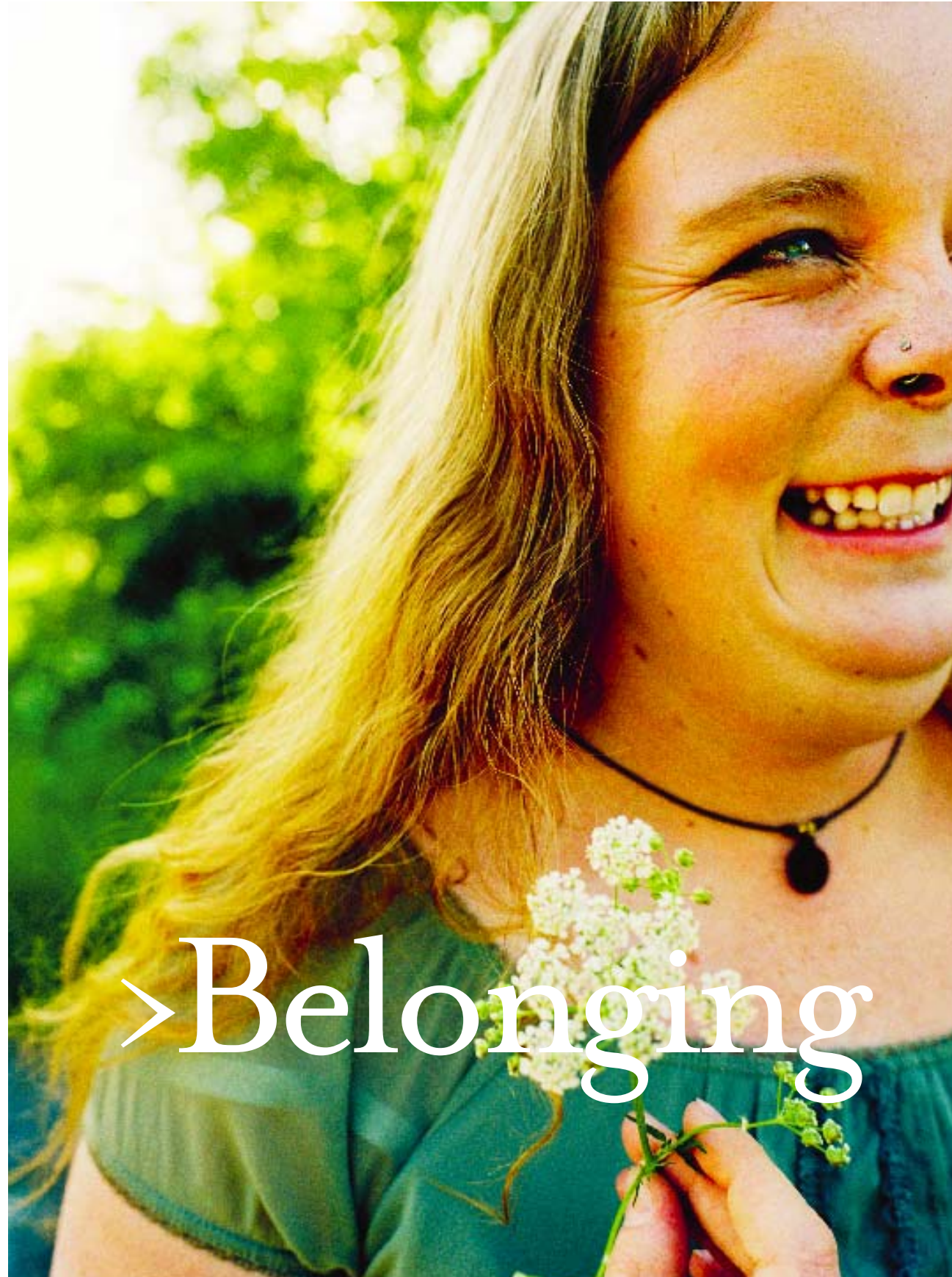



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# > Belonging

 **RFSL** *The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights*  
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IT IS VITAL FOR ALL human beings to feel as if they have a home, to feel kinship with others and a sense of belonging in a society. When one belongs to a marginalized or subculture it is even more important.

It has been more than half a century since the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights was founded. The conditions present in everyday life then are difficult to imagine today, as most no longer exist. What we now take for granted is the result of work that has been ongoing since that beginning.

We are living in exciting times. The dominant heteronormative perspective pervading society has recently been called into question; laws are being enacted that make it irrelevant who we choose to live our lives with. In some parts of society, it is no longer taken as a given that everyone is heterosexual and LGBT groups have become a critical driving force in these sorts of developments.

In a democratic system founded on the principle of equal rights and equal dignity for all, there would be no need for this pamphlet. But we still live in a society that holds heterosexuality as the norm, where many of us are not valued for who we really are. To achieve equality in all facets of society, we have to fight for the rights of all groups at the same time. This demands hard work and engagement, and once we achieve our victories we must continue to defend them.

As long as there are people in society who are not deemed valuable citizens, the vision we have of a truly democratic society has not yet been reached.

Sören Andersson  
*Federation Chair RFSL 2004*

Maria Sjödin  
*Vice-Chair RFSL 2004*

## > *The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights*

... RFSL, is a national federation composed of around thirty independent sections in Sweden. RFSL is a democratic organization, independent of religious and political party affiliations.

RFSL was formed in 1950 and is one of the world's oldest organizations for homo-, bi-, and transgendered people. Today the organization has more than 6,000 members throughout the nation.

The federation's main office is in Stockholm where employees work on questions pertaining to the Federation itself as well as health issues, the latter including a great deal of work on issues associated with AIDS.

The Federation also engages in public relations with the aim of changing attitudes in society and influencing politicians and opinion-makers in order to improve the situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgen-

dered people. RFSL's various sections also often have a social agenda meant to give lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people an opportunity to meet. The sections provide information both to the public and to schools, operate helplines, and influence politicians and officials on the local level. RFSL also publishes the independent newspaper *Kom Ut [Come Out]*, posts an internet site, and has a research library.

A group of diverse people, including a young man in a patterned shirt, a young woman with long red hair holding a bouquet of white flowers, a woman in a purple top, a man in a white tank top, an elderly woman in a white blouse, and a young man in a blue jacket with multiple necklaces, are standing in a field of white flowers. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset, with trees in the background.

# Stephanie;

*My image of how I want to look and how I want to be has been determined by what society dictates, of course. There is an image of what femininity is. If you live up to it by being a self-identified woman, you'll have it easy. I know a lot of people who have had a harder transition than I have had in terms of that.*

*If the dominant image of woman is either madonna or whore, then there is something for me to challenge. I would never want to judge naughty girls who go out and have sex, but I'm probably more moderate myself.*

*My dream for the future is to live in a house in the country with a man and children, dogs, and cats. I hope my life can be like that some day.*



**Asynja;** *A lot has happened during my eleven years living as an out dyke. When I came out, there was a girls' night at the community center the first Friday of every month, there were always fights and it felt like a desperate meat market. These days, you can have a club that's not gay but still attracts an interesting mix of people.*

*If people ask »Who are you?« I no longer first say that I'm a dyke. It doesn't feel as important. I'm a lesbian. That's important to me, as an identity, as part of my history. But for me, it is also important to not be lesbian in some ways.*

*You can't really tell who's a dyke these days. There are so many more ways to fight for increased equality than to dress in a way that shows — or proves — that you belong to a group.*

## ➤ GENDER & SEXUALITY

**EXCLUSION CREATES UNITY.** Throughout time, those who have been denied the right to express their desire, love, and way of life have come together at the margins of society. Often it was there that a respect for differences arose, along with a solidarity that frequently crossed gender, sexual, ethnic, physical, age, and class differences.

Today we demand equal rights for all people and respect for different ways of being and living. »Us« and »them« are not the same groups today as they were fifty years ago. But in certain contexts it is still meaningful to speak of a »group«, or a »world« of people who fall outside the heterosexual norm. The concept »LGBT« [lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people] — in Sweden, »HBT« [homosexual, bisexual, and transgendered people] — is an attempt to make visible all groups that break with the heterosexual norm. What we call LGBT today was »the gay movement« of an earlier era. In the gay movement, homo-

sexuality was the point of departure even though bisexual and transgendered people were always closely aligned and often affected by many of the same issues.

LGBT is used both as a collective term for people whose sexuality or gender identity differs from the heterosexual norm and as a concept when discussing issues relevant to non-heterosexual sexuality and gender identity. LGBT is itself not an »identity.« People who fall under that rubric sometimes have a good deal in common and other times nothing at all. Just like people in general.

**MANY PEOPLE THINK** that sexuality is a private issue that shouldn't be raised in public debate unless it relates to reproductive matters. This shows the need for a deeper understanding of how intensely and intimately sexuality and gender identity are woven into the values, actions, positions, and attitudes of society.

Today more people are realizing that there

isn't a necessary connection between who we are and what's between our legs. In other words, that concepts like »man« and »woman« are too narrow to capture the varied experiences of gender identity that constitute our realities.

Gender identity is central to the hierarchical system that regulates and assigns roles and positions in society. It is gender identity that determines how our bodies appear and how our desires are expressed.

Today we must loosen the hold of old values and allow people to live according to their own views. But that luxury has not been granted to everyone. Before we can afford to raise challenges to the old order we need respect and acknowledgement as human beings. Thus, the first step in the struggle for equality must be to acknowledge each individual's inalienable right to personhood; this must include allowing individuals to self-determine and freely choose their sexual and gender identities.

