

The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational & Social Sciences (EPESS), 2022

Volume 24, Pages 100-110

**ICRESS 2022: International Conference on Research in Education and Social Sciences**

## **Life in Rainbow Colors: Homosexuals Experiences**

**Gorana BANDALOVIC**  
University of Split

**Ines UVODIC**  
University of Split

**Abstract:** The term homosexuality has changed depending on the historical and social context. Although, in the past, significant progress was made in accepting homosexuality, the social exclusion of homosexuals is still not uncommon. Yet, the existence of certain barriers such as homophobic behavior and various forms of violence does not prevent a homosexual person from revealing their homosexual identity. That is why this research aims to examine the experiences of homosexual people regarding the quality of their lives. In this context, research questions were formulated regarding participants' experience in terms of same-sex preferences, hiding sexual orientation, feelings of exclusion, same-sex relationships and having children, and opinions about Gay Pride. The paper presents the results of research conducted in 2021 using the method of semi-structured interviews on a sample of twelve participants in the Republic of Croatia. The research has found that understanding their homosexuality represents a stressful period of their lives as well as the process of coming out, which they decide on most often during puberty and adolescence. The participants generally did not experience social exclusion, violence, and rejection. They would like to have children, and adoption would be the most likely option. In their opinion, there is no difference between raising children in a homosexual and a heterosexual family. Most of them are satisfied with their lives, and Gay Pride is considered important, especially in terms of increasing the visibility and rights of homosexuals.

**Keywords:** Homosexuality, Quality of life, Coming out, Children of same-sex partners, Gay pride

### **Introduction**

Homosexuality has existed in all cultures, societies, and all nations, and ancient Greece is considered the cradle of homosexuality, although homosexuality is mentioned in ancient Egypt as well (Tomasevic, 2003). Attitudes towards LGBT people have changed depending on the historical context. In the past, individuals whose sexual orientation was not heterosexual were not accepted and had to hide their sexual orientation to preserve their lives (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2014 as ctd. in Vuckovic-Juros, 2015). Today, especially in Western countries, the situation is much better, although the lack of acceptance of the rights and equality of LGBT people do not belong to the distant past (Dudic & Silajdzic, 2019). Compared to the past, it is noticeable that today people of homosexual orientation are more likely to go public with their sexual orientation and are much better accepted in society. Nevertheless, the questions arise as to in which environments and to what extent do homosexuals feel comfortable, what is their quality of life, and is there equality for all members of society?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Numerous studies indicate the existence of social exclusion of members of the LGBT population, whether it refers to the democratic-legal or labor-market system, the social welfare system, or the family and local community system. In this sense, the exclusion of members of sexual minorities from the democratic legal

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- Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the Conference

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system relates to inequality among citizens in the democratic legal order. First of all, it implies a violation of human, civil, and political rights (Sukur, 2004), therefore, the key problem is that the identity of an LGBT person is not considered as valuable as other identities. Exclusion from the labor market system implies prevented or hindered economic integration, which means impossible or hindered access to employment and economic goods (Sukur, 2004). This most often includes employment discrimination, especially for certain types of work, and discrimination in the workplace. It is not uncommon for members of sexual minorities to hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, which causes great pressure and concern (Takacs, 2006 as ctd. in Vuckovic Juros, 2015). Exclusion from the social welfare system refers to failed social integration, which means difficult or impossible access to benefits or services provided by the state (Sukur, 2004). This system includes two areas of state intervention to reduce such inequalities, namely education and health (Vuckovic Juros, 2015). If we look at the exclusion from the family system and the local community system, we can notice hindered interpersonal integration that increases the likelihood of social ties and refers to maintaining ties and relationships with family members, friends, neighbors, etc. (Sukur, 2004). This is of great importance since LGBT persons already in the family face misunderstanding and exclusion, especially if it is a traditional family, thus there is often emotional and physical violence done by their family members (Vuckovic Juros, 2015).

