

“Our Environment is Hostile Towards [Us], Without a Doubt”: The Politicisation of Sexuality in Jürgen Lemke’s *Gay Voices From East Germany*

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In this article, I discuss Jürgen Lemke’s (1989) text, *Gay Voices from East Germany* with reference to the politicisation of sexuality in the German Democratic Republic. As a brief overview of the political and cultural context in which Lemke’s text was produced, the GDR, more commonly referred to in the English-speaking world as East Germany, was a member of the former Soviet bloc from 1949-89. During this time, the regime complicated the conventional image of what constitutes a dictatorship. It must be conceded that human rights to freedom of expression and the right to assembly were systematically violated in the GDR, which existed as a one-party state under the rule of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)* for the entirety of its

existence (Kocka 18).¹ However, as historian Mary Fulbrook illustrates, in its capacity as a ‘participatory dictatorship’, ‘extraordinarily large numbers of people were involved in its functioning [...] *participat[ing]* in and sustain[ing] the system; they took on [...] and enacted roles, and played within the rules and parameters of the system’ (236, my emphasis). This is not to say that the GDR was democratic by any means, but this certainly challenges the notion that its citizens were fully subjected to a repressive state, as is typical for a dictatorship. On the contrary, the power relations between citizen and state were more nuanced than in other examples of totalitarianism as ‘participation in the exercise of state power spread [...] beyond the rather small group who can be characterised as the core ruling elite’ (Fulbrook 241). Consequently, means of normalising and maintaining surveillance on citizens were also required to expand as more people contributed to the functioning of the state.

My primary text, *Gay Voices in East Germany*, which was published in 1989 by *Aufbau* comprises 15 interviews with fourteen gay men and one trans woman, conducted by Jürgen Lemke.² Lemke began to conduct his interviews for *Gay Voices* in 1981, which he then repeated in 1986 and then, as with Svetlana Aleksievich's 1985 or Maxie Wander's 1977 work, the interviews were then edited so that they read as short pieces of discursive prose, as though the subject is delivering a monologue. Implicitly, due to the restrictive environment under socialism, there are certain topics, such as religion or overtly sexual themes, which were deemed unsuitable for public discourse in the GDR. On some levels, Lemke's *Gay Voices* conflicts with Party ideology as his subjects frequently mention experiences with homophobia (108), rejection from society or family members (45) and in certain cases, prostitution (73) and the contemplation of suicide. In spite of the fact that many gay authors were banned under the Nazis and the Communist Party in the Weimar Republic had actively campaigned for the decriminalisation of

1 The *SED* is also known as the Socialist Unity Party.

2 Originally published by *Aufbau* as *Ganz normal anders: Schwule Auskünfte aus der DDR*, all citations translated by the author. The author uses the edition published by *Luchterhand*, a western publisher based in Frankfurt am Main as this was published simultaneously and there are no differences in the text content.

homosexuality, as Josie McLellan points out, ‘East German books and newspapers were all but silent on the issue of homosexuality until the late 1960s, and the few references that did creep in were invariably derogatory’ (*Love in the Time of Communism* 115). For these reasons, it is surprising that Lemke’s *Gay Voices from East Germany* was ever published by *Aufbau*, the central publishing house in the GDR. In this article, I draw heavily on the work of Michel Foucault, especially his concept of the confessional as defined in the *History of Sexuality* (1976). Lemke’s voice is excluded from the text, but his presence is made known as the subjects occasionally address him directly (36). From this, the allusion to confession is made clear as those interviewed reveal intimate details about their lives to a silent observer.