## >LGBT & science

RESEARCH HAS RECENTLY shifted from investigating the origins of our identities to questioning the very norms that purport to define who we are. Scientists still perform experiments on radiated fruit flies in the attempt to locate the »gay gene« and social scientists still rely on commonly interpretive models based on parental influence, despite the fact that these efforts and methods are

hopelessly antiquated. When we no longer consider sexuality to be a problem, the need to correct deviance will of course also disappear. What we need today is research that emphasizes human experience and society's inability to accommodate reality. The results of ongoing research about homosexual and bisexual people working in caring professions, on the experience of children who grow up with two parents of the same gender, and on how terms for gender determine status in the school system can all potentially affect our future attitudes and laws.

Classifying either homosexuality or transgender as an illness is a thing of the past. Today, we only use the categories homo-, bi-, hetero- and transgender to help us understand different ways of being and experiencing, not to legitimize them. Despite this certain diagnoses are still used in order to receive specific treatment. For example, in Sweden »transsexuality« is a medical diagnosis that can only be made by a psychiatrist when a person wishes to receive treatment and a new legal gender. So, for many, this diagnosis constitutes a form of recognition. However, others believe it signals a lack of respect for their right to define themselves.

## >the movement

HISTORICALLY, THE LGBT movement's argument for equality was based on the political strategy of assimilation. They argued that

homosexuals were just like heterosexuals and that transsexuals were merely born into the wrong bodies and thought to be »real« men and women with precisely the same desires and needs as everyone else. In the early struggle for the recognition of equal basic rights, there was little room to critique norms. However, while today's society has begun to accept the fact that we actually do not all think and feel alike, we still believe that there is cause to continue to fight for basic equal rights and call attention to the fact that what is considered »normal« is no longer an immutable truth. In other words, how we choose to live is more a question of taste and desire than a natural given.

»Queer« was originally used as an insult to describe someone who was »like that,« at a time when society thought it could distinguish between »normal people« and »other people.« Today the movement has reclaimed the word, just like »fag« and »dyke,« and it has been transformed into a concept that calls the established truths of a heteronormative society into question.

Now we have to ask ourselves some uncomfortable questions. Like, can a transsexual be a »real« woman if there is no such thing as »authentic« womanhood? And, how does one become homosexual if orientation is not decided genetically?

The modern LGBT movement's role is to act as a gatekeeper against the undemocratic and reactionary values in that arise while society undergoes transformation.

## >LGBT words

### >heteronorm/ heteronormativity

The twin assumptions that:  
(1) the only acceptable way of life is to be attracted to, fall in love with, and live with a person of the opposite sex, and (2) a person must comply with the societal rules that govern what counts as feminine and masculine.

### >non-heterosexual

A person who does not live or identify him- or herself in accordance with the heteronorm.

### >homophobia

The fear or hatred of those who break with the heteronorm.

### >LGBT awareness

A general level of consciousness required by society that includes knowledge about and respect for the fact that not everyone is heterosexual, that not everyone relates to sex and gender roles in the same way, and that equality requires respect for various perspectives in the larger society.

### >LGBT [lesbian/ gay/bi/transgender]

A collective term for non-heterosexual and transgendered people.

### >transgender

A collective term for those who do not feel at home in the gender category they were allotted, or who are not acknowledged by others as having the gender they consider their own. Transgender only refers to gender identity and has nothing to do with sexual orientation.

### >queer

A perspective that calls into question the notion that there are sexual and gendered truths about the world, about who we are and how we ought to live.

### >come out

To tell others that one is not heterosexual or in some other way identify oneself as something other than what is perhaps expected by those around us.

## > IDENTITIES

IT IS IMPORTANT TO all of us to feel a sense of belonging and commonality with others. For that reason, identities and categories can be important points of orientation. For example, a person who lives in a new country might experience his or her identification with the home country with a new intensity. Or a disability can be perceived as such a dominant characteristic to others that the personality of a disabled person can be overshadowed although she doesn't experience herself as defined by it. Or a woman in a male-dominated environment might experience her »femininity« as the attribute most relevant to those around her. In the same way sexuality and gender identity have different weight for different people in different contexts.

Before identities like »homosexual« and »heterosexual« were formulated just over a hundred years ago, there were of course people living out their sexuality in every possible way – only without labels. Our categories are not inherent. No personal realities are unchangeable unless

we make them so. In order for us to adopt an identity, it has to have been formulated and presented to us as a possible category. How we behave and identify ourselves today depends on what we understand by terms like »lesbian« and »gay«. We are not only looking for names for what we are, but we also adapt to what is expected of us.

Different people mean different things when they talk about sexual orientation. So we have to distinguish between sexual behavior, identity, and desires. It is perhaps most accurate to say that there are *various* homo-sexualities, bisexualities, and heterosexualities.

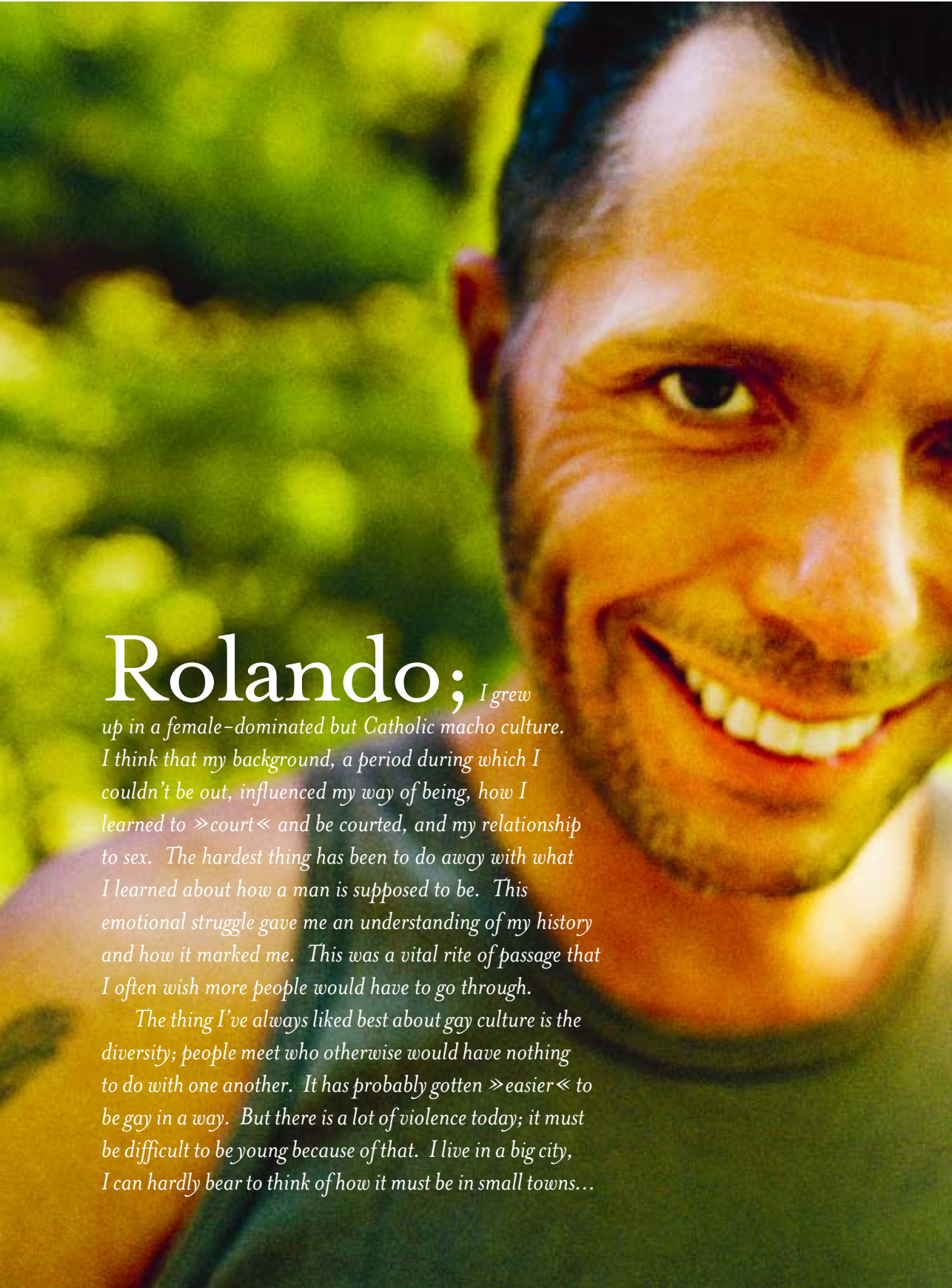
These terms can be useful as a means of explanation and information. But they must never be used as a tool to restrict people. How we identify ourselves, which term we feel comfortable with, and which describe who we are, is a different matter.

A vision for the future sees sexual orientation as having so little impact on how we are treated, that there will be less need to use terms like gay and straight when talking about ourselves.



**Eli;** *I've loved getting dressed up ever since I was a kid! I choose to take on feminine gender expressions because I feel more comfortable that way. Like, we don't need any more masculine men on this earth you know. There's so little wiggle room for how you get to act if you're born as a biological man. Life is so much easier if you can cross the lines and be provocative.*

*I chose my own name. I wanted to create space to make it easier to be the way I want on any given day; my old name had such limiting associations. I want to create my own person, a person I've made up out of my own experiences. I want to choose for myself who I am and who I will be.*



**Rolando;** *I grew up in a female-dominated but Catholic macho culture. I think that my background, a period during which I couldn't be out, influenced my way of being, how I learned to »court« and be courted, and my relationship to sex. The hardest thing has been to do away with what I learned about how a man is supposed to be. This emotional struggle gave me an understanding of my history and how it marked me. This was a vital rite of passage that I often wish more people would have to go through.*

*The thing I've always liked best about gay culture is the diversity; people meet who otherwise would have nothing to do with one another. It has probably gotten »easier« to be gay in a way. But there is a lot of violence today; it must be difficult to be young because of that. I live in a big city, I can hardly bear to think of how it must be in small towns...*

## >lesbians

HOMOSEXUAL/GAY WOMEN, *lesbians*, or *dykes*, fall in love with and/or are attracted to women. Some lesbians never feel attracted to men. Others do, but they might experience a special bond with women.

