



Queering the **white** picket fence:

a social justice take on
heteronormative
parenting

Bartulović Marija

Kušević Barbara

*Faculty of Humanities and
Social Sciences
University of Zagreb, Croatia*

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CROATIAN CONTEXT

- discrepancy between laws
- LGBTIQ invisibility
- general social climate
- research results



CROATIAN CONTEXT

- research results

Bagić, 2011

- research report on political literacy of Croatian students shows that around 46 percent of high school students believe homosexuality is a kind of an illness
- almost two-thirds of surveyed students agrees that homosexual persons should be banned from appearing in public because of their bad influence on young people



Hodžić and Bijelić, 2012

- research report on opinions and attitudes towards homosexuality in nine high schools in Zagreb reveals that less than one third of students have committed verbal and/or physical violence against a person because of his/her alleged homosexual orientation.



ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Classical identity dichotomy

stationarity - process →

central opposition for this work →

parenthood - parenting

Croatian language - implication
of biological connection
between mother/father and the
child →

Parent - *roditelj*

Kindred - *rod*

Birth - *rađanje*

English language - precedence
increasingly given to the verbal
noun *parenting* (being a parent)
→ oriented on the activity that
person does, while noun is
oriented on the very person
(Hoghughi, 2004)



ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

parenthood →
stationarity or fixed
notion of identity that
stems from the lens of
biological determinism
(Bem, 1993).

parenting → *process-like*
aspect of parental
identity.

queering the white picket fence →
paradoxical dual
balancing of LGBTIQ
parenting between
assimilation and
resistance



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Elementary research question →
how does a LGBTIQ family within
a heteronormative social context
balance between assimilation
practices which are necessary for
its self-preservation and
concurrent transformation of
oppressive and ingrained patterns
of family functioning

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Parenthood

institution defined by biology

legitimate family structures: two parent family with biological parents or one parent family with divorced partners

binaries (man : woman, heterosexual : homosexual, biological : non-biological parent, complete : incomplete family)

public (constructed in a relationship with legal, educational and other institutions)

oppressive

Parenting

practice defined by doing, that is, by the quality of a relationship between parental figures and the child

pluralism of family structures: reorganized families with multiple parental figures

fluidity of roles and identities

private (constructed in relationships within a family and in relationships with significant others)

transformative





RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Procedure → in-depth semi-structured interview including three sections:

- a** everyday family dynamics
- b** family's relations with significant others and the broader social context
- c** parental identity negotiating techniques in relation to educational institutions.

Sample → one reorganized lesbian family



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

parenthood / parenting

BM: Husband, wife, mother and father actually, I believe it's more difficult for me, I mean, she (*SM*) can never have those certain feelings for D, as mother and father have them, and I think that the family relationship like that, when that child is yours, when you both look at it with certain pride, she cannot look at D with that kind of pride and with those kind of feelings, that's the difference (...) I don't know, the way me and BF used to look at her, those are some motherly and fatherly feelings, parental feelings that stream through you... I don't know if two of you have children. That is something special, really something special.

Us: So you believe that biological ties are crucial for parenting?

SM: Yes, especially in our traditional country, you know, that's my blood and that's that.

BM: (...) I don't know now, if the two of us were in a relationship and that we have adopted a child, that neither of us has a child, but want to (...) have a child together (...), that we want that from the beginning, that's what it's all about, not biological. I have now mentioned some feelings, he is the father, I am the mother, she isn't...

SM: I think that if the child is not biologically yours, in 80 percent of cases, people won't really accept it.

BM: Maybe if I was left single and a mother, without a husband, just for example, and have a one year old baby, and that we have begun our relationship without the ex husband, without anything, that we are alone and that the child was younger, I think it would have been different.



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

parenting / parenthood

BM: I sometimes tell her (D) that if she (SM) tells her something, that she (D) shouldn't treat her as a friend, not like "don't boss me". She respects her and listens to her in that sort of way.