Throughout this article, I refer to the concept of politicising sexuality. I acknowledge that this concept is not exclusive to the context of the GDR or even the Eastern bloc, and that the term has been in use for a significant length of time. For some, this term refers to the process which leads to political activism to campaign for greater civil liberties in expressing one’s sexuality (Bronski 88). By contrast, according to other theorists, the politicisation of sexuality refers to a “normalizing disciplinary” exercise of power geared toward the production of subjects with [...] habits [...] that will be socially useful’ (Blasius 75). Either of these conceptions is applicable to the context of the GDR. In the current context, twenty-first-century western Europe, it is usual to view sexuality as a depoliticised construct largely as rights to protections against discrimination on the basis of sexuality and rights to equal marriage and same-sex adoption have been achieved. However, the politicisation of sexuality is central to an understanding of the GDR. Primarily as, with respect to Lemke’s text in many of the interviews, the men call for greater civil liberties, but also as a transition occurred in the GDR in which emphasis was taken away from moral concerns for behaviour and transferred onto concerns about queer people as political individuals, who may align themselves with western thought, diverging from the socialist vision set over GDR citizens (Evans “‘Unnatural’ Desire’ 555).

In the GDR, two sections of the criminal code prohibited ‘unnatural fornication [...] between people of the male sex’ until they were abolished

in 1968 (StGB-DDR, §175). Paragraph 175 prohibited all male same-sex activity, whereas paragraph 175a made special provisions for those under the age of 21.³ In the 1950s, attempts to have homosexuality decriminalised were met with resistance. Dr Rudolf Klimmer, a psychologist from Dresden ‘petitioned the authorities tirelessly’ in 1947, 1949, 1952 and 1958 for the decriminalisation of homosexuality, but all attempts failed. As justification, he was told by a prominent academic in the field of social medicine that unfortunately, ‘opening the floodgates to same-sex activity [was not] compatible with the principles of socialist morality’ (McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism* 115-16). This environment was sustained for several more years until the sudden, yet partial, decriminalisation of same-sex activity in 1968. Subsequently however, new legislation §151 meant that the ages of consent for same-sex couples of either sex was four years later than that for mixed-sex couples. As Hillhouse notes, the gay rights movement was the first pressure group in the GDR to have their demands met by the government (596). With thanks in part to a growing gay rights movement in the 1980s, in August 1987, the GDR Supreme Court [*Oberste Gericht*] overturned a conviction under §151 with the following justification:

Homosexuality just as much as heterosexuality [represents] a variant of sexual behaviour. Homosexual people, therefore, do not stand outside of socialist society, and civil rights are afforded to them just as any other citizen [of the GDR] (Vormbaum 562).

The following year, §151 was repealed without replacement. With this statement, the gay rights movement received public acknowledgement of its efforts from a prominent state institution. However, before that point, the fear of a conviction under §§175, 175a or, after 1968, under §151 is prominent in Lemke’s text. Several of the men represented relate their experiences coming to terms with their desires and same-sex activity’s legal status. Some are even convicted under §§175 or 151 (46).

Paragraph 175 was introduced in Imperial Germany in 1871, whereas its expansion, §175a, was introduced in the Third Reich under the Nazis. The original legislation from 1871 equated homosexuality to bestiality.

³ Unless at the start of a sentence, henceforth abbreviated to §§175 and 175a.

However, at that time, material evidence that same-sex behaviour had taken place was required to convict men for an offence. In the Third Reich, the ambiguity of the term *Unzucht* in its original German was taken advantage of to convict men for a much wider range of same-sex activity including kissing, mutual masturbation, and even homoerotic letter writing (Evans, ‘Bahnhof Boys’ 613). It was also the Nazis who were responsible for introducing §175a, which made special provisions for sex for commercial gain, any same-sex activity initiated through violence or coercion, and the “seduction” of those under the age of 21. Although in the Potsdam Conference, the GDR agreed to repeal all Nazi legislation, §175a was retained on both sides of the inner-German border in the same wording as under Nazism (Childs 6–9; Evans, “‘Unnatural’ Desire’ 556). The introduction of §175a is responsible for the imprisonment or internment in concentration camps of over 65,000 gay men during the Holocaust. One of Lemke’s interviewees, known as K. recalls how gossip would spread around sexual orientation:

The next day, I opened the newspaper and stared. People, together with their name, address, and occupation had been branded as homosexual vermin among the German people. At the top of the list, an art professor. [...] In the Nazi parlance, a central square had been renamed to “175er Square” as four of those who had been named had their businesses there.