In this context, a very important process is coming out, which is an important moment in reinterpreting and redefining the stigmatized identity of the individual (Rich, 1993 as ctd. in Schwab & Kuhar, 2005) at any point in life. In more religious and conservative families, an LGBT person needs to be careful about deciding to come out. In such families, the LGBT person will invest considerable energy and time in the process of coming out, wanting the family to accept their new identity, due to the deeply ingrained religious attitudes of the family.

However, a religious family does not necessarily have to reject its LGBT family member, but such families need more time to accept the new identity of the individual (Kavic & Urukalo, 2013). Since reactions can be quite varied, if a society does not react the way an individual expected, this will affect their identity. Therefore, it is crucial to have the support of the environment. In this sense, if the initial experiences are negative during the process of coming out, there is a possibility that the individual will begin to conceal their homosexuality and convince themselves that feelings towards people of the same sex are not a sign of homosexuality (Seidman, 2002 as ctd. in Schwab & Kuhar, 2005).

Present data suggest that LGBT people are often victims of violence, be it economic, psychological, physical, or sexual violence, but they all most often involve various forms of homophobic behavior. Underlying all these forms of violence is the abuse of power by perpetrators who use the stigmatized position of the LGBT population in society, which makes sexual minorities a vulnerable and unprotected population (Pikic & Jugovic, 2006). At the same time, it is problematic that homosexual persons are often found guilty of crimes in which they are victims themselves, since persons who publicly show their homosexual orientation are often accused of exposing themselves to crime in this way. For this reason, part of society believes that public display of homosexuality is a provocation, so homophobic violence is sometimes seen as a justified situation (Giddens, 2007). On the other hand, victims often do not report the violence they experience due to fear and stigma of society, and sometimes they are not aware of their rights and protection options, making it very difficult to estimate how many violent events occur (Juras & Grđan, 2009).

Discrimination against LGBT people most often refers to deep-rooted homophobia and transphobia in society, threats, hate speech and obvious forms of violence, non-recognition of the right to public assembly, legal invisibility, legally unregulated status after gender reassignment, negative connotations in the media and public sector, and social exclusion (Mrsevic, 2019). They often experience discrimination in the family, which indicates the need for parenting education that could be conducted in schools, for example in the form of addressing specific topics in parent meetings, but also the need to empower LGBT people to cope with possible negative reactions of their families after coming out. Furthermore, it is necessary to provide support groups for parents and/or their children to achieve better acceptance of LGBT people by their parents and/or other family members, but also easier coping with difficulties in family relationships (Milkovic, 2013). Due to the mentioned potential situations, it was noticed that heterosexual persons and homosexual persons are more likely to suffer from anxiety and affective disorders and more often abuse addictive substances. According to Meyer (2003), hiding sexual orientation can be the cause of mental problems that consequently lead to a person's poor mental health, which greatly affects their quality of life. Factors that prevent a homosexual person from declaring their sexual identity are primarily shame and guilt, followed by fear of social stigma and physical violence that can further foster this vicious circle (Bybee et al., 2009 as ctd. In Kavic & Urukalo, 2013). All of the above is more pronounced if LGBT people live in rural areas, so such individuals more often decide to remain silent and "stay in the closet", unlike those who live in urban areas. It is for this reason that they are sometimes forced to move to the city, aiming to have a more comfortable life (Smyth, 2011 as ctd. in Kavic & Urukalo, 2013).

