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Gender complementarity paradigm and sexual deviance in late Soviet expert and pedagogical texts: The case of the Lithuanian SSR

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Abstract

Despite the official Communist proclamations of women's emancipation and equality of the sexes, the gender complementarity paradigm took hold in popular and expert discourses in state-socialist Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union starting at least with the 1970s. This article presents an analysis of the late Soviet expert and pedagogical texts in the context of the Lithuanian SSR from a feminist and queer historical perspective. It shows how the adoption of complimentary, yet strongly differentiated gender roles by men and women was seen as key to marital happiness and a healthy Communist society. It further demonstrates how the emphasis on the need to foster traditional gender roles was interrelated to homophobia, as homosexuality was seen to pose a threat to the proper functioning of masculinity and femininity, and a reason for the fading attraction between the 'opposite' sexes. The article shows how Soviet expert and pedagogical texts borrowed from and at times paralleled similar ideas on gender and sexuality as they appeared in scholarship produced in other countries of the Eastern bloc, but also in 'Western' contexts, such as the United States. It deconstructs the perception that the 'return to traditional gender roles' discourse is only a result of post-socialist conservatism, and instead shows it as intrinsic to the moralistic dogmas of Soviet sexual science and pedagogy.

Keywords: homosexuality; Soviet Union; sexual science; Lithuania; gender complementarity; homophobia

1 Introduction

Despite the official Communist proclamations of women's emancipation and equality of the sexes, the gender complementarity paradigm took hold in popular and expert discourses in state-socialist Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union starting at least with the 1970s. It is by now well-researched that sexology books on family life, published in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia during this period stressed the importance of 'natural' gender roles in ensuring both marital and societal harmony. The Soviet Union, including its Westernmost republics, like the Lithuanian SSR, was not an exception in this

regard. Decades before the rise of the post-socialist nationalist political rhetoric, which saw the rebirth of the nation as inseparable from the 'rebirth of the traditional family' (Žvinklienė, 2008), Soviet Lithuanian psychologists, psychiatrists, and sexologists have been claiming that the happiness of families and the prosperity of Communist society relies on men and women dutifully enacting their stereotypical gender roles. The notion of the crisis of masculinity and the unwelcome virility of Soviet women was promoted by experts in combination with the vilification of homosexuality. While the nationalist populists in the 1990s blamed Eastern European women for allegedly having forgotten their responsibility as mothers due to the Communist propaganda (Novikova, 2006), in fact official Soviet sexual education and expert texts have been injecting the exact same idea into society for a few decades already. This, however, remains an understudied phenomenon, contributing to the skewed perception of gender politics under the Soviet regime and the extent of the changes that the fall of the Soviet Union brought to Eastern European societies. There is also a lack of understanding of how the ideas on gender and sexuality in the 'Eastern Bloc' were rather interconnected with various discourses produced in the 'the West', and in the United States in particular.

This article analyses how the anxiety, related to the perceived 'masculinization' of women and 'feminization' of men penetrated various specialist, educational and popular-scholarly texts in Lithuanian SSR since the 1970s. In particular it pays attention to how the fear of trespassing gender norms related to the general strife of the state to control and regulate sexuality of Soviet citizens and, in particular, to the strict policing of homosexuality. The article therefore contributes, first, to the field of Soviet and Eastern Europe studies, by analysing the formation of the discourses of gender and sexuality in the under-researched area of the Baltic states, Lithuania in particular. Second, it contributes to the scholarly debates on homophobia (Bosia & Weiss, 2013; Healey, 2018; Huneke, 2022), further historicizing this phenomenon and analysing it as a part of specific expert knowledge production in a transnational context. The insights presented here are based on the findings of my archival and desk research into the Lithuanian-language sources from the period between 1968 to 1990, with a focus on sexual education, expert scientific, and popular psychology texts. I argue that the moralistic re-traditionalization of gender in late Soviet Lithuania cannot be understood separately from homophobia and, in turn, that homophobia was inextricably connected to the fear of the mutability of gender. In my analysis I employ insights from feminist and queer history of sexual science, which has recently blossomed in the context of state-socialist Eastern Europe (Renkin & Kościańska, 2016; Lišková, 2018; Kościańska, 2021) and the Soviet Union (Healey, 2001; 2018; Alexander, 2021). This research has been influenced in turn by the theoretical contributions of feminist and lesbian & gay studies, as they developed primarily in the United States, and in particular the notion that gender and sexuality are historically changing, socially and discursively constructed phenomena, central to the social organization of societies (Scott, 1986; Duggan, 1990).