The proverbial weight was lifted from my shoulders. My name was not on the list (193).

Not only was homosexuality seen as against socialist morality in the early years of the GDR, the articulation of Holocaust experiences went against the principles of socialist realism. Understanding that systematic persecution of homosexuals had taken place in the Third Reich, it appears hypocritical that the self-styled “anti-fascist state” would see fit to directly inherit Nazi legislation. Especially as the GDR denied responsibility for the Holocaust. Furthermore, as McLellan makes clear, the GDR was resistant to acknowledging the victimhood of homosexuals during the Holocaust as ‘those who had been persecuted on the basis of their [...] sexuality did not fit easily into the dominant paradigm of political victimhood’ (*Love in the Time of Communism* 126).

In other words, communists could be the only “true” victims of fascism. Those who had been consigned to the camps for homosexuality were automatically assigned to blocks reserved for criminals and were disproportionately subjected to experimentation. In stark contrast, the communists were protected from certain areas of camp life; they were even significantly more likely to be recruited to have a hand in the administration of the camps than their homosexual peers (McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism* 126; Heger 34). For this reason, calling attention to the suffering of homosexuals is a particularly sensitive area of contention which challenges the focus on ‘a heroic narrative of [communist] resistance’ against fascism, which is rarely ‘alluded to in East German accounts’ of the Holocaust (McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism* 127).

Lee Edelman explains in his book that certain values which are categorised as ‘invest[ing] in the [...] narrativity of reproductive futurism’, in other words facilitating or supporting future generations of the population, are taken not only to be extrapolitical but their value is believed to be self-evident (17). In 1968, homosexuality was decriminalised in the GDR, but §175a was replaced by new legislation, §151, which prohibited sexual relationships with an individual of either sex under the age of 18. In Great Britain in 1988, the same year §151 was abolished in the GDR, Margaret Thatcher introduced the infamous Section 28 as part of her address to the Conservative party at Winter Gardens. Section 28 was a modified form of the Local Government Act (1986) which allegedly would serve to give school pupils ‘a sound start in life’ by disallowing the promotion of homosexuality in schools, affecting the rights of queer teachers nationwide but also the rights of students to positive queer representation (Thatcher, 1988). The legislation was in full effect for almost 15 years until it was repealed in Scotland in 2001 and the rest of Great Britain in 2003. Thatcher had dismissed the possibility that Section 28 could inflict damage on queer children as she had dismissed even the possibility of a queer child. Implicitly for her also, “a sound start in life” ostensibly equates to one of enforced cisheteronormative values.

Unfortunately, decriminalisation was something of a pyrrhic victory. This was primarily owed to the fact that decriminalisation was only

partial because of the introduction of §151, but also as homosexuality's former criminal status in the GDR contributed to the stigma long after 1968. Dieter describes how this stigma negatively affected his perception of homosexuality:

It was clear [...] that these people were criminals [...] money was involved, prostitution'. In retrospect, he qualifies this view by saying 'at this point, [he] didn't feel like a homosexual. [He] associated the word with disgusting images. *Homos*, who spent their lives chasing after the male member, cruising the public toilets, behaving like girls. That', he says, 'was just not me!' (46-47)

This sense of dissociation from one's own sexual identity is not uncommon and many of the men interviewed by Lemke share this sentiment. Although sexuality was no longer viewed as a matter of choice, the idea that the male youth in the GDR could be seduced into a life of aberrant sexual desire persisted. Paragraph 151 and its predecessor §175a were viewed 'as a bulwark against the development of abnormal sexual expression' (Evans, "Unnatural" Desire' 556). Consequently, even after decriminalisation, the perception that same-sex behaviour is criminal or inherently shameful did not disappear. Dieter internalises this view and subsequently chooses to distance himself from this image.

