental to them;
2. complexification is mostly used to prove a dissident group's internal diversification for the benefit of general audience, or in debates between the group's different strands. It results in complex and lengthy, potentially off-putting texts;
3. partial reframing focuses on proving 'we are just like you' or 'you are just like us' and may thus paradoxically be seen as reproducing and reinforcing divisions in the society;
4. radical reframing offers a way of inverting power relations between groups (inverted positioning) or making controversial statements (provocation). It is the only strategy that seemingly addresses the dissident in-group, outsiders are 'eavesdropping'. If ironic, it may easily be misunderstood (see example (10));
5. irony should be kept apart, as it can apply to any of the other strategies (with the possible exception of inversion, as no example of explicitly ironic inversion was found).



As far as the theory of validity claims is concerned, I would suggest that next to responding to previous, more or less explicit or verbalized claims to truth (see e.g. (3), (4)) and sincerity (e.g. (7)), all discussed discourse types presuppose responding to the claims of hetero-normativity/patriarchy – which may be a characterizing feature of dissident discourse (both argumentative and narrative), always understood as relative to another (hegemonic) one. A claim can be accepted (normalizing discourse), rejected (inversion, celebratory texts), reversed (inverted positioning), built upon (complexification), extended (partial reframing), or reclaimed (provocation).

In contrast, intertextuality is a property that applies to argumentative discourse only, since narrative discourse is decontextualized. Argumentative texts are embedded in the context of other texts which are more or less easy to trace – quoted in full or fragments, linked to, recalled in terms of content but not form, referred to descriptively, hinted at, etc.

Based upon the discussion in sections 2 and 3, it is now possible to make more general conclusions concerning gender dissident social media discourses in Latvia and Poland. These discourses seem to oscillate between accepting the need to normalize and desexualize one's own life narrative, and rejecting the need for social categories such as gender or sexual orientation.

There appears to be a difference between 1) normalizing narrative and strategies of inversion and partial reframing on the one hand, and 2) celebratory narrative and strategies of complexification and radical reframing on the other hand. Discourses under 1) accept the hetero-normative claim to rightness, but also construct sexual/gender dissidents to be as good as the others – gays, lesbians, feminists etc. can be faithful monogamous partners, generous care-takers, loyal citizens, etc. In contrast, discourses under 2) reject the hetero-normative claim, either glorifying lifestyles liberated of it, or presenting the binary gender (male/female) and sexual (hetero-/homo-) distinctions as artificial, unnecessary and restrictive social constructs.

Discourses under 1) and 2) may be seen as reflecting the gay/lesbian (and feminist) and queer movements, respectively.<sup>11</sup> The former has been mentioned here as voicing the demand of affirmation, acceptance. Sexual and gender dissidents enter the public debate on the terms defined by the hetero-normative majority; they have to prove their 'normalcy' first if they want to be heard. The latter, in contrast, rejects not only these terms, but also 'the sexual identity categories on which the conventional lesbian and gay movement was built' (Clarke et al. 2010: 41) – it is in opposition to the categories of homosexuality or gender as 'instruments of regulatory regimes' (p. 42, after Butler 1990). Table 3 below illustrates these divisions.

<i>movement</i>	gay and lesbian, feminist	(gender)queer
<i>positioning towards the hetero-normative claim</i>	(conditional) acceptance	rejection
<i>type of narrative discourse</i>	normalizing	celebratory
<i>strategies of argumentative discourse</i>	inversion partial reframing	complexification radical reframing

**Table 3.** Classification of discourse types/strategies discussed

The analysis in this article seems to suggest certain differences between the condition of these movements in Latvia and Poland. In Latvia, the LGBT blogosphere is weak, queer and feminist – practically non-existent. There are no blogs on same-sex parenting, and the normalizing discourse in general focuses on describing suffering and loneliness rather than happiness or fulfilment. There is less ‘angry’, provocative and sarcastic radical discourse than in the case of Poland. Here, the narrative blogs abound in success stories and there are even a couple of blogs – BPL6, BPL17 and BPL29 – that specialize in radical reframing, the most angry and queer of all counter-strategies. Women’s and sexual rights are demanded rather than asked for, and many self-described LGBTQ authors identify as feminist as well. It may be concluded, then, that the LGBT and feminist movements have a stronger position in Poland than in Latvia, while the queer movement is beginning to gain some momentum in the former, but not yet in the latter.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Kārlis Streips – Latvijas ‘vienīgais gejs’*. <http://skapis.eu/2011/12/karlis-streips-vienigais-gejs/>, viewed 25.06.2014
- <sup>2</sup> All the blogs are labeled according to the following principle: ‘B’ (for blog) + country code (‘LV’ for Latvia and ‘PL’ for Poland) and numbered in alphabetical order of their full titles.
- <sup>3</sup> The comment: *Jedno jest pewne – dziewczyna, która uważa wypowiedź ‘pokaż cycki’ za przejaw dyskryminacji, musi mieć bardzo smutne życie*. ‘One thing is certain – a girl who considers saying ‘show your boobs’ a manifestation of discrimination must have a very sad life.’
- <sup>4</sup> <http://szprotestuje.wordpress.com/2014/06/02/team-graff/>, viewed 25.06.2014
- <sup>5</sup> <http://trzyzesciowygarnitur.blogspot.de/2012/04/z-zycia-homoseksualistek-kroliki-i.html>, viewed 25.06.2014
- <sup>6</sup> <http://trzyzesciowygarnitur.blogspot.de/2013/03/pogoda-praca-kserokopiarka.html>, viewed 27.11.2014
- <sup>7</sup> <http://wtramwaju.blox.pl/2013/04/Pragnienie-kota.html>, viewed 27.11.2014
- <sup>8</sup> <http://lipshitblog.blogspot.de/2012/12/klatwa-biseksa.html>, viewed 27.11.2014

- <sup>9</sup> <http://hodowlaidei.blogspot.de/2014/04/drzyjcie-heteroswinie.html>, viewed 3.07.2014
- <sup>10</sup> <http://dopiskipedala.blox.pl/2013/11/EXCLUSIV-Wywiad-z-Demonem-Homoseksualizmu.html>, viewed 3.07.2014
- <sup>11</sup> They also reflect gay/lesbian and queer approaches to homosexuality in academic projects. See an interesting polemic in the Polish social sciences between Kochanowski (2004, queer studies) and Nowak (2013, gay/lesbian studies).

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- BLV3. *Cilvēks no skapja*. <http://skapjilveks.blogspot.de/>
- BLV4. *G\*blogs*. <http://neatkarigais.net/>
- BLV5. *Geju vēstis*. <http://veestis.wordpress.com/>
- BLV6. *Kāda puīša ieraxtu žurnāls, kas paslēpts zem matrača*. <http://zemmatraca.blogspot.de/>
- BLV7. *Kāda puīša noslēpumu antresols*. <http://antresols.com/>
- BLV8. *Kārlis Streips: pārdomas par dzīvi*. <http://karlisstreips.blogspot.de/>
- BLV9. *Mellenū naktis*. <http://mellenunaktis.wordpress.com/>
- BLV10. *Mozaīka*. <http://mozaikasvalde.blogspot.de/>
- BLV11. *Par cilvēku ar lāstu*. <http://klab.lv/users/exiled/>
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- BPL6. *Dopiski wkurwionego pedała*. <http://dopiskipedala.blox.pl/html>
- BPL7. *Dynarski.pl*. <http://dynarski.pl/>
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