Discovered Queer Desires: Rereading Same-Sex Sexuality from Finnish and Estonian Life Stories of the 1990s

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In 1992 a Finnish woman born in 1919 expressed her loss in an autobiography she wrote for a collection of sexual life stories gathered for sociological research. She wrote: "Maria has already passed on to eternity. That was announced in a death notice in the newspaper. Only the dark roses I have sent to the funeral convey the message of our friendship. Do I dare to break the fabric of forgetting?"[1] Although this author had married twice and, as she describes it, experienced her best moments with her spouse, her account begins with Maria, with whom she had worked in an institution that she does not name but describes as a "closed community" after World War II. The affair, which involved kissing and caressing that "made the blood rush in the veins," needed to be kept secret, and the writer recalls being worried about doing something harmful to herself by engaging in such an affair.

This glimpse of the queer desire between two women illustrates the nature of my findings about this collection of autobiographies. The story of Maria was written by a woman who had lived a predominantly heterosexual life, but the text nonetheless offers insight into the nature of same-sex desire during the post–World War II period. While this woman recounted her own secret affair with another woman, many of the writers in the collection remember gays and lesbians they have known. I will argue that the way in which these writers recall their own same-sex desires and those of others reveals the importance of queer desires in constructing their sexual life stories in the 1990s.

[1] Finnish Social Science Data Archive (Tietoarkisto), hereafter FSD, Tampere, Seksuaalisuus osana elämää 1992 (FSD2952), 126. I use the number given by the researchers and the letter F for the writings in the Finnish collection. Thus, the reference for this writing is F126. All names have been changed to protect anonymity. The translations are mine.

Journal of the History of Sexuality, Vol. 28, no. 2, May 2019

DOI: 10.7560/JHS28202

The life story collection was gathered for sociological research on sexuality in the life course by researcher Osmo Kontula, who had begun his research career studying youth sexuality in the late 1980s, and professor of sociology Elina Haavio-Mannila, who had by then had a long career of research often focused on various aspects of gender equality.[2] This collection consisted of life stories in which the writers described the sex education they had received and their sexual experiences, as well as their feelings and opinions on topics concerning sexuality. Out of the 175 life stories gathered in 1992, 149 are currently available for research, as their authors had given permission for archiving and future research. In addition to this Finnish collection, in 1996 sexual autobiographies were gathered in St. Petersburg, Russia, and in Estonia for a comparative study by a group of Finnish sociologists set up by J. P. Roos and Tommi Hoikkala.[3] A total of sixty-one Estonians responded to the call for contributions, and a selection of these life stories was translated into English to be analyzed by the Finnish researchers.[4] The Estonian life stories likewise contain glimpses of same-sex desire, although they are fewer than in the Finnish collection. I analyze these Finnish and Estonian autobiographies together, providing the first study based on the original, untranslated versions of both collections, though with the limitation that some of the Finnish writings remain unavailable to researchers. Produced for a comparative study, these collections display similarities that are rarely so open in studies on life stories or written reminiscences gathered in

[2] For Haavio-Mannila's own description of her research interests, see Elina Haavio-Mannila, *Sex Roles and Social Structure: Selected Articles 1958–2014* (Helsinki: Sociology, University of Helsinki, 2015).

[3] For a brief description of how these collections were gathered, see Elina Haavio-Mannila, Anna Rotkirch, and Osmo Kontula, "Contradictory Trends in Sexual Life in St. Petersburg, Estonia, and Finland," in *Sexuality and Gender in Postcommunist Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. Aleksandar Štulhofer and Theo Sandford (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2005), 360–61, although note that this description contains some inaccuracies in the number of respondents who participated in these collections; and Anna Rotkirch, *The Man Question: Loves and Lives in Late 20th Century Russia* (Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 2000), viii, 28–31. For additional details on the Finnish collection, see Elina Haavio-Mannila, Osmo Kontula, and Anna Rotkirch, *Sexual Lifestyles in the Twentieth Century: A Research Study* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 3–6.