Jack Halberstam argues 'that new visibility for any given community has advantages and disadvantages [...] with recognition comes acceptance, with acceptance comes power' but 'with power comes regulation' (18). This description of visibility is paradoxical categorising it as the means to obtain power and the medium through which power is asserted, on the one hand as visibility leads to increased susceptibility to critique. On the other hand, those with the most power in society are given the right to look. Visibility is simultaneously desirable and restrictive, but seemingly these restrictions are only escapable if one conforms to the norm. In some respects, Dieter's inability to reconcile his same-sex desires with the dominant image of homosexuality is easily understood. After all, not only did this image conflict with the values of

socialist morality (Herzog 185–87), as Jennifer Evans explains, until 1958, East Berliners could commit *Republiksflucht*, the criminal offence of leaving the GDR, simply by boarding the *S-Bahn* [suburban commuter train]. Typically, the *Bahnhof* [train station] itself was the haunt of male sex workers; ‘the Bahnhof was thus a potent symbol of political transgression as well as the site of much of the city’s clandestine sex trade’ (Evans, ‘Bahnhof Boys’ 606–21). In this sense, sexuality is politicised as the right to express certain desires or engage in certain behaviours is based on value judgements over which an individual has no control. On the contrary, rights are structured in a way which asserts the hegemony of the cisheterosexual majority over the queer minority. Crucially, these norms are bolstered by the politicisation of sexuality, justifying the restrictions by aligning same-sex desire with the decadence of capitalist society and growing concerns surrounding public health and national security.

In his book, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault demonstrates the limitations of visibility by referring to the design of Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, which can be taken as a paradigmatic example for the normalising function of society. By way of its design, in the panopticon a single guard is able to observe any of the prisoners at one time, but crucially, without the prisoners being able to know when they are being watched. In Foucault’s view, all disciplinary systems, or normative mechanisms, fulfil three main requirements. These comprise hierarchical surveillance, what Foucault calls normalising judgement, and finally, the examination, a combination of the former two, the ‘normalizing gaze’, in other words, ‘surveillance [...] makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish’. Hierarchical surveillance, in Foucault’s words, functions as ‘a network of relations from top to bottom, but also [...] from bottom to top and laterally’, meaning that behaviour is observed, reported, and disseminated throughout the network so that those who figuratively sit at the top of the pyramid are informed of all behaviour without the need to observe it for themselves. Normalising judgement then takes place to ensure that ‘the non-conforming is

punishable’, meaning ‘an “offence” [has been committed] whenever [an individual] does not reach the level required’ of them (176-84).

Foucault makes it clear that the role of the panopticon is to ‘induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power’ (201). Visibility, then, can only be restrictive as it inevitably leads to judgement; even the possibility of being discovered performing behaviour which does not conform is sufficient to sustain the hegemonic influence of cisheteronormativity. Foucault builds on his paradigm of the normalising function of society in his 1984 text, *the History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. In its way, the GDR might be seen as an almost panopticistic society. Although the GDR had a population of only 16 million people, at its peak in 1975, over 180,000 “unofficial collaborators” assisted the infamous *Stasi* in its operations, the most expansive surveillance network of any state in the Eastern bloc (Fulbrook 241). In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault turns his attention to the repressive hypothesis, which suggests that in a modern society, all activity undertaken purely for sexual pleasure is frowned upon. Consequently, sex has become a private affair and is not discussed openly in public life. Foucault argues that ‘as if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate [sex] at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech’ thereby eliminating discourse which might lead to subversions of the established norm (17).

Whereas in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault examines the normalising judgements pertaining to observable behaviour, concerning sexuality Foucault examines the means by which public discourse surrounding sex is regulated or controlled, by extension how sexual behaviour itself is controlled. Kyle Frackman notes that throughout its history, ‘the open discussion of homosexuality’ in the GDR usually ‘[took place] in specific contexts, often as part of efforts to prohibit its existence through criminal legislation’, which parallels Foucault’s concept of controlling behaviour through the regulation of language. Frackman continues by saying that ‘when it did arise as a subject of debate or

education, it was often through the lens of homophobic anxiety' (26-27). Evans corroborates this view of the GDR and states that the 'Stalinist regimes relied on similar notions of youth endangerment, rendering the male homosexual a danger to the moral [...] integrity of the state' ("Unnatural" Desire' 554). Consequently, the youth were to be protected from this ostensible threat in much the same way that Margaret Thatcher justified the introduction of Section 28. However, firstly that threat would need to be identified before it can be dealt with, which, in Foucauldian terms, relates to his concept of the confessional introduced in the *History of Sexuality*. In his words, it is as though 'the legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion' whereas the "sexually perverse" are required to 'confess to their desires contravening the law [...] decorated with the most numerous and searching details' (21-38). Foucault goes on to describe the obligation to confess as:

Now relayed through so many different points, [...] that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth [...] "demands" only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place [...] and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation (60).