In what comes next, I first present an overview of the secondary historical literature on the changing discourse on gender and sexuality in state-socialist countries and the Soviet Union, which shows a tendency in the 1970s and the 1980s expert texts to emphasize the importance of 'traditional' gender roles. I then analyse selected examples from the Soviet Lithuanian sources during this period (1968–1986), examining how the 'gender

complementarity' paradigm appeared in pedagogical (sexual education) and expert (forensic and psychology) texts. Throughout my analysis, I show how the discourse of 'traditional' gender roles is intertwined with the conceptualization of gendered and sexual deviance, homosexuality in particular. By analysing gender and sexuality discourse in a Soviet context from a transnational perspective, with a focus on international knowledge flows within the Eastern bloc as well as across the 'Iron Curtain', this article helps to break with the persistent imagination of the exceptionality of the Soviet propaganda and policy in the sphere of sexuality. Also, by analysing the predominance of strict gender roles and the heterosexual monogamous relationship model (McLellan, 2011, p. 51) it problematizes the tendency in some recent scholarship to idealize state-socialist and Soviet contexts as more progressive in terms of gender and sexuality (see e.g. Ghodsee, 2018) than certain Western contexts of the same period.

2 The historical context: The conservative turn of the 1970s–1980s

As the historian Deborah Field writes, since the 1960s, the Soviet Union and the state-socialist countries of Eastern Europe experienced a relative modernization of sexuality, with increasingly relaxed societal attitudes to premarital sex and extramarital affairs, and the weakening of the double sexual standard for men and women (Field, 2007, p. 64). However, since the 1970s, in these countries the official concern with declining birth rates prompted an attempt at a tighter control over sexuality, with the hope to redirect it to exclusively procreative goals. As Kateřina Lišková has shown in the context of Czechoslovakia, the Normalization period after the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring led to the cult of the nuclear family and domesticity. Since the 1970s, expert sexologists started putting increasing importance onto the hierarchically organized gender roles in the family, with women seen as the primary caregivers and housewives (Lišková, 2018, p. 180). The expert consensus in this period was that only 'traditional' gender roles could ensure sexual satisfaction and individual happiness. Gender equality in society and in the economy, allegedly achieved by the Communist revolution in the Soviet Union, was, according to socialist sexologists writing in that period, detrimental to the natural gender order. They warned that too much equality could even be dangerous on a personal level, in terms of leading to dissatisfaction, unhappiness, and to the abandonment of the important social roles – that of the mother-caregiver in women, and the father-provider in men (Lišková, 2018, p. 185).

Similar processes were also taking place in neighbouring Poland and Hungary, framed either as a backlash against the excesses of the earlier socialist policies, or as a reaction to the detrimental influences from the sexual revolution of the West. As Agnieszka Kościańska has shown, in the 1970s and the 1980s the most widely read and influential Polish sexologists of that period started seeing 'proper' gender roles as contributing to marital harmony, sexual satisfaction and mental health. Women's emancipation, their achievement of positions of independence, power, and influence started to be seen as threatening the social order and harming individual happiness (Kościańska, 2016, pp. 244–247). The belief in the essential difference and complementarity of gender roles was not limited to expert discourses – it also permeated the media, constituting somewhat of a conservative backlash against the post-war Communist ideological agenda, when

women's emancipation was promoted by the state (Kościańska, 2016, p. 247). Likewise, in Hungary, in 1973, two Communist intellectuals, Ágnes Heller and Mihály Vajda were expelled from the party due to their positive commentary on the sexual revolution in the West. The Communist party saw that as a threat to 'the Hungarian family' and the spread of Western leftist ideas, which were incompatible with 'actually existing socialism' (Takács, 2015, p. 162). State-socialist governments embraced the traditionalist line and aimed to 'protect' the national family ideal, the 'natural' gender order, and sexual morality, which was likely a useful strategy in facilitating the social support of the previously deeply religious populations.

In 1970s and 1980s Soviet Russia, the discourse of the 'crisis of masculinity' became prominent, which blamed women's emancipation for creating a generation of weakened, infantilized, feminized men (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2013). As Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina argue, the discourse of 'the crisis of masculinity' should not be seen as a reaction to changing gender roles under Communism. Rather, it should be read as a hidden critique of the Soviet system itself, which, by restricting liberal rights, prohibited men from 'performing traditional male roles' and thus allegedly emasculated them (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2013, p. 43) Following Zdravomyslova and Temkina it can be said that the dissatisfaction with the social and economic structure of the Soviet system was rhetorically transferred to private life, where women's emancipation came to be seen as depriving men from their 'long-standing role of conqueror' in the sphere of sexuality (Zdravomyslova & Temkina, 2013, p. 46). In the late Soviet period, propagandists therefore started navigating between two somewhat contradictory claims: the first one emphasized the importance of gender equality as achieved by the Communist Party and celebrated marriage as a partnership, while the second one communicated the persisting importance of the underlying 'natural' sexual differences between men and women. These allegedly innate differences meant that women had to stay prude and tamed, and their task essentially was to become mothers, while men had much stronger, uncontrollable sexual desires, which they had to master and redirect to productive work for the good of the state (Field, 2007, p. 41).