In social sciences, the term “family of choice” is used for all alternative forms of family life that differ from the modern heterosexual nuclear family model and play an important role in transforming the modern family institution based on heterosexual parenting (Svab, 2007). Non-recognition of the existence of same-sex communities and ignoring their rights can be compared and equated with discrimination based on sex, race, age, nationality, religion, disability, etc. Children who are members of LGBT families are often victims of discrimination, violence, humiliation, and ridicule, therefore non-recognition of such families damages children's rights, while the same rights are available to children living in heterosexual families (Mrsevic, 2009). Although most previous research (Wainright et al., 2004; Crowl et al., 2008; Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Marks, 2012; Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013; Manning et al., 2014; Allen, 2015; Fedewa et al., 2015) does not find differences between children raised by homosexual parents and those of heterosexual parents, this topic still encounters many controversies. Namely, the data show that the sexual orientation of parents is not crucial nor it affects the child's development, but the environment in which the child grows up, the attention, love, and care they receive from parents are important since the biological connection between parents and children does not necessarily mean a good and quality relationship between them (Mrsevic, 2009). Therefore, parental sexual orientation is less important than the quality of family relationships and the quality of everyday interactions (Zderic, 2020). However, it should be mentioned that children who grow up with same-sex parents face the so-called phase of difficulty because they find it difficult to understand why their family is different from the families of other children. They are also ridiculed by other children because society very often does not respect/accept differences. However, despite numerous prejudices that same-sex marriages will lead to the spread of prostitution, polygamy, and incest, it has been proven that there are no rational reasons to confirm this (Mrsevic, 2009).

Furthermore, one of the important questions in this context relates to public space. Inevitably, the question arises as to how much it is allowed to show one's sexuality in public space. Any kind of expression of sexuality in public space is sanctioned by social norms, but not all sexual orientations are treated equally because it is relatively allowed to show the intimate behavior of heterosexual couples (kissing, hugging, holding hands, etc.). However, the intimate behavior of homosexual couples is completely different and is often sanctioned. Precisely because of the difference in the behavior of couples of different sexual orientations, public space can be seen as an insecure place, a place of potential violence and danger for homosexuals (Bertosa & Antulov, 2012). In this context, it is necessary to mention Gay Pride – the annual protest public gatherings of LGBT people that have been held around the world since 1970. In Croatia, this is the longest-running political protest, which is usually held every year in June, and which aims to create a solidarity-based and equal society in terms of gender and sex norms/categories, as well as a common struggle for equality and full civil and human rights. Parades of this type are most often held on Saturdays when a large number of people are staying in public space, which creates tension towards the existing semiotic systems in that space (Bertosa & Antulov, 2012). Banners that are an integral part of such parades often contain slogans written outside the rules of appropriateness set by the dominant groups because these are topics that society considers inappropriate. Therefore, such slogans are considered transgressive, especially because they intervene in the heteronormative space and turn it into a queer area (Bertosa & Antulov, 2012).

## **Method**

### **Research Objective and Research Questions**

The research aimed to examine the experiences of homosexual people regarding the quality of their lives in the society in which they exist. In line with the thus defined goal, the following research questions were asked:

1. What is the experience of feeling attracted to people of the same sex?
2. Do homosexual people hide their sexual orientation?
3. Do homosexuals feel excluded from society?
4. Are homosexuals prone to same-sex unions?
5. Do homosexual people want to have children?
6. Are research participants in favor of Gay Pride?

### **Participants**

The sample consisted of twelve participants, including seven women, four men, and one person who identified as non-binary. Given the sensitivity of the research topic, there were difficulties in finding participants, so the

snowball method was applied. Participants are mostly in their mid-twenties. Although all of them come from Croatia, the place of residence of the participants is diverse – half live in Zagreb while the rest live in a settlement Sutivan on the island of Brac, in Split, Slatina, Umag, and Kastela. Most of them finished high school. Seven are employed, while five are unemployed. Almost all identify themselves as non-religious (one female participant is religious). Seven of them are apolitical, while the remaining five are left-wing.