Here, Foucault argues that societal pressure will always lead to a normalising judgement placed on sexual desires and behaviours, but only if that desire is transformed into discourse. After this occurs, the behaviour can be observed in absentia mediated by a confession, a normalising judgement can be applied, and private sexual desires can be brought into the panopticon of societal normative structures. The assurance that a confession will be articulated is a consequence of the politicisation of sexuality in that it implies individuals will feel compelled to confess out of a desire to be normalised, but moreover, as cisheterosexual privilege has been asserted so frequently and without question, that the behaviour of those who fall outside of these norms are taken as a matter of public interest.

Monitoring from the GDR state increased immediately after the Workers' Uprising of 1953, due to a heightened perceived threat of

Western espionage and because of their frequent contact with westerners, this marked queer people as the clear opponent in a political and ideological conflict. In the GDR, citizens were required to register all house guests in the *Hausbuch* [house book], which was kept by one resident in the building [*der Hausvertrauensmann*] (Betts 28). Further examination of the Foucauldian confession reveals the possibility for two categories of confession. For the purposes of this article, I differentiate between the two forms with the terms discovery and confrontation. This particular feature of state observation, the house book system, in which ‘nosy neighbourhood authorities’ report non-conforming sexual activity is motivated by discovery, the desire to acquire knowledge of or the act of exposing perceived abnormal sexuality and bringing it into the public view (30). Another of Lemke’s interviewees, known only as T., overhears a conversation between his colleagues, one of whom has discovered a homosexual lives in her building. Her co-workers ask how she ‘worked it all out so quickly’.

She [answers], “I was warned, by the entry in the house book”. – Incidentally, [T. adds] the man in charge of my floor [meine Etagenverantwortlicher] is the one who keeps the house book.

Nobody judged this as an indiscretion, though. Everyone thought it was good that one is warned about *someone like that*. The sooner the better, you never know (75).

In incidents of discovery, the politicisation of sexuality is made evident by normalising judgements which are made. In the GDR, the narrative was perpetuated that queer people were politically subversive, or that they ‘made elaborate plans to corrupt the innocence of youth through seduction’ into a life of anti-socialist decadence (Evans “‘Unnatural’ Desire’ 553-54). In Foucault’s conception of the panopticon, the house book represents surveillance, normalising judgement, and when repeated incidents are documented, the examination. As the incident occurs after partial decriminalisation in 1968, no punishment can be delivered within the formal judicial system, but it could lead to societal stigma and ostracism which would constitute punishment. Furthermore, T.’s co-worker is compelled to share this information around his workplace, in a way which participates within the network of

hierarchical surveillance, as though to inform anyone who may be listening that the that the ‘truth [...] demands only to surface’, that non-conformity will always be discovered (Foucault, *Sexuality* 60).

What is significant in Foucault’s description of the normalising judgement is that that which is not observable, specifically that which shows no visible evidence of producing the desired result is also punishable, as opposed to performing undesirable acts exclusively (178). In the predominantly heteronormative pronatalist context of the GDR, rather than the presence of a certain trait, queerness is viewed in some respects as the absence of traits associated with cisheterosexual people. In this case, the absence of children further demarcates queer people as an Other in that it ‘suggests a [...] perverse refusal [...] of every substantializing of identity [...] and, by extension, of history’, portraying queerness as a threat to humanity’s shared future (Edelman 3-4). Many of the men who are interviewed by Lemke share a fear that they will be accused of something which has not been observed, but which is based on the fearful assumption of their private desires and behaviour. Peter, who lives with his partner, Volker, notes that his behaviour towards children is restricted out of a fear for what their parents might think of his interactions with them, especially around boys. In his interview with Lemke, he mentions his feelings of entrapment or, in his words, ‘unfreedom’ [*Unfreiheit*] which is an aspect common to his life as a queer man and to his experience in totalitarianism (98).