The history of gender and sexuality in Soviet Lithuania is still rather underresearched, although the topics of family and private life have already drawn some attention from researchers. According to the sociologist Aušra Maslauskaitė, the Soviet Lithuanian society throughout the whole socialist period remained continuously attached to the pre-Soviet ideal of a nuclear family model, seen as connected to the national, ethnic identity, but also easily transformed into the ideal 'Soviet family' model (Maslauskaitė, 2010). The historian Dalia Leinarte (-Marcinkevičienė) has analysed Soviet Lithuanian society as a puritan society, opposed to the romantic notion of love, and exalting the kind of marriage, which creates the best conditions for the productive labour of both spouses and the upbringing of Soviet youth. Relationships, she argued, were seen not as a private matter under the Soviet regime, but ideally a building block of the Communist society (Marcinkeviciene, 2009). She identifies the 1970s and the 1980s as the decades when expert interest in sexual and romantic aspects of love started growing, with the institutes of sexology opening in Vilnius and Riga (Marcinkeviciene, 2009, p. 112). The historians Valdemaras Klumbys and Tomas Vaiseta point out that the 1960s in Lithuania was a relatively liberal decade – not of sexual revolution, but of moderate sexualization of the

public sphere, which allowed publication of erotic images of women in popular magazines. However, this 'liberalization' was halted very suddenly in 1968, when the Soviet censorship curbed all erotic content from appearing in public – something that lasted for the next two decades (Klumbys & Vaiseta, 2022, pp. 98–100) Simultaneously, in the 1970s, the worsening demographic situation prompted a further conservative turn towards family, which aimed at procreation-oriented sexual education of families and youths (Klumbys & Vaiseta, 2022, p. 135).

In late Soviet era Lithuania, sexual education was countering perceived threats to the nuclear family and traditional gender roles. Just like in the Soviet Union at large, as the historian Rustam Alexander has shown, homosexuality was constructed as a moral threat to Communist society (Alexander, 2018; 2021). As Alexander argues, since the 1970s the Soviet Union increasingly relied on the conception of 'Communist morality' in their policy making. Vaguely defined as meaning that sexuality should be confined to marital heterosexual procreative sex, the concept of 'Communist morality' allowed conceptualizing homosexuality as a moral crime (Alexander, 2021). In the sexual education manuals, youths were treated as easily susceptible to homosexuality, and warned against many triggers – from spicy foods to exposure to inappropriate behaviour of adults. The sexual education itself was seen as potentially dangerous, in terms of triggering sexual curiosity in youths. For that reason, the mentioning of homosexuality was mostly very careful and implicit, hoping not to instil any indecent ideas into the young minds (Alexander, 2021, p. 54). As Aušrinė Skirmantė, one of the first researchers of LGBTQ history in Lithuania has argued, sexual education can be seen as the main tool by means of which the Soviet heteronormative ideal was ingrained in society, with accompanying 'gender roles, forms of cohabitation and sexual practices' (Skirmantė, 2013, p. 22, translated from Lithuanian by me).

3 Strict gender roles as the basis of socialist upbringing

Since the 1960s the Lithuanian SSR state publishers 'Šviesa' and 'Mintis' started releasing book-sized manuals that aimed to instil proper gender roles and sexual morals into young people; they targeted boys and girls separately (Bagdonaitė, 1967; Chripkova & Kolesovas, 1983; 1985; Griciuvienė, 1971). The books were edited volumes, with texts mostly translated from Russian and some partially authored by scholars from other countries of the 'Eastern bloc'.[1] Since the publishing process was controlled by the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP CC), these texts demonstrate quite well what kind of gender roles were encouraged by the state-approved expert pedagogical discourse, and how gendered behaviour and appearance was policed by the state. The books were normally written in a moralistic tone and had an explicit intent at ideological indoctrination through

[1] The lack of references in these books make it hard to trace the exact provenance of texts, but parts of the book for boys *Be a Man* (1971) were for example borrowed from the Russian translation of the 1956 book by the prominent Czech sexologist Josef Hynie, called *Growing into a man* (Hynie, 1956). The original text was however tampered with by the translators, often abridged and 'adapted' to the Soviet context (see Alexander, 2021, p. 63).

praising the Communist society and criticizing the allegedly immoral capitalist 'West' and the vestiges of the 'bourgeois past' (Alexander, 2018, p. 352). These sexual education manuals took it as self-evident that clear gender roles were at the basis of a proper upbringing of the Soviet youths and key to successful marriage and procreation, as well as a well-functioning society (Skirmantė, 2013, p. 21).