## **Conducting the Research**

The research was conducted using the method of the semi-structured interview from January to July 2021 on a sample of twelve participants. The protocol defined the primary topics in line with the research questions. All interviews were conducted online, mostly via WhatsApp video calls and phone calls, and lasted about 30 minutes on average. When conducting the research, all ethical standards of the research were respected. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, participants were guaranteed the anonymity of the data collected and were allowed to withdraw from the survey at any time if they wished. All participants in the study gave written consent for the audio recording of the interview and the use of the collected data in further analysis. Conversations were audio-recorded (using a sound recording application for mobile phones), the resulting recordings were transcribed and exact participants' quotes were used, in standard language or dialect, as recorded. Particular care was taken to ensure anonymity and remove information that could reveal the identity of the participant. After transcribing the interview, the transcripts were read to analyze in detail the parts that are relevant to us as answers to the research questions. The next step was to code the interview according to the topics/sub-topics that emerged during the transcript analysis. Each topic was defined by one concept that in such data analysis becomes code. In this way, the statements of the participants are summarized in codes and then grouped into categories, making sure that the categories and codes answer the research questions. Data analysis was approached by combining deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive part was related to the fact that we asked certain questions based on the current conceptual framework, while the data analysis related to this research included an inductive approach, which consisted of “building” an already defined category. In this way, we started from the individual to include the general, with the participants enriching and developing the set categories with their observations and answers. Thus, we created additional codes that were not provided in the initial framework. The final step of the analysis was to interpret the research results.

## **Results**

### **The Beginnings of Homosexuality**

According to the research results, half of the interviewees became aware of their sexuality at an early age when they began to cultivate certain feelings towards children of the same sex. It is at this age that the first feelings towards other people appear, however, the participants point out that at that time they were not aware of their own identity, which was formed only later, most intensely during puberty:

*Hmm, well, it's hard to pinpoint that, but I believe I started to understand that part of myself during the last grades of elementary school... That is when I was about 12 or 13 years old. (P3)*

Only one interviewee revealed her homosexual orientation in late adolescence:

*Well, let's say about four years ago, then I actually had my first girlfriend, something more serious, and then I realized that it's something that fulfills me, that is a part of me, and that I want in life. (P6)*

We were interested in their feelings when realizing their homosexuality. We tried to examine whether there are events (certain life situations, trauma, negative experience...) that have stimulated and/or intensified the feelings of the participant towards people of the same sex. Almost all interviewees believe that no event was decisive for the emergence of such feelings; only one interviewee pointed out that a certain situation may have intensified feelings towards a person of the same sex:

*Well, it's not an event, but actually a woman told me about it and after 15 days I started to feel something towards her, and it was all weird to me and then I realized that this was it. (P12)*

Knowing one's sexuality, whether being heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual, is an area that individuals do not think deeply and intensely until they become aware of their first feelings towards people of the opposite and/or

same sex. For this reason, we were interested in participants' experiences that they felt when they became aware of their homosexual orientation. Most of the participants experienced feelings of confusion, fear, guilt, and shame, which is in a way expected given that young people most often grow up in a society where homosexuality is a taboo topic that is not talked about or it is mocked:

*Well, mostly confused, somehow scared, wrong... I think it's hard now to go back in time and understand what exactly was going on in those years of growing up, but I believe some major reason for these emotions and conditions was due to some very traditional environment in which I grew up and by some strong action perhaps of those church views on the subject of homosexuality. Somehow when you're at that age you want to be accepted by friends and other children, but you know if you... If they find out about your orientation, you won't be able to be fully accepted and you probably won't have friends. (P3)*

Also, some participants pointed out that at that time they felt completely “normal”, fulfilled, and happy.

*Well, I have to admit that somehow I felt fulfilled, happy... It was just like that for me, I would say everything was crystal clear, and clean and it was great. (P6)*

Most of the interviewees were afraid of the reaction of family and relatives to the knowledge of their homosexual orientation, which is somewhat expected given that the family usually reacts negatively to the coming out process and finds it difficult to accept it:

*That I was afraid that they would reject me, that they would expel me from the family, that.... I was more afraid of my mother's reaction than anyone else's. (P7)*

Nevertheless, most of the participants do not hide their homosexual orientation, although some of them partially hide it, depending on the society, place, or situation in which they find themselves, thinking that in this way they feel safe:

*No and yes... Definitely when I'm just hiding it's active when it's about some dangerous situations, so when walking in the evening on an empty, half-empty street with my partner, I certainly won't, somehow, while some unknown men pass, hold hands, or if in the club I see that we are attracting the unwanted attention of some guys who, like, think they have the right to harass us. So, uh, when it comes to some kind of security, then, unfortunately, we hide it. (P2)*