[4] These translations are now available in the Finnish Social Science Data Archive (Tietoarkisto), Tampere, Virolaisten rakkauselämäkerrat 1996 (FSD 2545). There is no common English translation for the contributions produced in the Finnish and Estonian collection campaigns on written reminiscences. They are referred to as life narratives, life writings, or life stories, or, in the case of thematic writings on a given topic rather than full autobiographies, as personal narratives or reminiscence writings. On the Estonian collections and terms used to describe them, see, for example, Ene Kõresaar and Kirsti Jõesalu, "Post-Soviet Memories and 'Memory Shifts' in Estonia," *Oral History* 44, no. 2 (2016): 48, 57. On the terminology used in discussing the Finnish collections, see, for example, Ulla Savolainen, "The Return: Intertextuality of the Reminiscing of Karelian Evacuees in Finland," *Journal of American Folklore* 130, no. 516 (2017): 169–70. In this article, I call the writings I have studied "life stories" and "autobiographies" interchangeably. These are my translations for Estonian *elulugu* and Finnish *omaelämäkerta*.

different countries.[5] The unusual comparability of these two sets of sources allows me to discuss the Finnish and Estonian collections together in this article.

The calls for life stories that produced these collections were published in newspapers and magazines and written in a manner that did not specify the gender of those involved in the sexual experiences or desires being discussed. This left room for addressing both heterosexual and same-sex experiences and feelings. Indeed, sixty-four of the Finnish writers and ten of the Estonians discussed—mostly briefly, but sometimes in great detail—either their own experiences of same-sex desire or the experiences of others they had known. This article analyzes the reflections of those writers who mention homosexuality or same-sex desire. My study demonstrates how the two aspects of queer historical research that Laura Doan has termed "queerness-as-being" and "queerness-as-method" can, when deployed together, profitably inform our understanding of the sexualities and desires of the past.[6] As the authors of these accounts mostly did not identify themselves as homosexuals, gays, lesbians, or bisexuals, I describe the feelings expressed in these writings as same-sex desire or queer desire to emphasize the diversity of desires outside of identity-based labels. Discovering these accounts requires employing queerness-as-method, addressing those same-sex desires that do not conform to the most visible forms of queerness today, in other words, those explicitly categorized using the identity-based labels of gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Simultaneously, however, I claim that concepts related to homosexuality were particularly important for the authors of these accounts, since the labels allowed them to comprehend the same-sex desires of others in their social circles. In this way, my analysis demonstrates the relevance of queerness-as-being by tracing the development of present-day identity labels in the past.

By consulting these collections of autobiographies, I explore the double margins of the history of same-sex desire by examining national contexts that have received less attention in the international scholarship of queer pasts. Moreover, whereas oral histories of queer narrators have been an invaluable source for queer history, the life stories discussed here resemble

[5] Tiiu Jaago analyzed the Estonian and Finnish collections of war memories collected in 2004 and 2005 at the time of the sixty-year anniversary of the end of World War II. Jaago argues that even though collections were not the result of a joint research project, they nevertheless depict the simultaneous emergence of similar questions and research interest in these countries. Tiiu Jaago, "Pärimuslik ajalugu elulugudes," in *Ruti raamat: Artikleid, lugusid ja mälestusi; Pühendusteos Rutt Hinrikusele 7.05.2006*, ed. Janika Kronberg and Sirje Olesk (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, 2006), 91–108.

[6] Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). I have discussed Doan's understanding of the different strands in queer historical research in more detail in Riikka Taavetti, "Queer Politics of Memory: Undisciplined Sexualities as Glimpses and Fragments in Finnish and Estonian Pasts" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2018), 33–34, 98.

the stories of the American "men who like that" whom historian John Howard describes as having had homosexual experiences but not possessing a gay identity.[7] These autobiographies also offer us memories of gay and lesbian others in glimpses that resemble Howard's "twice told stories," since they often narrate rumors and hearsay about the lives of others, social mechanisms that have also often been the subject of historical investigations of the queer past.[8] Since these life stories were written for research, they resemble the British Mass Observation reports, which are likewise motivated by the participants' will to contribute, producing new knowledge by taking part in a study.[9] My goal in this article is to historically contextualize the glimpses of queer life that life stories produced for sociological research might offer us. While the narrators recall desires that they had experienced as early as the 1930s, they were writing in the context of the 1990s. In Finland and Estonia, this was a period of rapid expansion of both the public discussion of homosexuality and the expansion of gay and lesbian activism. The process was even more accelerated in Estonia, where the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of national independence in 1991 opened new possibilities to discuss sexuality and other topics that had been restricted during the Soviet era. The life story collections offer insight into how Finns and Estonians viewed homosexuality in this context, and they provide autobiographical reflections on same-sex desire.