Despite the rhetorical emphasis on the emancipation of women and the overarching importance of 'common-for-all-humans' (Lit. *bendražmogiškos*) features, the books normally included long and detailed lists of characteristics and behaviours that are allegedly typical for either boys or girls. Boys naturally possessed 'deeper thinking and a broader worldview', but lacked 'adaptability to the household chores' (Chripkova & Kolesovas, 1985, p. 45). Girls, on the other hand, were prone to caring for other people, they were able to effortlessly create a positive and warm atmosphere at home and in the workplace (Bagdonaitė, 1967, p. 6), but they lacked attention to technical detail, creativity and inventiveness (Chripkova & Kolesovas, 1983, p. 110). In the sexual sphere, men were depicted as active and persistent, but they were taught to control themselves and their urges and respect a woman – their sexual object (Chripkova & Kolesovas, 1985, p. 63). Women, on the other hand, were not understood as sexually proactive – their role was primarily to resist the advances of a man by their own modest behaviour (Bagdonaitė, 1967, p. 247). These differences in character were seen as innate, universal and unchangeable. The ability of individuals to understand the strengths and weaknesses dictated by their gender were key to harmonious married life and social adaptation – femininity and masculinity were supposed to 'complement one another' (Chripkova & Kolesovas, 1983, p. 104).

Since gender differences were seen as natural and complementary, one of the most crucial aspects of a proper socialist upbringing was the development of behaviours which would fit the traditional roles of masculinity and femininity. For girls, it was important to never forget that their main mission and calling in life was to become mothers, which also implied the necessity to preserve their virginity before marriage (Bagdonaitė, 1967, p. 251; Chripkova & Kolesovas, 1983, p. 135). A young boy, on the other hand, was encouraged to build himself as a fully independent, strong individual, able to control his passions and instincts, ready to work for the homeland, and, of course, defend it, if needed. While boys were encouraged to help their future wives in the household, and 'not to distinguish between masculine and feminine jobs' (Griciuvienė, 1971, p. 109), the traditional division of labour was taken for granted in these books. Unquestionable was also the presumption that there are fundamental differences between the expected social roles of men and women, which stem from innate psychological and physiological differences, as described above.

While gender roles were taken for granted as natural, they were also an object of cultivation, scrutiny and policing – it was the task of parents, but also very much of pedagogues to correct the inappropriate behaviours. For example, in the following excerpt from the book *Be a Man!* boys were shamed into adopting 'masculine' haircuts and warned against wearing long hair or any clothes reminiscent of femininity:

> Long haired, untidy young men lose the appearance characteristic of men, they lose their masculine pride, they turn into something in between a man and a woman. (Griciuvienė, 1971, p. 137)

In the book this excerpt was accompanied by an illustration of an untidy long-haired boy with a cigarette in his mouth and a shall around his neck. The passage was likely intended as a critique of the hippie fashion, which was seen as blurring strict gender roles in appearance and behaviour and framed as a bad influence from 'the West' (Fürst, 2021, p. 325). Such fashion was presented as threatening the normal gender roles of young men and women, turning them into something 'in between' proper gender roles and had to be shamed. Similarly, girls were warned that in 'the Western world' some young women find it appropriate to walk around 'disheveled, purposefully untidy, pretending to be drunk, rude like savages' (Bagdonaitė, 1967, p. 5), something, that was unsuitable for a Soviet girl. All in all, the appearance, behaviour, character and sexuality of young men and women was expected to follow quite strict guidelines. Trespassing of gender norms was not expected and, if it occurred, it had to be shamed and eradicated, because it was seen as un-Soviet and a bad influence from 'the West'.