## **Society and Environment**

Since most of the participants do not hide their homosexual orientation, we were interested in when they decided on the process of coming out to their relatives and friends, what their reactions were, to whom they first confided, and whether the act of confessing their sexual orientation was stressful. Participants most often started their coming out by entering puberty when they realized that homosexuality was part of their identity, while some of them “came out of the closet” a little later, in adolescence. As for the reactions of family and friends, it is interesting that mothers reacted worse than fathers. In a traditional family, in which the father represented a “firm hand”, mothers more often protected their children in front of the father. Today, in the modern family, the situation is different, yet there do not seem to be any rules, but family relationships largely depend on the parenting style. The results of this research show that mothers reacted more violently to certain knowledge about their family and found it harder to accept reality, while fathers were more open and gentler with their children. Accordingly, fathers were more likely to take a positive, neutral, or indifferent attitude toward their children's homosexual orientation, while mothers were in a state of shock and sought to refute and/or deny what was said:

*My father accepted immediately, all that mattered to him was that I was happy, and he supported me there completely, while my mother didn't at first... I had a lot of problems with that. But over time she just realized that as much as she wanted to change some things, it wasn't possible because I was very firm in my views and she accepted it now, I think she had to accept it more, but she accepted it after all. (P8)*

*The mother was, admittedly, most of all... Completely, completely negatively reacted and went through all the stages of shock, sadness, trying to instill feelings of guilt, begging, ignoring, etc. (P2)*

Almost all participants first confided in their closest circle of friends. For half of them, that moment was quite stressful, while for some participants the process of coming out was not a problem:

*Well, not really... Precisely because I knew his views on it from before, so I think it was good for me to get used to coming out to other people... (P7)*

Only one participant experienced a slightly worse reaction from a close friend:

*And anyway, it, it wasn't a big deal, but I had a feeling that he thought this could and should change. (P4)*

Given that the social exclusion of homosexuals is present in various systems (democratic-legal, labor-market, social welfare system, family system, and local community system), we wanted to gain insight into whether the participants experienced social exclusion in society, school, or work due to their sexual orientation. According to the results, most of the participants were not socially excluded due to their homosexuality:

*Honestly, not, because I try to be surrounded only by people who support me and for whom my sexual orientation does not create any problems. (P1)*

However, it should be noted that some of the interviewees felt socially excluded at certain times:

*Well, not at work, but at school I know it's always been, you always have some people at school who make fun of other people. So whether you are gay or not, whatever, there are always those guys who, among other things, mocked me for that, but also a hundred other people for some other things. (P5)*

*And sometimes ... Society doesn't stop, somehow, reminding me that I'm somewhat "lower", like a third-class citizen, and that can be depressing... (P2)*

At the same time, homosexuals are often exposed to various forms of violence and belong to marginalized and discriminated groups. There is no doubt that part of society believes that homosexual people intentionally attract attention by expressing their orientation and thus provoke, which in turn leads to conflict. Our participants generally did not experience violent behavior due to their sexuality, although one of them pointed out that the cause of physical violence was his dancing in public:

*Recently, a man on the road first started filming me, then insulted me, and after my insistence to stop, to delete the video, he started threatening me and I didn't want to react, bowing my head and moving on because I really don't feel like arguing any more, and then he drove to me first, after that I threw a Coffee-to-go cup I was holding over the car which pushed him over the edge, and then he came out and started attacking me. He managed to kick me twice, I suffered two blows to the head with his hand... I like to dance and sing, and then when I walk on the road like that, to shorten my time, I sometimes hop on the road and sing, so what he said as an incentive for him to start recording me, was the fact that I was dancing and singing at the time, and a kind of reaction to that when I asked him why you were recording me, he said "let it be, you're singing nicely, just keep it up, you little fagot" and that was, that was kind of the beginning of the whole, the whole thing. (P10)*