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

fluid / **binary**

BM: We don't actually bother with that.

SM: Yes, we don't think about it.

BM: I think the most important thing is that we... that people see that we are... I mean, not to see, they are happy, but that we are happy and then nobody asks anything.



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

private / public

Us: First of all, we would like to know how open are you with people in your environment about your family? Do your extended families, your parents, your friends know?

SM: Nobody knows.

BM: Oh, no, they know.

SM: For example, mine know about me, my mother and sister, they know. And her sister. For example, parents...

BM: Parents know too.

SM: Parents know too.

BM: But they don't ask.

SM: They see that we are great, that we work, that we can afford a lot of things and they think that's great. That we are healthy and that we don't quarrel...



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

private / public

Us: For starters, how would you describe your relation with D's school?

BM: (pause) Well... there's not much about it, neither I get asked questions, nor I talk to someone. I mean, in school she does everything normal...

SM: (...) For example, the biggest problem is our belief that children would tease her.

BM: Well, we fear that other children would tease her. I'm not afraid that her teacher will think of me as abnormal, or what other parents will think of me.



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

oppressive / **transformative**

BM: Well, D is aware that her friends are not on that level. So to speak. (...) So I think that she is aware of it. For example, she said she would tell only (her best friend). Like, maybe I would tell only (her best friend).



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

oppressive / transformative

SM: I think everyone is on its own. Fighter for himself/herself. I don't think that I need to fight as much, because I have created a life that I am satisfied with and if someone asks me something, I will answer and that's that. But that I'll participate in the Pride, that I'll fight for some rights, that's a bit too much for me, because there's a deep-rooted belief in our culture that we, we (gesticulating towards herself and her partner), that that's sick, that it's wrong and that it's simply not good, and that's that.

I think it should start from the beginning, especially with these younger generations, I don't know, had that health education been introduced in schools... But children, like 95 percent of them, as many as there are Catholics in Croatia; children are told... like that's not good. For example, some of our friends are of the opinion that all is great, us, some of the people that we socialise with... And I guarantee that they tell their small children that it doesn't matter who you are, you can be a boy and a boy, and a girl and a girl. Maybe they don't speak about trans and a more delicate things. But like, lesbians and gays, that's ok, what's important is the love and children begin to understand that. But many still don't know how to explain that to children and think that it's wrong and that it means fighting with windmills, I think, in our environment. And like, I have absolutely no will to fight against it.

We simply fight for ourselves and that's that. Like, if our fight is this job, that we can afford what we need and that D is happy and that we are happy and that people around us are happy, than that's that, I am fulfilled in a sort of...



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

transformative / oppressive

BM: I would want her to be herself, like not to allow others to manipulate her, to have her own character, her whatever, if she wants to dress gothic; to be herself. And I actually secretly wish for her to be different from others. I would like her to, in some way, really be herself.

Us: Do you see any connection?

BM: Well, I don't know, maybe subconsciously. But who knows. Maybe something subconscious in my head. I would like D to be true to herself. To know what she wants, that others cannot force things upon her, that she doesn't succumb to the influences of others, I don't know, what ever she does, to be hers, to enjoy in it. That kind of a person. (...) To take up music. I like that she is like she is.

BM: Finally, I feel so strong and confident that I would be able to explain to her, like, let them tease you, who cares. Keep your head high, don't talk to anyone, take a book, sit on a bench (...). I think, like, they are not important to you. I somehow think that I would be able to help her.



ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

transformative / **oppressive**

SM: Well, yes. Everything for some sort of progress. A step forward. Nothing like an attack, radical, but for people to see that we lead a normal life. In my opinion, those who use fists and who don't raise their children the way they should are the ones who are not normal.



CONCLUSION

- intersectional analysis
- oppression / privilege →
entwining of various identity markers
- future research → planned families
- social justice approach



thank you
for attention!

Marija Bartulović mbartulo@ffzg.hr bkusevic@ffzg.hr Barbara Kušević