The sexual education manuals, described above, promoted a rather contradictory message, especially for the girls: while they reiterated Communist slogans regarding the emancipation of women and the realization of 'common-for-all-humans' needs, the books also stressed repeatedly the importance of accepting the gendered social norms, including the woman's role of a mother and caretaker. The books acknowledged this contradiction but stated that the burden of reproductive labour will eventually be eradicated by the inevitable progress and perfection of Communist society (Chripkova & Kolesovas, 1983, p. 108). However, in late Soviet society the opinion became more and more prominent that in the light of Soviet societal progress one needs to cultivate the seemingly disappearing traditional gender roles for the sake of morality and social wellbeing. The scholarly publication *Equal, but Different. On the Social Roles or a Man and a Woman* (1987) by the psychologist Gediminas Navaitis is a good example of this discourse. Based on a survey of 700 parents, 426 pupils and 210 students, it aimed to analyse, in the context of the Lithuanian SSR, 'the issues that arise in the acknowledgement and enactment of the social roles of man and woman in a family' (Navaitis, 1987, p. 4). Characteristically for such publications, the introductory section of the book was dedicated to the achievements of the Soviet system in ensuring gender equality and women's ability to achieve their fullest potential. It also contained an acknowledgement that science has not convincingly shown any fundamental psychological differences between men and women. The book, however, emphasized, that socialist gender equality should not be misunderstood as meaning that all the differences between men and women should disappear.

Navaitis stated:

> The social equality of men and women characteristic to our society has brought their activities closer. However, the change of the social circumstances has not and cannot eradicate the complementarity and some kind of difference of the social roles of men and women in the society, family in particular. As it was earlier, so it is now, that we appreciate man's courage, restraint, the ability to be the defender of a woman, while in a woman we value gentleness, care for the children, the ability to create coziness and spiritual comfort at home. (Navaitis, 1987, pp. 28–29)

On the one hand, the book emphasized, in a declarative way, the already achieved gender equality as one of the great accomplishments of Communism. On the other hand, it proposed that women and men are in fact fundamentally different.

Navaitis's conceptualization of gender was informed by post-war U.S. American sexology. He referenced, for example, the 1963 article by John L. Hampson, the colleague of the infamous sexologist John Money, in which Hampson argued that gender is fully learned and proposed a theory of 'psychosexual neutrality' (Hampson, 1963, p. 34) in humans at birth. Navaitis adopted the view of gender as mainly formed socially and stressed the importance of parents and pedagogues in forming the gender of children 'correctly'. The book proclaimed that men and women are not so different 'biologically' (that is, that science cannot show any immovable differences in the brain of men and women) and that Communism could eradicate any inequalities. Nevertheless, Navaitis also argued that people should cultivate the age-old social differences between genders for the sake of familiar harmony and the moral upbringing of children. Navaitis wrote:

> We have to stress the fact, which is understandable and known to everyone, but still not sufficiently referred to in the familial and even social upbringing: without a clear gender belonging there cannot be a full-fledged personality. […] Therefore, it is important that when taking over the socially accepted models of masculinity and femininity, the inner position of the personality – a man's or a woman's position – would form without a contradiction (*neprieštaringai*). […] In helping children to understand their gender belonging it is also important to educate them – parents should often repeat to their children: 'you are a girl', or 'you are a boy.' (Navaitis, 1987, p. 50)

Navaitis saw gender in line with the Soviet Marxist view of human nature – as pliant and changeable (Oushakine, 2004), which also aligned with the view prevalent in post-war American sexology, as described above. The belief in the social malleability of human nature, including gender, did not preclude Navaitis from promoting a conservative view towards gender roles. In fact, the belief in the mutability of gender, which clearly permeated the *Equal, but Different* book, led to a certain anxiety about the possibility that girls and boys might fail to attain their respective gender roles and fall somewhere in between masculinity and femininity. The goal of sexual education in a Communist society was to therefore ensure that gender was achieved 'without an inner contradiction', and that men and women took up gender roles which were different, but complementary in the service to society.

4 Gender inversion as the basis of sexual deviance

When examining a variety of sources from the late Soviet Lithuania one can notice that the social fears surrounding young people's ability to achieve their appropriate gender role was connected to homophobic social views. One of the most explicit examples of this was the manual for forensic experts, published in 1977, entitled *Sexual perversions. Reasons, juridical interpretation, prophylaxis* by the psychiatrist Zenonas Buslius and the forensic doctor Antanas Cėpla (Buslius & Cėpla, 1977). The authors assumed homosexuality and other 'sexual deviances' to be caused mainly by social factors and bad upbringing, a part of which was gender socialization gone awry. Most of the attention in terms of the 'prophylaxis of sexual perversions', was given to proper parenting, 'tidy' (*tvarkingi*) behaviour at home, prevention of early exposure to sexuality, and the good example set by the parents (Buslius & Cėpla, 1977, p. 27). However, the authors also mentioned that any deviation from proper gender roles, meaning from the gender appropriate dress, behaviour, manner of speech, even games, can be seen as a sign of impeding homosexuality or 'transvestism' (or might cause it) and should therefore be prevented by parents and educators:

> We have some doubts over the recent custom for the young men to grow long hair, wear various shiny things, while for the young women to wear masculine pants on any occasion, smoke demonstratively, and so on. From a sexological point of view, such fashion is unacceptable, as it eradicates the external gender difference to some extent [...] If a boy likes to wear girls' clothing, wear jewelry, imitate their manners and games, while girl is demonstratively rough, copies masculine behavior, style of talking, avoids feminine clothing, etc., this shows that the psychosexual orientation is on the wrong path. From such seemingly innocent aspect of childhood behavior might arise homosexual or transvestite tendencies. (Buslius & Cėpla, 1977, p. 26)

The authors argued that children and teenagers should stick to narrowly defined gender roles and saw this as an indicator of normality in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity. Parents and educators had the responsibility to fix any deviances from the norm. For adults Buslius and Cėpla recommended regular marital (heterosexual) intercourse as a healing and preventive tool from homosexuality for adults (Buslius & Cėpla, 1977, p. 27). As the researcher Skirmantė aptly put it, 'successful marriage, as a cornerstone of society, had to prevent deviances, which had the potential to disrupt the Soviet gender order' (Skirmantė, 2013, p. 21) and was therefore promoted by the state and its experts/educators. Buslius and Cėpla treated any deviation from heteronormative behaviour as a serious 'perversion,' detrimental to society and also criminal. They therefore warned that in the cases of hardened deviances, including homosexuality, marriage might not be a possibility anymore and psychiatric treatment might be necessary. Among the suggested treatments in cases of homosexuality they mentioned, as the last resort, also 'medical, laser, or chirurgical castration' (Buslius & Cėpla, 1977, p. 28). Homosexuality was clearly cast as a grave danger for socialist society, which needed to be policed from early childhood up until adulthood, making sure that children stick to their gender roles and that adults stick to the heteronormative script.

One can see the relation between unsuccessful attainment of the gender roles and homosexuality also theorized in other texts of this period, but with slightly different implications. The psychiatrist Aleksandras Alekseičikas, one of the pioneers of psychotherapy in Lithuania, argued, in his 1980s science popularization book *The Psychology of Human Weaknesses* (Alekseičikas, 1980), that men and women are different in their psychological make-up. Typically for Soviet texts on this issue, he claimed that while individual differences matter, the gender differences were more significant, and that people should aim to take advantage of their gendered differences, rather than trying to become more alike. Alekseičikas, however, also created a fascinating theory of sexual attraction, unique in Lithuanian language sources, where he defined gender as a spectrum, and explained homosexuality as a 'discrepancy between the physical and psychological gender markers' (Alekseičikas, 1980, p. 102). Alekseičikas, who is still (at the time of writing) professionally active as the department head at the Vilnius City Mental Health Center is currently the only psychiatrist in Lithuania who has publicly testified to having treated 'hundreds' of homosexual patients during the Soviet period by helping them 'develop' their gender identity (A. Alekseičikas, personal communication, August 21, 2023).

Alekseičikas, similarly to Navaitis, discussed above, claimed that the equality between the sexes does not mean their sameness and, in the same vein as the Soviet educational manuals, commented ironically on the current trends in unisex fashion. He however, differently from Navaitis, did not believe gender to be a social role, essentially shaped

by society and upbringing, but a much more fundamental phenomenon – he believed that gender 'penetrates the whole organism' of the human being, that 'every cell of the human body has its gender' (Alekseičikas, 1980, p. 98). In *The Psychology of Human Weaknesses* Alekseičikas' presented a table of stereotypically feminine and masculine features, such as men having more abstract thinking, while women having more detail-oriented thinking, men having stronger will-power, women having more subtle and deep emotions, men having broad interests, women being more adaptive to the environment, etc. (Alekseičikas, 1980, pp. 92–93). Alekseičikas assumed these character features to be deep-seated in men and women and believed that the key to a successful marriage and, essentially, to the flourishing of an individual, was cherishing and managing these gendered differences in an intimate relationship with a partner.

In the same book Alekseičikas, however, also developed a theory of gender spectrum, as he believed that men and women can be more or less masculine or feminine. His spectrum also equated gender expression with sexuality. For Alekseičikas the most feminine woman would also be the most sexual, and the most masculine man – the most sexual man too, while people with less pronounced gender would have less 'sexuality'. In the scale that he developed, the most masculine presenting man would get +5 points, while the most feminine presenting woman would get -5 points, while many people would fall somewhere in between. In developing such a scale for measuring gender Alekseičikas was not completely original, but echoed a similar development in the 1930s U.S., where the American psychologist Lewis Terman created a test to determine psychological gender, the so-called M-F test (Terman & Miles, 1936). It is not possible to check if Alekseičikas relied on Terman in developing his own theory, since his *The Psychology of Human Weaknesses* includes no reference list. Coincidentally or not, in both Alekseičikas' and Terman's theories, the positive scores indicated masculinity, while negative ones – femininity, and homosexuality were depicted as related to gender deviance.