In order to understand what these reflections can divulge about queer desire in the past, I analyze the goals and outcomes of the research projects for which these life stories were collected. To date, investigations of same-sex desire in these collections have been modest, both in the large two-volume study based on the Finnish collection that Kontula and Haavio-Mannila published in 1995 and 1997 and in their comparative analysis of the Estonian collection.[10] Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's studies were connected to the

[7] On the use of oral histories in queer historiography, see especially Nan Alamilla Boyd, "Who Is the Subject? Queer Theory Meets Oral History," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 2 (2008): 177–89; and Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Jason Ruiz, "What Makes Queer Oral History Different," *Oral History Review* 43, no. 1 (2016): 1–24.

[8] John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 5. For the use of rumors in queer history and their links to politics, see Claire Bond Potter, "Queer Hoover: Sex, Lies, and Political History," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 3 (2006): 355–81. On gossip as a source in Finnish queer history, see Tuula Juvonen, *Varjoelämää ja julkisia salaisuuksia* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2002).

[9] See, for example, Matt Cook, "AIDS, Mass Observation, and the Fate of the Permissive Turn," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 2 (2017): 239–72.

[10] The first volume discussed sexuality in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood: Osmo Kontula and Elina Haavio-Mannila, *Matkalla intohimoon: Nuoruuden hurma ja kärsimys seksuaalielämäkertojen kuvaamana* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1995). The second volume addressed sexuality during adult life: Osmo Kontula and Elina Haavio-Mannila, *Intohimon hetkiä: Seksuaalisen läheisyyden kaipuu ja täyttymys omaelämäkertojen kuvaamana* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1997). The results of the analysis of the Estonian collection were published in Elina Haavio-Mannila, "Seksuaalsed tavad ja hoiakud Eestis," in *Seksuaalsus Eestis: Ajalugu. Tänapäev. Arengud*, ed. Olev Poolamets, Elina Haavio-Mannila, Osmo Kontula, and Kai Haldre

influential FINSEX project, which began in the early 1990s and is currently based in the Family Federation of Finland (Väestöliitto). The FINSEX study investigates Finnish attitudes toward sexuality and sexual experiences through repeated surveys based on random samplings of the adult population.[11] These studies have been repeatedly discussed in the Finnish media, and they have made a significant contribution to public understanding of Finnish past and present sexualities. I will demonstrate, however, that the neglect of the evidence for the diversity of same-sex desires has created a misleading image of queer pasts and presents. Although produced and studied by the same researchers as the Finnish writings, selections from the Estonian life stories have received more public attention outside of research. They have been worked into an anthology and a play by Merle Karusoo, an Estonian theater director with a long career of writing and directing plays based on life stories. Both the anthology and the play appeared in 1997 and were titled *Kured läinud, kurjad ilmad* (Storks flown, foul weather).[12]

As I will demonstrate, both the neglect of same-sex experience in the original analyses of the life stories and the original opportunity to tell these stories can be explained with reference to the model of sexuality on which the researchers were relying. I refer to this model as a gender-neutral equality paradigm. The underlying assumptions of this model are that heterosexuality liberated gradually in Finland in the decades following World War II and that men and women are essentially sexually similar, as well as equal partners in sexual relations.[13] Devotion to this principle and a failure of historical perspective led the researchers to ignore how gendered social structures and unequal balances of power might play a role even in intimate relationships. In other words, the researchers perceived sexual freedom as a liberation of both men and women and assumed that men and women would lead essentially similar sexual lives.[14] In line with theories of postsocialist transition that were popular in the 1990s, the researchers took Finland as the model to which they assumed Estonian trends would conform, and they

(Tallinn: Eesti Akadeemiline Seksoloogia Selts, 2006); and, in comparison with the findings from Finnish and Russian autobiographies, in Haavio-Mannila, Rotkirch, and Kontula, "Contradictory Trends."

[11] For a report of the most recent (2015) survey, see Osmo Kontula, *Lemmen paula: Seksuaalinen hyvinvointi parisuhdeonnen avaimena* (Helsinki: Väestöliitto, Väestöntutkimuslaitos, 2016).