Because women have been relegated to a lower status in society, lesbians have always been more invisible. However, women have always had sexual and emotional relationships outside the »normal« life of marriage and family. Often it went unnoticed, since it was not believed that women could have a sexuality independent of men. Lesbians have always been a driving force in the struggle for women's rights. Since lesbians have not depended on men for attraction and love or in order to form families, they have served as an example of women's possibilities outside the traditional paradigm.

Society traditionally connects *woman* to *femininity* in a way that loses all relevance outside heterosexual gender roles. The image of the lesbian woman as masculine and »unfeminine« reflects society's fear of and contempt for women who do not subordinate themselves to traditional models.

The notion that there is a naturally inherent female sexuality and a natural way for women to live and have relationships is considered old-fashioned. Lesbian women's lives, like everyone else's, are constructed by societal images and models. There is no

common denominator among lesbians for how to live, dress, or express themselves, just as none exists among heterosexual women. As women are granted more influence, freedom, strength, and self-worth, the variety of sexuality and lifestyle opportunities that exist for lesbians will increase.

## >gay men

HOMOSEXUAL MEN, *gays*, or *fags*, fall in love with and/or are attracted to men. This does not imply that gay men never have sexual or emotional relations with women, just that they may feel a different kind of emotional bond with men.

Men have always had sexual relations with other men, often even while they were living in traditional heterosexual families.

Homosexuality in men has often been seen as an affront to patriarchal culture and as a »lack« of masculinity. But for many men, the struggle to live up to the ideals of masculine appearance and behavior becomes stronger when they break with the sexual norm.

A common denominator for gay culture seems to be a strong focus on sexuality. Male sexuality has almost always been believed to be superior and stronger than women's and, likewise, gays have been characterized as oversexed and incapable of forming close relationships. This has been seen as the domain and desire of women. Since gay sexuality has been relegated outside the frame of society, certain gay men have developed an underground cruising culture.

At times, this included establishing clandestine and separate places where men could meet and have sex with other men. The stereotypical image of gay men has been shaped by this view that sex should be marginalized to a separate part of life.

As the image of masculinity undergoes transformation, we'll see that gays can live in every conceivable configuration and in a variety of lifestyles. Classic models of masculinity and femininity are embraced to varying degrees by gays, bisexuals, and straight men. As sexuality becomes separated from gender identity it will become impossible to identify people with sexual categories.

## >bisexuals

BISEXUALS FALL IN LOVE with and/or are attracted to persons of different genders. Some have sex with people of different genders but choose as partners or fall in love with people of only one gender.

It's sometimes easy to believe that there are only heterosexuals and homosexuals, since one usually assumes that people live in same-sex or opposite-sex couples. Many believe that a person who moves from a same-sex relationship to an opposite-sex relationship, or the reverse, is moving from a *homosexual* to a *heterosexual* relationship. But bisexuals seldom feel that way about it. You might think of yourself as bisexual all the time, regardless of the gender of those with whom you have sex or relationships.

Most people at some time or period in

their lives have had feelings for or sexual fantasies about someone of a gender other than the one to which they are ordinary attracted to. Some have sex with people of different genders but don't feel that it affects their identity as homo- or heterosexual. Many consider the term »bisexual« misleading because they are not attracted to people on the basis of their gender. Since to a great degree we define gender through the division of people into those to whom we *relate sexually* and those with whom we *identify*, as we begin to shed that perspective, our own gender identity becomes more fluid.

There is a belief among many gays and lesbians that bisexuals enjoy the advantage of being part of the heterosexual world. But many bisexuals feel that their situation is more complicated since they risk never being acknowledged as part of any »world,« as well as being excluded by either world when they choose the »wrong« partner.

Our feelings are complicated. Desires and needs are constructed in different ways and shift over time and according to context. Only the person identifying as bisexual can really say what this means for him or her. It is also clear that bisexuality is more common than people think.

## >transgender

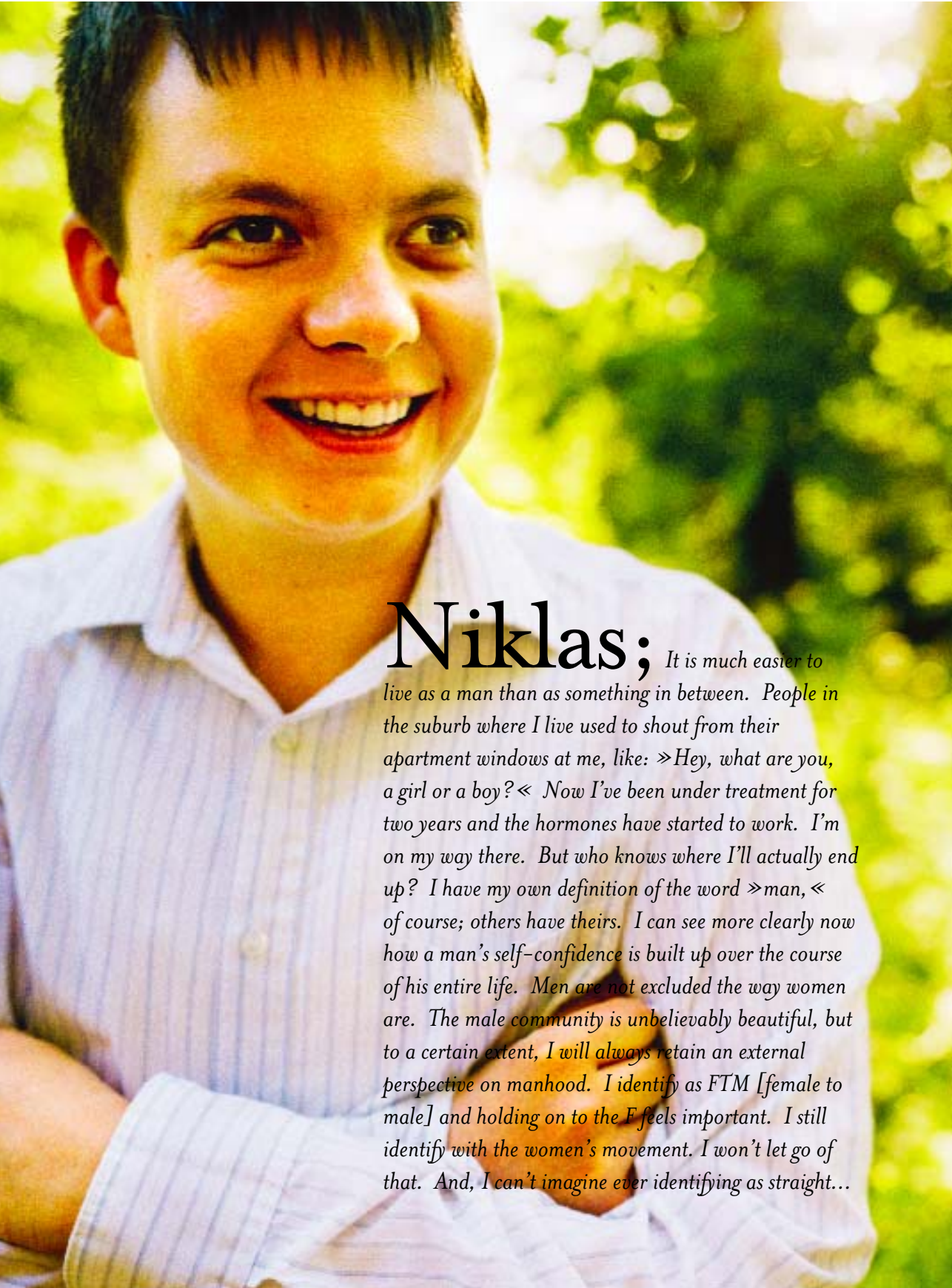
TRANSGENDER IS THE umbrella term for people with varied experiences of what it means to break with or not feel at home in



**Bitte;** *When I was at a lesbian demonstration in Gothenburg it was obvious that I didn't quite belong. But I stayed anyway. Even though I fall in love with guys sometimes I still think that we have to be united in political struggle. Unfortunately we probably always have to hide some parts of our personalities to take part in a movement.*

*I know dykes who sometimes have sex with guys and some that don't simply because they think it would make things too complicated. When I got together with a girl for the first time everybody said that I was a lesbian — it was as if my past was erased. Then, when I fell in love with a guy, it was as if I had been fooling people. I hang out a lot with dykes, and sometimes I say »Hey, check out that cute guy« so that I won't be branded as a traitor if I were to get together with a guy again. ha-ha.*





**Niklas;** *It is much easier to live as a man than as something in between. People in the suburb where I live used to shout from their apartment windows at me, like: »Hey, what are you, a girl or a boy?« Now I've been under treatment for two years and the hormones have started to work. I'm on my way there. But who knows where I'll actually end up? I have my own definition of the word »man,« of course; others have theirs. I can see more clearly now how a man's self-confidence is built up over the course of his entire life. Men are not excluded the way women are. The male community is unbelievably beautiful, but to a certain extent, I will always retain an external perspective on manhood. I identify as FTM [female to male] and holding on to the F feels important. I still identify with the women's movement. I won't let go of that. And, I can't imagine ever identifying as straight...*

the prevailing roles of our two-gender system. *Transvestites* sometimes take on another gender role through clothing or other attributes. Some do this in accordance with their sexual practices but, for most, it is done from a sense that gender roles are too limiting. *Transsexuals* feel that their bodies are »wrong« and want to correct them and change their legal gender identity. *Intersexual* people are born with some combination of genitalia, gonads, chromosomes, or hormones, that do not completely conform to those of what society deems an »ordinary« biological boy or girl. *Drag kings* and *drag queens* take on another gender identity through dress in order to entertain, play with gender roles, and to push the boundaries of their own and others' notions of gender. The term *transgender* can also be used for those who do not feel at home in a particular gender or who deviate from gender norms in terms of appearance or behavior. They are not always accepted as the gender they identify with, which can often be distressing or uncomfortable to that person.