As the historian Wendy Kline argued, Terman's test was inspired by the eugenicist ideas, highly influential in the U.S. at the time, which saw homosexuality as 'severe form of sexual "maladjustment,"' which threatened marriage, family and the ideal of a healthy society, and had to be eradicated by specialists (Kline, 2001, p. 134). For Terman, the 'failure to acquire gender-appropriate identity, as revealed by M-F score, indicated homosexuality' (Kline, 2001, p. 136). Alekseičikas also used his gender scale to discuss homosexuality:

> Some cases of homosexuality show the discrepancy between the physical and the psychological gender characteristics. For example, a personality with clear physical signs of a man (bodily condition, sexual organs) can have a feminine psyche, while a female "form" might hide a masculine psyche [...] Such a psyche is of course attracted to the externally "opposite" (but actually the same) gender body [...] For the individuals with homosexual tendencies this mismatch might be the reason for many difficulties, sometimes very torturous. (Alekseičikas, 1980, p. 102)

According to Alekseičikas' understanding of desire, according to which 'opposites attract', homosexuality could be explained by the attraction of a less masculine person by a more masculine person, even if both people were men. Analogously, he explained that a very feminine woman would seek a less feminine woman as a partner (so a –5 or –4 would look for a -1 or -2). Homosexuality, as he explained, did not always manifest in people with

the external appearance reminiscing of the opposite sex. However, homosexuality still indicated a sort of a gender inversion on one or another level, or a discrepancy between the physical and psychological genders, which would inevitably cause 'disharmony'. While Alekseičikas argued against criminalization of homosexuality, he was in favour of psychiatric treatment of such individuals. Similarly to the American eugenicist Terman, he believed that homosexuality was detrimental and had to be eradicated for the sake of harmonious families and healthy society (A. Alekseičikas, personal communication, August 21, 2023).

The last example of the promotion of 'gender complementarity' paradigm in connection to the perceived threat of homosexuality analysed here is the book *Mīlestības vārdā*[2] ('In the Name of Love'). Written by the Latvian doctor oncologist Jānis Zālītis and published in original Latvian in 1981, it was translated to Lithuanian and published in the neighbouring Lithuanian SSR in 1984. The first publication had a print-run of 100.000 copies and was reprinted the following year (70.000 copies), making the total print run of the book among the largest of any publications in Soviet Lithuania (Klumbys & Vaiseta, 2022, p. 136). Interviews with LGBT respondents collected in both post-socialist Latvia and Lithuania have shown that for this group of people the book was often the very first source of knowledge about the existence of homosexuality, albeit a very stigmatizing one (Ruduša, 2014; Skirmantė, 2013). Despite its emphasis on the importance of sexual satisfaction, which might be seen as progressive, the book however also reproduced many of the predominant Soviet ideological clichés regarding sexuality, including the ones already analysed above.

In line with other Soviet and socialist authors of his time, Zālītis believed that psychological and behavioural differences between women and men are key to sexual attraction and satisfaction, stable marital life, and psychologically healthy children. The conceptualization of the difference and complementarity between femininity and masculinity therefore permeated the whole book. He argued that an essential part of sexual education is teaching children how to stick to the rules of behaviour appropriate to their sex – how to be proper boys and girls.[3] While he could not completely avoid the programmatic and brief praise of the gender equality and women's emancipation achieved by the Soviet Union, Zālītis spent much more time elaborating on the dangers of the 'vulgarization of women's emancipation,' (Zalytis, 1984, p. 65) which, according to him, resulted in 'masculinization' of women and 'feminization' of men (Zalytis, 1984, pp. 69–73). Zālītis warned that:

> Without denying the good aspects of emancipation, it seems worrying that a woman, whose true call is to bring the new generation to this world, should sit at the steering wheel of a tractor. (Zalytis, 1984, p. 69)

Zālītis worried, that the 'masculinization' of women, that is, the loss of what he understood as specifically feminine traits – modesty, pride, elegance – will result in a weakening

[2] The book that was used for analysis here is the Lithuanian translation of the original Latvian book: Janis Zalytis, *Meilės Vardu*, trans. Renata Zajančkauskaitė and Visvaldas Bronušas (Kaunas: Šviesa, 1984).