### **Same-sex Relationship/Union**

To get a complete picture of the experiences and feelings of the participants, we were interested in whether they were ever in a relationship or married to a person of the opposite sex. We thought that at least some of the participants would have such an experience because we took into account the period of the so-called "searching" and experimenting with one's own identity. As we predicted, most of the participants had experience with a person of the opposite sex, most often in the form of a relationship, while none of the participants had the experience of a heterosexual marriage. All of them were in a same-sex relationship at the time of the interview. Given that most have experience of a relationship with a person of the opposite and same-sex, we wondered if there was a difference for them between these two types of relationships. The results show that the relationship with a person of the opposite sex was a certain test for most of the participants, in such a relationship they felt insecure, unfulfilled, and without a connection with their partner, and the lack of sexual attraction was noticeable. On the other hand, they pointed out that the relationship with a person of the same sex is different because by entering into such a relationship they experienced happiness and fulfillment, and they felt more natural and freer. Conversations with the partner in such relationships were more open and deeper, especially because of similar interests and similar issues they experience as homosexuals:

*In same-sex relationship, I just felt completely happy and a kind of fulfillment... Some depth of relationship that I could never find with the opposite sex, neither that nor sexual attraction... (P2)*

Furthermore, the interviewees mostly did not emphasize the difference between a same-sex relationship and a same-sex union, so it can be concluded that for them it is a universal concept. However, several of them emphasize the difference where they perceive the relationship as something more informal while union represents a higher level of relationship, but also legally, life in a same-sex union, in their opinion, can be much easier and simpler:

*Hm... So there is a difference... relationship is often somehow more informal while union is maybe some higher-level... (P3)*

Accordingly, some of the participants believe that entering a same-sex union represents a kind of certainty that they will spend the rest of their lives with that person, a confirmation of love and trust, while other participants believe that entering such union makes life easier in terms of certain rights, such as finances, buying an apartment, but also the adoption of a child/children:

*First of all, a legal act means the realization and regulation of certain rights. Then there is the romantic part, the obligation, and care for the person I am with, to dedicate myself to that person and to build a life together... I want to marry/enter union with someone I can imagine in the long run at that moment, that is, such as with my current partner. (P2)*

Almost all of the interviewees think that there is certain discrimination against same-sex union, and they cited the mentality of the society in which they live as the most common reason. Since none of the participants had the experience of entering a same-sex union, we asked them what the reactions of their family, friends, and colleagues would be to such an act. The participants mostly think that the reactions would be positive and approving:

*Well, we have talked about it many times already and they would be absolute supportive to it, in every sense. (P1)*

However, some interviewees point out that if they informed their parents, the reaction of one or both parents would not be positive and approving:

*My mother would be indignant... Very likely, just as she is now pretending that the situation is the way it is not... I think she would completely ignore that aspect of my life. Father would be happy, very likely, because I am happy and that's it. (P7)*

### **Children of Same-Sex Partners**

Considering the current discussions on the life of children in same-sex unions, we were interested in whether the participants want to have a child/children or whether they think about it at all. According to the results, most of them have a desire for a child/children, but several participants still do not know and/or are not sure and it is too early for them to think about such topics as their lives are not currently shaped as they should be. Regarding the best way to have children, most of the participants emphasize the possibility of adoption and a few of them mention the possibility of artificial insemination. They believe that adoption is a very noble and humane act, and the possibility of artificial insemination and sperm banks are achievable thanks to human progress and the development of science:

*Well, I believe adoption is the best way. Many children live in orphanages and family homes. I think this is one of the noble things that any couple or individual can do to give an abandoned child a home or a better future... (P3)*

Although almost all participants have a very positive opinion on adoption and point out that this is the most likely way to have children, some still point to certain problems that exist during such a procedure in the hope that such issues will be resolved as soon as possible for the benefit of parents and children:

*Well, adoption... I think it's very nice, very noble, but I think there is a huge problem in Croatia because we all know that the system in our country is a disaster and that people who meet all the conditions to have children and who would take care of them and everything, they have to fight for years and years and it's about the persistence of the people who decided to adopt because to spend 5-6 years to adopt a child I finally think it's a little too rigorous, of course, it should not be given to everyone, but I think it should be much faster and much*