Cisheteronormative values are inherently political as they facilitate the restriction of minority rights. Moreover, the politicisation of sexuality ensures that queerness is viewed as a matter of public concern, either from the perspective of public health, collective sensibilities or from the perspective of socialist ideology. The perpetuation of the dominant image of homosexuality as something anti-socialist, anti-family and potentially, by extension, against fundamentally core values of the average GDR citizen, not only exacerbates the fear of child seduction but demonstrates how pre-existing homophobia in the GDR was validated by homosexuality’s legal status. In incidents of discovery, a value judgement is made based on this image of homosexual identity. Historically, as Jose Muñoz explains, ‘the discourse of the fact has often cast antinormative desire as the bad object’; discovery relies on evidence of fundamental

differences and makes these desires known to the majority so that normalising judgements can be made (65). McLellan notes that ‘if a worker was known to be acting in an “immoral” way’, and this was not necessarily limited to same-sex behaviour, ‘his or her co-workers were encouraged to intervene to put him/her back on the right path’ (*Love in the Time of Communism* 91-92). In Lemke’s text, T. recounts his experience of this occurring when his parents suspect that he has been engaging in sexual activity with older men. As he is under the age of consent at the time, they send a representative from the state to speak to him. In his words:

I went to the door, [...] once again, I had been out getting drunk all night, opened the door and in front of me was a slightly out of touch woman, but in smart modern dress. She said: good morning, I am Frau Meyer, advisor in marriage and sexual relations from so and so, I would like very much to speak with you [...].

To which I replied: with me? Why just with me? Then I knew exactly, what had been going on.

Oh yes, she answered. Your mother called me – in her desperation, she didn’t know what else to do, and so here I am [...]

She started to babble as though she had been wound up and let go: you just can’t do that to your mother. Stay away for nights on end, going off on your own at your age! With those sorts of men, what ever will become of you? (72).

In this excerpt, it becomes apparent how normalising judgements can be used to punish those who do not conform to cisheteronormativity, but also how the right to privacy is granted only to those who conform to those norms (Foucault, *Discipline* 184; *Sexuality* 21-22). For Frau Meyer, it is inconceivable that T.’s actions are performed willingly. Rather, she wishes to protect him from being seduced into a life of aberrant sexual desire and anti-socialist decadence (Evans, “Unnatural” Desire’ 553-54). In his sociological study of gay men in the GDR, Kurt Starke notes that ‘homosexuals grow up, just like the rest of us in a heterosexually dominated society, with prescribed male and female gender archetypes and a model for the family as mother – father – child’ (141).

Consequently, the aspiration to conform to this model by establishing a relationship with a member of the opposite sex is repeatedly, yet tacitly enforced as the norm. Confrontation, then, the second iteration of the confession I wish to address in my argument, is to break free from this model and to form an identity which can be disclosed to others voluntarily.

Unlike discovery, which robs the individual of their agency to disclose or withhold information about their sexuality, confrontation is always voluntary and provides the opportunity to challenge the normative values of society. Perhaps because of the negative experience he had with his parents, which led to him leaving home and performing sexual favours for money, T. believes that society at large 'is hostile towards homosexuals, without a doubt' and that 'homophobia is part and parcel [of life here]'. He goes on to say:

essentially, these prejudices persist because very little is done to push the facts. Besides, there's an awful lot of history behind these prejudices, the Nazi era, the Church. I'm not surprised most people face the issue so narrow-mindedly, they don't know any better (73-75).

This cynical view of the GDR is matched by Peter and his partner, Volker, who are also interviewed in Lemke's text. The pair meet in 1968, almost immediately after decriminalisation and although Peter remembers that 'looking back, it's obvious [...] that [he] already knew he was homosexual', he is engaged at the time and aspires to a career in Church ministry. Eventually, he and Volker realise their attraction to each other and Peter abandons his engagement and his career (89-91). Although they stay together for at least eighteen years before the interview is given, they are both aware that their relationship will likely never be fully accepted by society as a whole.