[3] The book is filled with different versions of this argument, but for the most concise example see Zalytis, *Meilės Vardu*, p. 72.

sexual desire between the sexes, because desire is 'the attraction between the opposite poles' (Zalytis, 1984, p. 72). Woman's 'masculinization' would further lead to the 'feminization' of men, and obstruct the development of a sexual relationship based on true love. Furthermore, it could lead to sexual perversions, argued Zālītis, because 'as research shows, a rude and hostile woman always also has sexual deviances, and one influences the other' (Zalytis, 1984, p. 70). Women's alleged loss of femininity under Communism therefore came to stand in *Mīlestības vārdā* as one of the core problems of contemporary marriages.

In line with his Pavlovian behaviourist reasoning, Zālītis argued that since homosexuality 'does not exist among animals' it must be a purely human problem, related to upbringing and education, and therefore, must certainly be mutable – it could be 'healed', for example, with hypnosis (Zalytis, 1984, p. 82). Among the reasons for the development of homosexual attraction he listed, predictably, seduction by an older homosexual, growing up in an incomplete family and therefore lacking a proper same-sex role-model, and finally, masturbation, which might lead to situations of same-sex intimacy (Zalytis, 1984, pp. 82–84). Next to the reasons connected to bad socialization, Zālītis added that sometimes homosexuality might be inborn, or 'constitutive' (Zalytis, 1984, p. 82), in which case it appears with symptoms of gender inversion:

> Sometimes such people quite openly hold themselves to be of the opposite sex, they wear the clothes and do the jobs of the opposite sex. Such men like to bake and cook, take care of children, they choose feminine professions. Usually they grow long hair, even their clothing is feminine. Lesbians, on the other hand, like to dress in an overtly masculine way, cut their hair short, pick masculine professions, etc. […] We would not have to mention any of this, if these phenomena did not hide the weakening feelings of love: a feminized man (which is similar to latent homosexuality) could never feel such a passionate attraction to a woman as a normal man. The same can be said about women. Therefore, let us not insist that a man should take care of the household. Of course, a woman might need some masculine help at home, but it is crucial to avoid such activities, which might instigate homosexual tendencies. A man can cook a dinner once in a while, but he should also be able to fix a broken sink… (Zalytis, 1984, p. 82)

While Zālītis described the subversion of gender roles as a sign of inborn homosexuality, he also believed, as it is clear from the excerpt above, that it is crucial to avoid the socio-cultural 'feminization' of men and 'masculinization' of women, which might lead to homosexuality. His discussion of the dangers of homosexuality shows how deeply entwined was the notion of sexual 'normality' with the notion of gendered 'normality' in late Soviet expert and pedagogical discourse. Moreover, it demonstrates how directly was the threat of the disappearance of traditional gender roles connected to homophobia – weakening masculinity and femininity were seen as inevitably leading to the erosion of sexual attraction, which would lead to homosexuality, and vice versa.

5 Conclusion

While it is often assumed that the 'return to proper gender roles' rhetoric is characteristic of post-Soviet and anti-Communist traditionalist discourse, in this article I have shown how in fact this discourse flourished in the late Soviet period already, next to the declarative ideological support for gender equality and women's emancipation. Soviet expert and pedagogical texts promoted the view that men and women have to preserve and foster traditional gender roles, despite the egalitarianism of the sexes, achieved, allegedly, by the progress of Communist society. A part of this discursive promotion of the traditional 'gender complementarity' paradigm was the fear of the masculinization of women and feminization of men, which, in turn, could apparently lead to the decline of the 'traditional' family and the weakening of heterosexual desire. Even though the reasons for homosexuality were understood as complex (both biological and social), the belief in the possibility to prevent and treat homosexuality remained. The main tool for such management of the homosexual 'threat' was proper socialization of children. Since homosexuality was continuously understood as related to gender inversion and/or trespassing of gender norms, the strict policing of gendered expressions was seen as a way to ensure the stability of heterosexual desire and generally good adaptation to social norms and expectations of Soviet society.

The heteronormative ideals of Soviet sexual education and the strict gender order that it promoted were not unique – they reflected similar theories that have been developed in capitalist countries throughout the twentieth century. The Communist ideological belief in the malleability of human nature, embodied in the project of the New Man resonated with the theories of gender as socially mutable, as developed in post-war American sexology, for example. However, the idea of pliancy of femininity and masculinity did not lead to more openness to the idea of transgressing the gender norms. Instead, in the late Soviet Union it resulted in anxious attachment to traditional gender roles and conservative morality, which were seen as threatened by social progress and 'wrongfully interpreted' emancipation of women under Communism. The gender complementarity paradigm and the related condemnation of sexual deviance became increasingly pronounced in late Soviet expert and pedagogical texts, appearing as an implicit critique of the earlier 'excesses' of women's emancipation. This rise of gendered and sexual conservatism in the 1970s and the 1980s allowed a smooth transition into the traditionalist nationalist discourses characteristic of post-Soviet societies.

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