Many of the people one places under the category »transgendered« want nothing to do with that label. Many transsexuals can do easily identify as a specific gender and don't question the male/female division. This is called »passing«. Others feel that it is impossible to identify within the given binary gender framework, either physically or psychologically, and refuse to »choose sides« or be gender coherent.

Society today has the legal right to decide what an individual's sex/gender is from

birth. But no one has the right to decide what being a »man« or a »woman« means for another person, or how gender should be experienced or performed. Gender identity does not have to conform to the body's appearance or to the gender given on identification papers.

In a world where fixed roles are tied to biological gender it can be difficult to live comfortably as oneself. Many people consciously struggle with this vital issue throughout their lives. For others, playing with and inverting is enough to remind them that they are free, their gender identity is their own, and that it goes beyond the binary sex/gender prison.

## >queer

SOMETIMES THE WORD »queer« is used as an alternative identity term that blurs the more rigid and misleading terms that society uses to describe people. To call oneself »queer« implies an identity outside the norm with regard to gender identity, sexuality, and/or lifestyle. For many this is as much about an attitude about life and the world as how we actually live, an attitude that rejects predetermined rules and roles regarding gender, love, sex, and relationships.

Some think that the term LGBT should add a »Q,« in acknowledgement of these complex ways of living and being outside heteronormative paradigms.



Memorial ceremony during Liberation Week 1984. In the 1990s focus shifted from political demand for tolerance to pride, and the annual demonstration became a parade.

**1864**> The new Swedish penal code lists »fornication against nature« (incl. sex between persons of the same sex) as punishable by fines and/or hard labor. The law applies to women and men.

**1869**> The Hungarian journalist Karl M. Benkert launches the terms »homosexuality« and »heterosexuality« in a pamphlet directed against Prussian law. From the Greek »homo« [same] and Latin »sexus« [sex].

**1897**> The Scientific Humanitarian Committee, the first political organization for homosexual men, was founded in Germany.

**1907**> The term »homosexuality« is used for the first time in Sweden in a review of the German Kraft-Ebing's book *Psychopathica Sexualis*.

**1910**> The German researcher Magnus Hirschfeld invents the term »transvestite« from the Latin »trans« [from-to] and »vestis« [clothing].

**1918**> Magnus Hirschfeld invents the term »transsexual« from the Latin »trans« [from-to] and »sexus« [sex].

**1930**> The first known sex-change is performed in Germany.

**1944**> In Sweden, consensual sexual relations between people of the same sex are decriminalized. Homo- and bisexuals are believed to be ill and are confined to mental hospitals until they are »healthy.«

**1949**> The American doctor Harry Benjamin treats transsexuals with hormone therapy.

**1950**> RFSL is formed as Sweden's first organization for gays and lesbians.

**1951**> Allan Hellman comes out as Sweden's first openly homosexual man in the magazine *Se* [Look] and is named »Sweden's Most Courageous Man.« RFSL had 500 members by the end of the year.

**1952**> Christine Jørgensen undergoes what has often been called the first sex-change operation.

**1955**> Sweden's highest court determines that a lesbian mother is not unfit as custodial parent merely on the basis of sexual orientation.

RFSL publishes its newsletter for members *The Companion*.

**1957**> RFSL's divisions are *Diana* for women and *The Circle* for men [Stockholm], the mixed *Friends' Club* [Gothenburg], and the mail contact service *Club Albatross*.

**1962**> The club *Transvestia* is formed in Sweden for transgendered people and other sexual minorities.

**1964**> The first RFSL meeting hall, *Timmy*, is opened in Stockholm.

**1968**> The author Bengt Martin and his partner come out on the tv program *Great Forum* and are contacted by thousands afterwards.

The first private gay club, *City Club*, opens in Sweden.

## > QUEER HISTORY

THROUGHOUT TIME people have been attracted to, had sex with, and chosen to live with people of the same sex. The models for what is »normal« and »abnormal,« taboo and permissible, have expanded over time.

It is difficult to say when »gay history« began in the modern age. Classification and division into categories began as a common practice in the nineteenth century when institutions began to distinguish among »types« in order to figure out the relation between norm and difference. In 1944, homosexuality became a medical diagnosis in Sweden and was removed from the criminal code. Homosexuality, which had been viewed as a conscious failing and a personal shortcoming, then came to be seen as inborn, something one couldn't help. In Sweden the notion of homosexuality as disease persisted up to 1979.

The status change of 1979 made it possible for homosexuals in the West to begin to identify themselves as a group with common interests. Underground cultures emerged and gave people refuge.

Industrialization allowed women to move more freely and, in cities, space was created for new ways of life, for people of all sexual orientations. The culmination of the new permissive urban culture was achieved in Berlin of the 1920s and 30s, where a host of cafés and dance halls catering to the LGBT community emerged, despite the prohibition of sex between men. Hitler's seizure of power brought a hasty end to this culture. Homosexuals and transgendered people were classed by the Nazis as undesirable elements and were sent to concentration camps. Somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 men were interned between 1939 and 1945 along with an unknown number of women. Within these categories, of course many transgendered people.

»THE STONEWALL UPRISING« occurred in 1969 when the patrons of a well-known New York bar – mainly transgendered people and sexual »deviants« – fought back against the harassment of an all-too-common police raid. This event marks the birth of the modern

**1969**> On June 28 transgendered people and sexual »deviants« strike back during police persecution at the bar Stonewall in New York. This uprising marks the birth of the modern LGBT struggle.

Viking, later Revolt, is launched as the first gay lifestyle journal in Sweden dealing with sexual politics.

**1970**> First sexual education dealing with non-heterosexuality takes place in Stockholm schools.

**1971**> First gay demonstration takes place in Örebro. RFSL becomes more political and reaches out to a larger audience; bisexuals are included as a target group.

**1972**> Sweden becomes the first country in the world to offer the formal medical and legal possibility for trans- and intersexual persons to receive, after legal examination, a new legal gender designation. Treatment with hormone therapy and surgery begin.

**1972**> The parliament declares that homosexual cohabitation »is, from the point of view of society, a fully acceptable form of cohabitation.« RFSL has around 1,000 members. In the U.S. homosexuality is no longer classified as a disease.

**1974**> The Greek letter Lambda becomes the international symbol for the gay movement.

**1977**> The first Day of Liberation event, later Liberation Week, is organized by RFSL Stockholm.

**1978**> The minimum age for same-sex relationships is set at 15 years old, the same as for different sex relationships.

The rainbow flag is born, designed in San Francisco by Gilbert Baker.

**1978–84**> The government's »Homosex-Inquiry« works to identify »possible remaining discrimination« in the legal code. Suggests among other things some form of marriage law, protection against discrimination, and protection under the hate-crime law.

**1979**> After the steps of the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare are occupied and homosexuals are urged to demand medical leave on the basis of homosexuality, homosexuality is removed from the medical diagnosis list in Sweden.

The new association Benjamin for transsexuals joins RFSL.

**1981**> RFSL has circa 2,500 members.

**1982**> First AIDS death in Sweden.

**1985**> Sweden's archbishop urges Christian homosexuals to live as celibates in friendship.

The association for transsexuals, Benjamin, leaves RFSL.

**1986**> RFSL's advisory bureau in Stockholm and RFSL's HIV-office begin HIV preventative activity.

**1987**> The Swedish »Bathhouse law« is enacted as a result of the AIDS panic and gay saunas are prohibited. Prohibition of discrimination against homosexuals by business and government officials is legislated.

In New York, the Aids Coalition to Unleash Power—ACT UP—carries out militant actions.

**1988**> The Swedish partner law for same-sex couples is passed, still not placing same-sex couples on equal standing with heterosexual couples.

**1989**> Denmark becomes the first country in the world with a partnership law that gives almost the same rights and responsibilities to partners as heterosexual marriage.

**1990**> In New York the activist group Queer Nation disseminates its radical manifesto about the right to be openly gay in the face of liberal and assimilationist gay focus on the right to a private life and the radical group OutRage is formed in London. The beginning of a queer movement.

**1994**> RFSL has 4,000 members.

**1995**> The new partnership law is enacted in Sweden.

**1996**> First Swedish gay website starts up.

**1998**> EuroPride is celebrated in Stockholm, bringing media focus on LGBT issues.

**1999**> Swedish law against discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation is passed.

Ombudsman against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, HomO, is established.

**2000**> RFSL is named »Lobbyist of the Year« by the journal Resumé. LGBT and queer media is flourishing.

**2001**> Transgendered people are included as a part of RFSL's target group.

**2002**> Swedish law against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the post-secondary education is passed.

**2003**> A prohibition against persecution on the basis of sexual orientation is written into the constitution. Laws governing the right to an adoption interview for all couples who enter into legal partnership relationships and stipulating equal rights for same-sex and hetero partnerships are enacted. RFSL's Youth Organization is founded. By the beginning of the year RFSL has about 6,700 members, 39% of whom are women.

**2004**> RFSL adopts a feminist agenda.

LGBT movement in the West. Ironically, the uprising entered history as the symbol of gay rights, while transgender issues have been relatively marginalized.

The AIDS epidemic broke out in the beginning of the 1980s but interest in the disease and death of gays throughout the world by officials was quite low. The catastrophe brought new strength to an international protest movement that united LGBT people who made militant demands for access to social institutions.

In the new wave of radicalism, the term »queer« was embraced as a perspective that rejected outdated norms about gender, sexual practices, and lifestyles, taking as a point of departure the equal value of all people. Queer theory has since developed as an academic discipline that today works as a watchdog against resistance to giving up outdated norms while moving to develop a truly democratic society.