Repeatedly, the men in Lemke's text make references to a desire for conformity. When in denial of his sexuality, Dieter marries a woman and has two children with her. When his first son is born, he remembers thinking 'regardless of how the marriage went, the main thing was that I was a father [...] finally, a man *like all others*' (44, my emphasis). Similarly, Volker, Peter's eventual partner sleeps with a woman as a student at vocational college because he 'wanted [...] [his] status' among

his peers, which meant by extension ‘to have slept with a girl’ implying that same-sex relationships are of a lower status (101). Finally, T. rationalises his first same-sex experience as merely a consequence of ‘puberty, everything half as bad’; he claims that ‘his friends have all done that with each other too, [that] he’ll grow out of it’ and that ‘[he will] be *like the others*’ (71, my emphasis). Discovery only has any effect as the individual internalises these normative values, subsequently building a façade to conceal the identity which causes them to experience shame. Confrontation breaks through this façade also, but in a way which is based on the individual’s terms and which can turn the politicisation of sexuality back onto cisheteronormativity, to demonstrate the damaging influence of reproductive futurism.

Confrontation is less to do with depoliticising sexuality in a way which renders every sexual desire as permissible, rather it is political in the sense of the restructuring and ordering of power inequalities within society. Confrontation or political activism more broadly is to overcome the stigma which pervaded at every level of society in the GDR. Instead of the state perception that they were working against the ideals of socialism, the burgeoning gay rights movement in the 1980s worked within the constraints of socialist ideology as far as they could. These organisations fought for social inclusion in the GDR by attempting to redefine the parameters of what constituted a committed socialist. Dieter, at the time of his interview is unambiguously supportive of the GDR and of socialism. As he declares:

For me, my mother was an aunt, who would occasionally visit me and bring me things. [...] I didn’t know my father. [...] I say today, though, the Soviet Union [where his father is from] is my fatherland, the GDR my motherland. I really mean that (38).

Dieter grew up in a children’s home and therefore had no contact with his biological family when growing up. Although he was arrested and convicted under §151, he feels a great sense of solidarity in his labour brigade and gains acceptance from his colleagues. He mentions that if his colleagues arrange a social event outside work, ‘[they] invited [his partner] without even needing to ask. To [his co-workers, Dieter and his

partner, H.] belonged together' (33). Perhaps for these reasons, Dieter attributes this sense of belonging to life in the GDR under socialism.

In conclusion, the act of confrontation makes it possible for norms to be redefined and for various gender and sexual identities to be normalised. Precisely because of the politicisation of sexuality, *Gay Voices* exerts a powerful normalisation effect on its audience by emphasising the commonalities between those who are queer and those who form part of the cisheterosexual majority. The men in Lemke's text are united by their desire to be accepted and their shared need for a sense of belonging. In addition to these desires which are common to the majority of GDR citizens, Lemke emphasises the mundane elements of the queer experience such as sharing household duties between partners, thereby establishing the assignment of fixed gender roles as relative and presenting acceptance for queer individuals in the GDR as a tangible possibility (47; 95). However, confrontation does not equate to simply yielding to confession voluntarily or to pre-empt the removal of an individual's agency. In fact, the confrontation is the only way to normalise queerness within society by providing an alternative image of homosexuality which may or may not fit within the perceived norm. In so doing, gaining the ability to establish one's own norms of sexual expression as a parallel norm to the values of heteronormativity and monogamy. Furthermore, confrontation illuminates what is so often missing from the discourse surrounding identity politics: that the cisheterosexual majority have a sexual and gender identity which has been depoliticised, 'relayed through so many different points, [...] that we no longer perceive [discovery] as the effect' of an unequal power structure (Foucault, *Sexuality* 60). On the contrary, the confrontation calls this power structure into question in a way which allows for multiple points of parallel normality to be established.

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