*more efficient because all the time while they are struggling with this system, this child is kept in the orphanage for as many days and that is not the solution. (P11)*

Furthermore, all interviewees believe that homosexuals are as capable as heterosexuals in raising children, emphasizing the ability of homosexuals to prepare children for certain life situations, those with which heterosexual parents do not have problems:

*Of course, I think, I even think that maybe in some things they are better, because we have a lot of examples of domestic violence, violence against women, against children, and I think that people who can't have children, whether hetero couples or homosexuals, and who long for it, they will do their best to make that child happy. (P6)*

Nevertheless, most of the participants believe that there are differences in the upbringing of children in same-sex and heterosexual families, but in the context of the society in which they live and the mentality of people. Although they believe that there is no difference in terms of providing love and care for them, they are aware that children of same-sex partners would be viewed differently than those of heterosexual partners and believe that parents should prepare children for such situations:

*I think they exist only because we live in this climate, but there shouldn't be differences because, me for example, if I had my child here, I know that child would be from an early age, let's say, discriminated against and strangely viewed because, like, you have two moms, while in other countries it is not like that, it is a completely normal thing and all children are equal. (P6)*

For this reason, all participants believe that children raised within the same-sex union will be exposed to some kind of peer discrimination, but also point out that this is much less represented today than it used to be. They emphasize that society is still progressing for the better and that it is possible to reduce the possibility of discrimination through a quality education system, whereby children in schools should be educated about homosexuality in the right way. They also believe that parents have an important role in this process of progress, considering that children behave the way they are socialized at home, so if their parents raise them in the right way, in the future this discrimination should be less and less prominent:

*I think there could be, however, a lot of children exposed to peer violence and children need to be educated on how to stop doing this, how to have zero tolerance for violence, and we should not worry about whether a child would be abused. (P9)*

### **Satisfaction with Life and Activities**

Although all interviewees were quite satisfied with their lives at the time of the research, some of them pointed out the tendency to improve certain aspects of life (e.g. financial situation, self-employment, education):

*Well, I would like to improve in terms of myself as a person achieving my goals, to achieve my plans since I am still young, but in essence, I am satisfied and appreciate what I have. (P8)*

*Well, at the moment, the way things are, right now, like this second, it is exactly what I set out to do, but in the future, like, we'll see, I'll finish college first and then we'll think further. (P11)*

Interestingly, half of the interviewees lived outside the Republic of Croatia at some point in their lives, so we tried to examine whether they notice differences in the quality of life in different environments about their sexual orientation. Most of the participants have very positive experiences of living in countries such as Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria, which, in their opinion, are more advanced and open than Croatia on many issues, including homosexuals and their rights. They stated that they felt much more accepted and freer in those countries:

*So since the first country I lived in was the Netherlands, the impression was completely different. I lived in Amsterdam and I was surprised by how different it is from Croatia in terms of these personal freedoms and existence as a sexual minority. It's quite a more open society, more tolerant, and that's where I lost that ubiquitous fear of physical attack and the like. Yes, I think staying there in that field helped me a lot. (P3)*



However, some participants cited the example of life in Bosnia and Herzegovina and do not like to remember that period because they felt worse than in Croatia, they noticed a much greater tendency to prejudice and homophobic behavior:

*Ah, I think that BiH is one of the few countries that are worse than Croatia in this regard, it generally has lower living standards, people are more prone to prejudice, and still feel the effects of war, political and national divisions, and so on... (P4)*

At the same time, half of the participants who do not have experience of a long-term stay outside Croatia would like to experience life in a foreign country, most often choosing Sweden, Austria, France, and America. As the most common reasons for choosing these countries, they pointed out the knowledge of a foreign language spoken in that country (English as the main language or a language well known to the majority of the population), the possibility of enrolling in a college, and employment. They think that life outside of Croatia would be better and more comfortable in terms of their homosexual orientation and that in some large and developed cities, it would certainly be easier for them, at least in certain aspects:

*Well, I think it would be... Because I think it's easier in foreign countries... So apart from the fact that of course there are bigger cities and more people, it's more represented, but also more accepted. I think this mentality of ours in Croatia is simply like that and we are brought up to be too preoccupied with other people and not our own lives, while in foreign countries they somehow don't have time for such things. Of course, there are some small communities everywhere where there may be discrimination of some degree, but I think they are better and more developed in this regard than Croatia. (P8)*

We also touched on the Gay Pride, which most of our participants consider extremely important in terms of increasing the visibility and rights of homosexuals, aiming to achieve equality in society:

*I think that every kind of representation and increase of visibility of gay people in society is important, and the Pride especially because you are drowned in a mass of people who have experienced at least some similar struggles with yours and I think that feeling of support is invaluable. (P4)*

On the other hand, some of them believe that Gay Pride is not necessary and that it “rocks the boat”. They believe that such a protest will not change anything for the better and that by participating in the Gay Pride, individuals are exposed to unnecessary risk:

*Aaa, it's a nice event, but I also think that there shouldn't be so much noise, I would organize it, that Pride, as a big gathering, barbecue, and not a protest practically all over the city ... I think that it doesn't achieve anything anymore, that we, that they have already achieved as much as they could with that, that now we just need to work on society, stay here as much as possible, not to run away, show by our example that not like every gay has to be feminized. (P11)*

## **Conclusion**

Defining the concept of homosexuality as we understand and use it today has taken shape over several centuries. In the past, people of homosexual orientation used to hide their sexuality mostly for their safety because they often experienced psychological and physical violence. Today, however, the situation is somewhat different, although this does not mean that homosexuals still do not encounter certain problems and condemnations. It is for this reason that this paper aimed to investigate the experiences of homosexual persons regarding the quality of their lives.

After analyzing and interpreting the data collected during the interviews with the research participants, we concluded that the first feelings towards a person of the same sex occurred in kindergarten and puberty and that no special life situations were crucial for their occurrence. When realizing their homosexuality, they mostly felt confused, scared, guilty, and afraid of the reaction of the environment, especially their family. Despite certain fears, the participants do not hide their homosexuality, and they most often “come out of the closet” during puberty and adolescence. Discovering their homosexuality was quite stressful for them, but despite that, they mostly did not feel social exclusion from society, most of them were not victims of violent behavior and did not feel rejected. Most had the experience of a relationship with the opposite sex followed by learning about the existence of feelings towards people of the same sex. The participants believe that there is not much difference between a same-sex relationship and a same-sex union, yet entering a same-sex union still represents certain

security for some of them, both emotionally and financially. Most want to have a child/children, and the best way for them is adoption. They believe that same-sex partners are just as capable of raising children as heterosexuals. Finally, the participants are mostly satisfied with their lives, although, given the experience of living outside of Croatia, they believe that in some European countries, homosexuals are more accepted and freer, which greatly affects their quality of life. Finally, based on the presented experiences, it can be concluded that there has been a shift compared to previous years, but there is still a lot of room for further education, aiming to eliminate gender-based discrimination and to accept diversity.

## Scientific Ethics Declaration

The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

## Acknowledgements or Notes

This article was presented as an oral presentation at the International Conference on Research in Education and Social Sciences ([www.icress.net](http://www.icress.net)) conference held in Baku/Azerbaijan on July 01-04, 2022.

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#### Author Information

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**Gorana Bandalovic**

Associate Professor  
University of Split (Croatia)  
Poljicka cesta 35 21000 Split, Croatia  
Contact e-mail: [gbandalo@ffst.hr](mailto:gbandalo@ffst.hr)

**Ines Uvodic**

Master of Sociology  
Hotel Le Méridien Lav Split, Croatia

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**To cite this article:**

Bandalovic, G. & Uvodic, I. (2022). Life in rainbow colors: homosexuals experiences. *The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational & Social Sciences (EPESS)*, 24, 100-110.