Europride 1998 in Stockholm allowed for the visibility of, first and foremost, gays and lesbians in Sweden. The intense media attention as well as the increased interest of the political establishment during this time brought LGBT issues into the arena of public discussion.

In recent years, a series of laws have been passed to protect and ensure equality for LGBT individuals in Sweden. Transgendered people still fall into the gap between discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender. In Sweden there is no legal identity other than that of a man or a woman, or option to choose a name that doesn't correspond to biological and legally assigned gender. For transgendered people who undergo sex-change procedures, sterilization and divorce are still required.



**Petra;** *I'm the nightmare bi; I'm everything you're not supposed to be or supposed to deny—transophile, poly, and into S&M. I find myself in the midst of a never-ending coming-out process. With my last girlfriend, I had to come out. And, if I meet a guy, then I'd have to explain everything all over again. Today I'm involved in relationships with three people.*

*Provocation has been the air I breathe in some way. But the world I live in today is permissive, people are rarely surprised at me, I really only shock myself these days. Just imagine — there used to be only gays and dykes in the LGBT world. Today I too can exist in it. Of course there is patriarchy and oppression of homosexuals, but hello—almost everyone can now say homo-, bi-, or trans. The boundaries have become firmer between the categories in the LGBT community. But, at the same time, tolerance and knowledge about how sexuality and gender identity are connected is more advanced here than in the rest of the world.*

# >THE LGBT WORLD

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT experienced what it means to differ from entrenched societal norms, it can be difficult to understand the importance of LGBT culture. Not to exist, or ever be able to see oneself and one's interests and feelings reflected in the culture in which one lives, can be unbearable. That's why there is a need for a community that supports and affirms attitudes and ways of life that differ from those of the majority. This community can be found in networks, and groups of friends, special bars, restaurants, cafés, clubs, and associations. This does not generally mean that others are not welcome, just that heterosexuality is not held as norm in these spaces. However, at times, these are closed situations where LGBT people have the chance to meet without the outside world imposing alienation upon them or exerting pressure and repression.

The internet has had and continues to have great power to unite people who can communicate about and depict the lives and day-to-day experiences of LGBT people far from the offerings of the big city.

There are countless organizations that pursue particular interests and create places to meet; religious groups, youths with immigrant backgrounds, the deaf, opera lovers, drag kings, gay seniors, etc. The proliferation of these groups is made possible by community.

*Pride* is the annual event that brings together the LGBT world. In the large cities of the West, the parades often draw hundreds of thousands of participants and enormous crowds of spectators. In countries where LGBT people are still openly oppressed and harassed by officials, *Pride* becomes an even more important political statement. In Sweden, Stockholm has been the site of public actions of this kind since the *Homosexual Liberation Week* of the 1970s, with demonstrations, seminars, and cultural events. Cities like Malmö and Gothenburg have also begun to stage larger events of this kind. A demonstration is an opportunity to show the world that we are numerous and that we need to be reckoned with. But for many it is just as much an opportunity to

find community and feel a sense of solidarity. Not the least important aspect of *Pride* is that it is a forum for common and diverse issues of a group, though unified in a history of struggle and pain, now large and rich in diversity.

## >social status

TODAY WE KNOW THAT the most important lines of division between people are not drawn between gender and sexual orientation. We now acknowledge that it is just as impossible to define any given homosexual person as it is to define a heterosexual person. It is our attitudes about life and our values that dictate who we are and determine our lifestyles. A gay couple living in a small town might have more in common with their middle-class heterosexual neighbors than with gays who live in the heart of a big city.

As people acquire rights and achieve social status, the feeling of community and identification with the alienation of others is dulled and groups splinter. Whereas the line of division once ran between those who were open about their orientation and those who were not, today it is often marked by the degree to which a person's deviation from the norm combines with other differences. To have a »passing« body, an education, and enough self-confidence to allow one to fit comfortably into middle-class culture, is to enjoy a degree of privilege

not available to the majority of the population.

However much we would like to reject the heteronorm and society's stereotypes, they are often reproduced in the LGBT world. A person who has experienced exclusion might fear association with anything that falls outside the norm. Our longing for acknowledgement and our sexual and gender identities are formed by society's values just as much as they are by subcultures.

The struggle against social injustice, against xenophobia, sexism, racism, ageism, and body fascism can be more relevant to LGBT people's needs as a whole than the struggle against discrimination in individual cases.

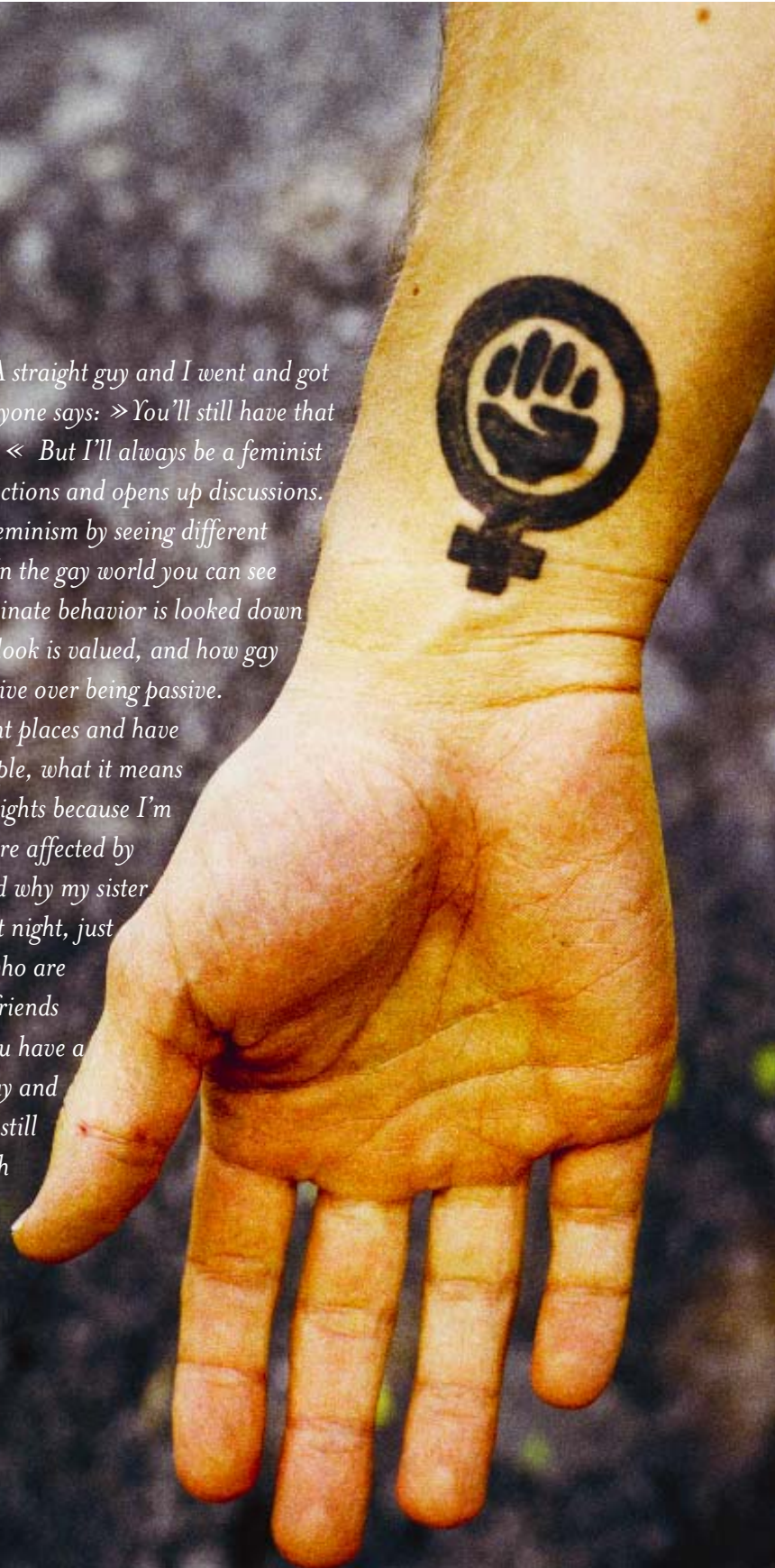
As society changes its perspective on gender and sexuality, it is important for the LGBT movement to develop new strategies and to sharpen its focus.

## >gender makes a difference

WHILE SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS other than heterosexuality are finding increasing acceptance, the resistance to gender-crossing continues to be strong. This is also true in the LGBT world, where masculine men and feminine women enjoy a higher status than gender-benders who challenge the heteronormative order.

# Are;

*A straight guy and I went and got tattoos together. Everyone says: »You'll still have that thing when you're 70.« But I'll always be a feminist and the tattoo gets reactions and opens up discussions. I found my way into feminism by seeing different kinds of oppression. In the gay world you can see this clearly; how effeminate behavior is looked down upon and the hetero-look is valued, and how gay people value being active over being passive. I have lived in different places and have experienced, for example, what it means to not have the same rights because I'm gay and that women are affected by violence. I understood why my sister was afraid to go out at night, just like my male friends who are effeminate or female friends who are butch do. You have a lot of advantages as gay and a man. But there are still many contexts in which I am not the norm.*



These hierarchies are often as invisible in the LGBT world as they are in the rest of society.

In the women's movement, bisexual and lesbian women have always played a leading role. But when it comes to fighting for legal rights, those who live outside the hetero-norm and collapse the ideal of the nuclear family have often been neglected. For example, the experience of transgendered people is often seen as a threat to the feminist movement and the right of lesbian women to insemination has been perceived as too problematic to champion.

In a community where the heterosexual two-gendered system is not as entrenched, the interest in women's rights among men is often weaker than in the society at large. In the LGBT movement, the special interests of women and transgendered people have been overshadowed by those rights achieved by homosexuals as a collective group. While the major political parties already laid out feminist manifestoes during the 1990s, it wasn't until 2004 that RFSL officially adopted a feminist agenda.

The most important task for the LGBT movement is to work for change in social power structures and expose the complexity of human life. This demands sensitivity to differences among people and the active participation of a more diverse group of people in the LGBT movement.

## >ethnicity

THE PEOPLE GROUPED UNDER the rubric »immigrant« share little more than that they aren't natively Swedish. How difficult it is for a person to feel at home in Swedish culture and adapt to Swedish norms, attitudes, and traditions depends on the degree of difference between Swedish and home culture.

LGBT people from cultures with radically different views on gender, sexuality, and attitudes towards LGBT, find themselves especially pulled between values and loyalties. Many LGBT immigrants and first generation Swedes live double lives in order to avoid being exiles from their families and communities. In the Swedish LGBT world it can be difficult to find sympathy for such experiences. The expectation of outness can be oppressive as can norms for appearance and behavior. Oftentimes the LGBT community exhibits the same racism and fear of the foreign that is present in society at large. This leads to a double sense of exclusion and a feeling of homelessness.

Up to now, Swedish officials have shown little understanding for the stress many immigrant LGBT people have experienced and the risk many have run in their home-countries as »deviants.« Only in exceptional cases have they found sex/gender status a sufficient ground for granting a residence permit or support. This reflects a vestigial unwillingness to see sexuality as

something integral to personhood and implies that sex/gender expression is something that people ought to be able to »keep under control.« Prescribing sexual abstinence and denial of love for LGBT people ought to be as unthinkable as denying heterosexuals family life or sex.

## >disability

THE SHAME THAT KEEPS LGBT people from coming out is the same shame that keeps people with invisible disabilities from being open about them. Not much time has passed since homosexuality was considered a mental illness.

While the LGBT movement has made progress, for example on the issue of adoption, disabled people are still considered less appropriate as parents. Inaccessible information and buildings are a reality, whether one conforms to the heterosexual norm or not. For LGBT people with disabilities, the double difference leads to double exclusion. Many people with disabilities are dependent on special help from society in their everyday lives. This doesn't mean that they should be considered »victims« or that they possess different desires or emotions than non-disabled people. Society frequently shows prejudice and little to no interest in the needs of, or providing possibilities to experience sex and love, for people with disabilities. Being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered with

a disability not only means that one is often considered less »accomplished« and »attractive,« but might also mean that one is dependent on and left to the mercy of the attitudes of family and caretakers.

In the LGBT community there is a lack of consciousness about and a fear of bodies that deviate from the norm, just as in society at large. There is nothing »natural« about having a certain kind of body. That is why the struggle for the rights of people with disabilities is essential to the LGBT movement.


## >generational differences

JUST AS IN SOCIETY AT large, LGBT culture is strongly characterized by its youth culture. But there are also some key differences. Generational differences are not as tangible in a world in which traditional norms of family formation and childbirth do not exist. While older heterosexual women are often seen as »used up,« older women in an LGBT world are often more empowered and seen as active and attractive. Among gay men, youth is often embraced to a greater degree than among lesbians, while respect for the aging generation is generally lower.

On the other hand, schisms develop between people who are marked by different societal values. Changes during the last ten years have made it possible for today's LGBT youth to have a life that would have been



**Finn;** *It doesn't matter how smart you are or that you're a white, privileged, middle-class man like me—if you're blind you're not exactly in high demand. I've been in the LGBT world for ten years. Bi and transgendered people are in a completely different place now. But there are hierarchies that are still so powerfully connected to sexuality. In the heterosexual hierarchy of desire, the most valued sex happens in the marital bed and everything other than that is ranked lower. Within the LGBT world, the attitude is not always that different. Crossing boundaries is always suspect; if a Swede and an immigrant get together, some people see that as a kind of fetishization. Many people just think it's annoying when you try to connect issues of sexuality oppression to instances of minority oppression. People just sigh and say that we have to focus on one question at a time.*



**Märta;** *It used to be so secret, you know, even criminal. You were »like that,« »belonged to the family,« or »the department,« we used to say. I was as beautiful as Greta Garbo back then and had handsome beaux. But as soon as I got into bed with a man it was as if there were a wall between us. Home and family were what counted, so I got married. He was good looking and could play the lute. Thank God he met someone else! I had been unhappy in love one-hundred-and-fifty times before I finally got together with a woman. Almost all the women I have met share my background; there weren't too many other possibilities. Nobody suspected anything; people thought it was an anatomical impossibility for women to have sex with each other. Now there's almost no one who thinks that this is strange, other than perhaps a few Christian Democrats. But I have never been afraid about feeling the way I feel. I am not afraid of anything.*

unimaginable in the preceding generation. Young people, building on the work of earlier generations, can make new demands and leave behind the marginalized and vulnerable positions into which their elders were relegated.

Despite this development, gloomy statistics show that the frequency of suicide is much higher among LGBT youth, who are left to the mercy of an adult world slow to absorb rapidly changing perspective shifts.

## >LGBT youth

CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT to be respected as people. Correspondingly, as they mature, children deserve respect for their sexuality, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

We live in a society where, and under the assumption that, becoming an adult and a normal »real« man or woman is equivalent to being heterosexual. Minors are completely dependent on their social environment for support and acceptance. The adult world's lack of preparation for the fact that our children can, and do, grow up to be non-heterosexual is the greatest threat to LGBT people.

School is a unique and dangerous institution. For students who deviate from the norm during the early stages of sexual and gender formation, the mainstream conformity of school can easily become unbearable or even dangerous. According to several studies, the risk that LGBT youth

will try to take their own lives is about seven times higher than that of straight youth.

The person who does not want to or cannot conform to the system is persecuted into assimilation. The boy who doesn't share the expected interests, appearance, or circles of friends will be called »gay« or »sissy«. He becomes a threat to the stereotypical image of manhood and has to be crushed so that he doesn't undermine the other boys' positions of power. The girl who insists on making her own decisions about her body and doesn't subject herself to the will and expectations of others gets called »dyke« or »whore.« She can be seen as a threat to the status of the female as passive and inferior; she disturbs the given order.

The adult world rarely acknowledges the real experiences of young people. Both teachers and parents dislike discussing subjects like sex and relationships. It can be uncomfortable and forces us to examine our own values. The quality of textbooks and instruction vary widely in their treatment of gender and sexuality issues.

Some schools live up to the basic human value that all students should refrain from oppression. In others, negative ideas continue to be disseminated through ignorance or a more or less unconscious lack of understanding. This increases prejudice about issues of sexuality and gender, which increases the pressure on LGBT youth.



## >LGBT seniors

THOSE WHO WERE YOUNG during the 1940s and 50s remember when same-sex relationships were forbidden and could be punished with a prison sentence. For many years after the abolition of such laws in 1944, attitudes continued to be very negative. Sexual and gender deviation continued to be viewed as sick and something one didn't speak about. Women who lived together could be understood as friends by a blind world for their entire lives. Men who cohabitated had to be extremely careful. Crossing gender lines often meant complete exclusion from society.

As much as we would like to think that societal prejudices have declined, it is a fact that the situation for LGBT seniors has not changed very much on this point. Older people have often been forced to conform to a straight world based on very different premises than those we hold today and, for that reason, their values differ from those of younger LGBT people. Because of their experiences, many older LGBT people prefer not to talk about their orientation with outsiders and thus often unable to make demands about how they should be cared for.

Like all aging people, LGBT seniors are faced with illness, reduced income, loss of family and friends, and the increased isolation arising from societal age discrimination. Sexuality and love are almost

exclusively associated with youth and beauty and it is often difficult for younger people to imagine that older people have either an active sexual life or the same rich emotional life as they do. As the years pass, men who openly express their sexuality are suddenly transformed into »dirty old men,« and older women are expected to be asexual.

Our fear of discussing the sexual dimension of human lives is especially acute in dealing with LGBT seniors who require nursing care. While heterosexual love, because of its seemingly »natural« quality, does not conjure up solely sexual associations, for many, same-sex love is only about sex; the emotional aspects and needs are either hidden or forgotten. Having reluctant family members and ignorant caretakers decide what kind of love and partners are acceptable and which activities are relevant to an older person's life is still a reality for many LGBT seniors.

A project is underway today to create special homes for LGBT seniors, that will specify to caretakers the criteria of how to best meet the more complex needs of those under their care.

## >coming out

»COMING OUT« MEANS admitting to oneself and others that one is not heterosexual or does not have the gender identity expected by society. To some this comes naturally and early on, for others it is more difficult

and occurs later in life. Some may even live entire lives without anyone questioning their sexuality or gender identity because the norm is assumed to be obvious.

Being »In the closet« is an expression used to describe people who are not open about their sexual or gender identity. It can be difficult to declare an alternative sexual or gender identity when one passes, or goes unnoticed, in the mainstream society.

Nowadays it is usually significantly easier to come out than it used to be. Many are already discovering things about themselves as young teenagers that people from earlier generations did not confront until at least their twenties. When something is named and discussed, it also comes into reality as a possibility, something that one can identify with.

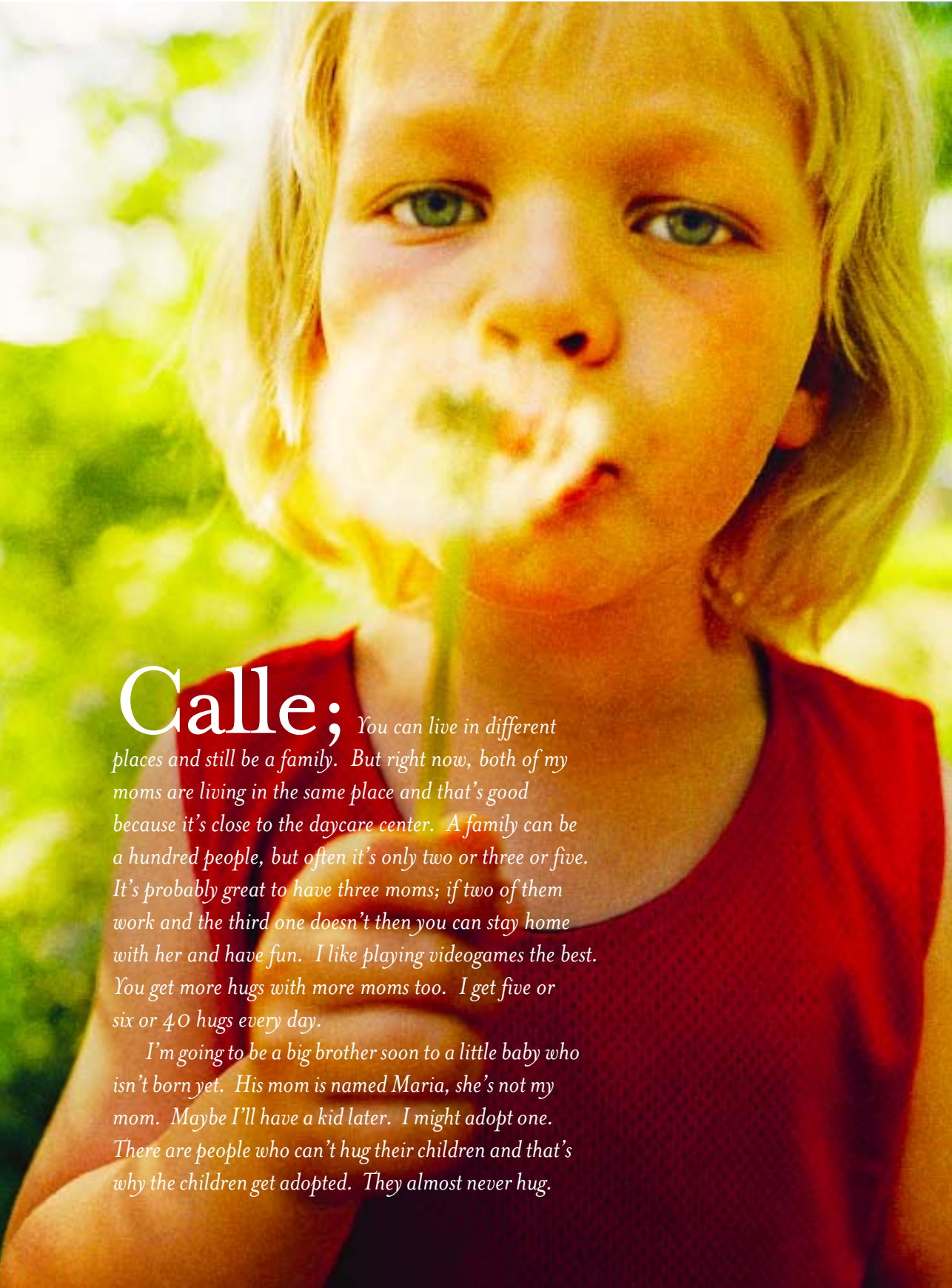
Some people consider or describe themselves as »bisexual« as an intermediate step before accepting their homosexuality, finding it easier not to completely close the door to heterosexuality, both for themselves and the discomforted world around them. Others feel that the demand from others to come out as either gay or straight, to »make up their mind« once and for all, is the greatest oppression.

Some feel that too much focus is put on »coming out,« that LGBT people insist on forcing their private lives on those around them. But this kind of attitude means that LGBT people can never speak openly about their daily lives, refer to partners or talk about their histories, in the way that straight and non-trans people take for granted.

No matter how a person comes out, it can still be a difficult and rather exhausting process. But it is also a process that allows a person to think about the meaning of their life, their feelings, and life choices. This experience is something that many feel is an enormous advantage. Even in a society where people weren't assumed to be »normal,« the coming-out process wouldn't disappear. Instead, everyone would have to »come out,« in order for others to understand important aspects of their lives and identities.



**Annika;** *In general, if you are clear about what you're doing, nobody would question your family about it's »differences.« Because really it's all about who is taking care of the children, who is raising them and is actually there, and who gives them love. Children need stability, love, and support. One should adopt a genuine children's perspective: seeing what children need and not what they ought to need. It's possible that many non-heterosexuals can be even better at providing that because roles are not dictated by biology. That's my experience in any case. Our son has many people around him who are there when he needs them. Children like a larger circle of adults around them in order to feel secure. The Swedish hetero society is too focused on the nuclear family, biology, and absent fathers. In doing so, they ignore the child and the need to support the other important men and women who actually live around the child.*



**Calle;** *You can live in different places and still be a family. But right now, both of my moms are living in the same place and that's good because it's close to the daycare center. A family can be a hundred people, but often it's only two or three or five. It's probably great to have three moms; if two of them work and the third one doesn't then you can stay home with her and have fun. I like playing videogames the best. You get more hugs with more moms too. I get five or six or 40 hugs every day.*

*I'm going to be a big brother soon to a little baby who isn't born yet. His mom is named Maria, she's not my mom. Maybe I'll have a kid later. I might adopt one. There are people who can't hug their children and that's why the children get adopted. They almost never hug.*

## >THE FAMILY

MOST LGBT PEOPLE LIVE »normal« lives; as singles, with committed partners, or even with children. Many LGBT people are not close to their biological families and have created other strong bonds instead. Friends, people with whom one shares something and to whom one feels loyalty, have become alternative families.

A person who comes out as something other than the expected, who has already broken with societal norms, can also come to question other rules about how to form familial bonds and relationships. One of the most loaded of these, perhaps, is the couple. In a society based on the nuclear heterosexual family, and with roles assigned according to a strict two-gender division, the notion of the couple has been impossible to challenge. What happens then when society evolves and we have to change traditional roles and insist that our lives be more equal and multi-faceted?

Breaking with »the couple norm« can be one way to escape the classic relationship-inequality traps. Some people choose to live

in »open« relationships, where clear distinctions are drawn between love and sex. Others feel that it is acceptable to have multiple simultaneous important relationships, not considering love as necessarily exclusive.

Regardless of which family structures society chooses to sanction, it is a fact that non-heterosexual and gender-bending people have had and raised children throughout time. Reproductive functions are not impaired simply because you're aroused by someone with whom you cannot reproduce. Nor does the desire for children naturally disappear.

Reproduction is no magical process but often — and in the best cases — a carefully considered and planned objective. Having children is not a human right but no one should be considered unfit as parent on the ground of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Today, children grow up in every imaginable family constellation. The »good« family is one in which the adult(s) participate voluntarily and, if there is more than one



»The Kingdom of Heaven, «from *Ecce Homo* by Elisabeth Ohlson, 1998. This photo exhibit in which LGBT people enacted biblical scenes aroused strong reactions in the church and started an important discussion in society about the right to religious experience and access to the church.

parent, that they equally share the responsibilities and put the needs of children at the center. There is nothing that indicates that a particular gender constellation makes better parents. A new perspective on parenthood, in which we distinguish between sex and reproduction and place love and the security of the child in the center, would make it possible for more people to be good parents and give more children a secure path to adulthood.

## >religion

THE IDEA THAT heterosexuality is the only »normal« form of human sexuality is deeply anchored in most religions. In Sweden protestant Christianity has had the deepest influence on our attitudes. The condemnation of sexual actions between people of

the same sex appears in both the Old and New Testaments. But, on the other hand, many things that are accepted today without question are also condemned in the Bible. Today, many Christians feel that the church should strive to be contemporary with modern times and, thus, that biblical texts should be read according to historical and cultural contexts. They argue that the deeper meaning of these texts appears when we interpret them from our modern understandings of reality. The same tack has already been taken with respect to women entering the priesthood. Despite this, the number of people who still oppose both homosexuals entering the priesthood and the church's blessing of homosexual unions is so large that resistance to this inequality is justified and necessary. A similar situation exists in Muslim and Jewish communities in Sweden. It should be known that there are also many out LGBT people who are active priests in Sweden and who, along with the Christian LGBT movement, are working for continued change.

For society, it is important to distinguish between modern democratic values and the religious norms that carry through tradition. RFSL does not take a position or make statements on religious issues. But we resist demeaning or abusive treatment of LGBT individuals and condemnation of groups by the church and other religious communities. Obviously, the constitutional prohibition against prejudice and persecution on the basis of sexual orientation must apply in all arenas of society.

## >SEX & SOCIETY

*Sexuality is an integral part of every person's being. This applies to women and men as well as to children. It is a basic need and a key feature of being human, one that cannot be separated from other aspects of life. Sexuality is not synonymous with intercourse, it is not about how we can achieve orgasm, nor is it the sum of our erotic lives. [...] Sexuality is much more: it exists in the energy that drives us to seek love, contact, warmth and intimacy; it is expressed in our ways of feeling and awakening feelings as well as in how we touch others and accept the touch of others. Sexuality influences our thoughts, feelings, actions, and responses and therefore our physical and psychic health.*

WHO'S DEFINITION OF SEXUALITY, 1986

ANYONE WHO BELIEVES that sex is equivalent to traditional intercourse knows very little about what people actually do and enjoy. Sex means different things for different individuals, on different occasions, during different periods in their lives, and with different people. Many think that there are sexual practices that are more »correct« and »mature« than others. That doesn't mean

that the need to experience other things subsides. Sex can be a way to experience warmth and intimacy, to dispel frustrations, to channel strong feelings and fears, to »wake« the body and mind from a state of dullness, isolation, or routine. Sex includes all of this and no reason for having sex is more important or valuable than another. The only requirement is that we mutually communicate our expectations when we have sex with others and don't force another person to do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable.

*Heterosex* is something we all grow up understanding, and develop a position on, well before puberty. But, for the person who feels attracted to others of the same sex, there is not much information about how to »do it.« This can create the sense that this kind of sex »doesn't exist« or doesn't count. At the same time, the absence of predetermined models and pointers may be liberating and may offer more space to experiment.

There are few studies that show how women have sex with women or how men have sex

with men. Even so, there's not much of a mystery there. Many women kiss, caress, rub against one another and stimulate and penetrate each other's genitalia and/or anuses with hands, mouths, and tongues. Some use dildos or other sex toys; some like to be penetrated, others like to penetrate, still others like both. Many enjoy stimulating themselves and others in more creative ways.

Men who have sex with men can kiss, caress, and embrace one another, stimulate each other's genitals and/or anuses with hands and mouths. Many have anal intercourse and like to be penetrated and/or penetrate someone else. About a fourth of men who have sex with other men prefer not to have anal intercourse but still enjoy sex in many other ways.

One's own sexuality can take on various expressions. One can be active or passive, and/or dominant or submissive, irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity. How we behave in sexual encounters is not bound to whether we are women or men, even if society's stereotypes try to convince us of that.

## > hiv & sexually transmitted diseases

THERE ARE MANY MYTHS about HIV. Many still believe that it is a disease that only infects or is spread by gay men. HIV is present in sperm

and blood. HIV spread rapidly among gay and bisexual men because many of them had anal intercourse with multiple partners prior to knowing how to protect themselves, an awareness that came only after the virus was isolated and understood. There are very few cases in which women have been infected with HIV through sex with other women. This is because most sexual techniques women use with other women carry little risk for infection.

Sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise in Scandinavia among people of all sexual orientations. One explanation could be that young people who did not experience the terror of the first years of AIDS don't fully understand the danger or don't care about the risks. The current medicines used to control HIV, which allow many who are HIV positive to live full lives, have made the disease less visible.


Most sexually transmitted diseases are easy to cure if they are caught and treated early. However, a person with a sexually transmittable disease runs a greater risk of being infected with HIV and of infecting others with HIV if also HIV positive. HIV can not be cured with the treatments available today.

In Sweden, HIV has not become an epidemic as it has in other places around the world. At the beginning of 2004, over 6,000 people in Sweden had been diagnosed with HIV, of whom 2,400 were men who had been infected by sex with other men. In Sweden, about 70 cases are reported every year in which men were infected by sex with other men.



**Micael;** *I don't really feel like talking about my personal situation. But at the same time, it seems like the only way to reach people; they don't seem to realize that this could actually happen to them. I had precisely the same attitude before I got infected four years ago. My boyfriend had unprotected sex with other guys. I learned that you can't depend upon the actions of others but instead have to take responsibility for your own.*

*Telling people that you're HIV positive is like coming out all over again. The same kind of withdrawal happens when you meet people. HIV is something that is never going to disappear, it is a hard and concrete fact and that's probably what's so scary. While a lot of people know about AIDS and HIV, perhaps it's just part of human nature to not be able to really take it in until it affects you personally.*



**Facundo;** *The neo-Nazis that beat me up at the Pride parade in 2003 hit the jackpot because I'm both a »blatte«\* and gay. Today I feel that it's more important than ever to walk in the Pride parade. There are so many gays, dykes, and transgendered people who don't dare walk. Get out on the streets, show yourselves! It is extremely important to be open about who you are and not to let religious and fascist groups control our lives. If shit happens to you, don't be afraid to report it. Society is there for us.*

*When I was younger, I considered myself a Swede, until someone said I was a »blatte«—now I call myself that—it's important to reclaim the words they use against us. That's why I shave my head, wear skinhead boots and wear the Thor's hammer, for example. I'm no victim.*

\*Derogatory term for a non-white Swede, or people of color people of, for example, Arab or Latino descent

SWEDEN HAS TAKEN a very hard line on the HIV-question: those who are not infected are absolved of all responsibility and all the responsibility for preventing the spread of infection is placed on those who are HIV-positive, the infected ones. This position has been judged inhumane by other countries and has also proven to be ineffective. Prejudices have created the idea that HIV-positive people are indifferent to the health of others and that the gay sex drive is limitless and destructive. Branding HIV-positive people »freaks« leads to a reluctance of many to admit they are positive. In fact, some people avoid being tested altogether because they couldn't live with the consequences of a positive result. After more than twenty years of HIV, we ought to place responsibility for protection and prevention on everyone and not just the person carrying the virus. The idea that we »know« who has the virus and who doesn't only makes us more alienated. If everyone took responsibility for him- or herself, no one would have to be infected.

RFSL, which bases all of its work on the people's experience and knowledge, knows that an effective prevention plan has to build on a positive and realistic message. This means that sexuality has to be affirmed with advice that people can really follow, and that is free of moralizing. Further, HIV positive people and their experiences have to be included.

## >violence & discrimination

PEOPLE ARE SUBJECTED to hate crimes by those who irrationally hate/loathe how a person looks or what a person represents. Both violent and discriminatory crimes affect LGBT people more often than many other people. Even though we have been successful fighting against discrimination in society, we can observe that there has been a significant rise in violent crimes. Between 2002 and 2003 the number of homophobic crimes rose 30% according to the Swedish national police. In a survey in 1999, 25% of LGBT-identified people reported that they had been victims of hate crimes in forms ranging from abusive speech to severe physical assault. By 2004 that figure has risen to 50%.

In a democracy, minorities sometimes need special protection against the majority. Swedish law stipulates that hate crimes carry stiffer penalties. The legal code includes, for example, laws about defamation, persecution of minorities, and illegal discrimination. Today this legislation applies only to sexual orientation and not to gender identity, which means that transgendered people are only indirectly included. There are more facts about legislation on *the Homosexuals' ombudsman's* home page: [www.homo.se](http://www.homo.se).

The violence committed by intimates, by

women who batter women, and by men who batter men, are all just as serious as violence committed by men against women. But often these forms of abuse are invisible, precisely because non-hetero relationships are hidden from or made invisible by the society at large.

OUR WORKPLACES, just like schools, are especially dangerous places for people who do not fit in or conform to sex/gender norms. Since 1999, there has been a designated office, *HomO*, assigned the role of fighting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the workplace. Transgendered people who experience discrimination are helped by *JämO*, which works against cases of discrimination on the basis of gender.


Within this area, there is a need for education, information, and effort from society to raise consciousness about how normative thinking impacts workplaces and erases differences between people in destructive ways. There are two projects especially focused on discrimination against LGBT people: one focused on the domain of childcare and care for the elderly, and another on the church, police force, and military. Called *Homosexuals and Bisexuals in the Care System* and *Normgiving Diversity* they are part of the EU project *Equal*, which investigates how discrimination in these professions can be combated.

## > LGBT in the world

THE SITUATION OF LGBT people in the world differs significantly among countries and cultures. Today, the EU countries, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa all have a more or less expansive legal protection in place blocking discrimination against LGBT people. In South America, repression is still palpable, even though several of these countries show signs of progress in legislation and recognition of the rights of LGBT people.

In many parts of the world, however, the road to even the most basic rights is still long. Sexual activity between people of the same sex and gender-bending behavior are forbidden in more than 70 of the world's countries, often enforced by physical punishment and, in a number of countries, by death.

Religion, and its degree of importance in a culture and government, is still the decisive factor for how progressive or regressive a country is when it comes to LGBT issues. Still, different countries have varied ways of dealing with sexuality and gender identity. In Iran, where same-sex sexual relations can lead to whipping or death, transsexualism is considered a hormonal imbalance and the highest priesthood can give permission for a surgical sex change.



**Susanne;** *I really don't care what orientation my customers are. But it's important that there's a certain kind of atmosphere and a tolerant attitude. At first, when they tried to burn down the café, painting swastikas, it felt as if somebody was taking the place away from me. Then I realized that the place itself is just something material. The other things, what we do there and talk about, can't be taken from us. There were people around who stood up to the violence and closed ranks—those who themselves had experienced what it meant to be in a danger zone, those who could really relate. People can feel solidarity across all kinds of boundaries in these situations. You wish it would happen more often in ordinary life. It is hard to find a common ground where a person's difference isn't defined in contrast to others or to any norm.*

A close-up portrait of a man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a soft-focus green and white, suggesting an outdoor setting with foliage.

# Stig-Åke;

*I have worked for more than 30 years with LGBT issues and the last ten years more directly with international issues. During the 1970's, there were no laws against discrimination. The focus was on launching RFSL as an organization and on beginning work on sexual politics. Today there are many countries that are in the same place we were in the 1950'. Those of us who profitted from the progress have the responsibility to help. It is great to have been a part of the evolution that has taken place in, for example, Moldavia during the last three or four years. Their organizations have grown and now make themselves heard in society, laws punishing various sexual practices have been changed, and people accept the idea of human rights. I see a lot of positive change in Eastern Europe and in some of the countries in Asia and South America. I am much more pessimistic about places where religion is very strong, above all, about the Middle East.*

However, the patient is required to conform to a heterosexual lifestyle and all other forms of gender deviance are forbidden. The situation is similar in other Muslim countries and there have been reports of individual sex-change operations in Kuwait and Jordan, for example. In South America and Asia, there are many places where sex change is acceptable and where surgical techniques related to it are constantly improving and are an integral part of medical training. But, in many of these places, same-sex relations are forbidden and punishable by law.

In some parts of the world a more progressive human rights movement is emerging, the agenda of which often includes LGBT issues. And around the world, LGBT organizations are pursuing the struggle to expose rights abuses. The demand is slowly rising for international agreements that exert pressure on countries that criminalize or discriminate against LGBT people. However, it will be many years before people everywhere enjoy the basic right to love and live according to their own desires and values.