[12] Merle Karusoo, ed., *Kured läinud, kurjad ilmad* (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum and Eesti Elulood, 1997). The script of the play has been published in a collection of Karusoo's plays together with a short description of its production and excerpts from the media coverage. See Merle Karusoo, *Kui ruumid on täis: Eesti rahva elulood teatritekstides 1982–2005* (Tallinn: Varrak, 2008), 353–412.

[13] On this model, see Haavio-Mannila, Kontula, and Rotkirch, *Sexual Lifestyles*, esp. 6–7.

[14] This was formulated in 1995 by Osmo Kontula in an interview in the leading Finnish daily newspaper; he stated that the life stories confirm that if men and women get to choose, they realize their sexuality in roughly the same way. Outi Tuohimaa, "Tytöt puhuvat seksistä kursailematta," *Helsingin Sanomat*, 24 May 1995, A5.

argued that state socialism had also postponed the sexual modernization of Eastern Europe.[15] Kontula and Haavio-Mannila have primarily conducted quantitative research on sexuality, excerpting the life stories mainly as illustrations for survey results that concentrate on what they argue are the typical features of sexual practice and attitude.

Explaining the context of sex research helps to explain its complex effects on understandings of sexual desire in the past and present.[16] The work of Kontula and Haavio-Mannila followed the traditions of scientific research on sex that are associated with the legacy of Alfred Kinsey, who sought to document sexual practices and norms from a perspective of self-proclaimed neutrality and objectivity. Kinsey and those he inspired also sought to demonstrate how aspects of sexuality that had been perceived as uncommon were in fact rather common.[17] In contrast to Kinsey's effort to normalize homosexuality and to eradicate the barriers between "homosexual" and "heterosexual," however, Kontula and Haavio-Mannila perceived same-sex desire as characteristic of only a small, well-defined minority of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals or as a minor form of sexual experimentation in heterosexual lives.[18] Even though Kontula and Haavio-Mannila regarded homosexuality as a normal sexual phenomenon, they relegated it to the margins of their study. Reading these life stories through a queer lens reveals the flexibility of identifications in the life stories, not to mention cases of aching love and

[15] See Haavio-Mannila, Rotkirch, and Kontula, "Contradictory Trends." For a discussion of the limits of the transition theory, see, for example, Marta Rabikowska, "The Ghosts of the Past: 20 Years after the Fall of Communism in Europe," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 42, no. 2 (2009): 165–79. Anna Rotkirch provides a self-reflection on the position of a "Western" scholar in Russia during the early post-Soviet years in Rotkirch, *The Man Question*, xiii–xix.

[16] On the meaning of Kinsey's publications for American gays and lesbians, see Janice M. Irvine, *Disorders of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Modern American Sexology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 33; Julia A. Ericksen and Sally A. Steffen, *Kiss and Tell: Surveying Sex in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1–2, 227; and Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 354–55.

[17] Chris Waters, "Sexology," in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality*, ed. Matt Houlbrook and Harry Cocks (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 41–63. On Kinsey's "value-free" research and its embedded values, see Irvine, *Disorders of Desire*, 15–43. Heike Bauer has analyzed how, despite the claimed neutrality, Kinsey's work constructed its own apolitical research attitude by recirculating homophobic attitudes. Heike Bauer, "Sexology Backward: Hirschfeld, Kinsey and the Reshaping of Sex Research in the 1950s," in *Queer 1950s: Rethinking Sexuality in the Postwar Years*, ed. Heike Bauer and Matt Cook (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 133–49.

[18] On Kinsey and homosexuality, see Miriam G. Reumann, *American Sexual Character: Sex, Gender, and National Identity in the Kinsey Reports* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 165–98; Terry, *An American Obsession*, 297–314; Ericksen and Steffen, *Kiss and Tell*, 55–56; and Irvine, *Disorders of Desire*, 32. On Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's definition of homosexuality, see Elina Haavio-Mannila, "Seksuaaliset vähemmistöt," in *Suomalainen seksi: Tietoa suomalaisten sukupuolielämän muutoksesta*, ed. Osmo Kontula and Elina Haavio-Mannila (Porvoo: WSOY, 1993), 245.

craving desire that do not conform to a model of same-sex desire confined to a clearly delineated minority.

In what follows, I have drawn, in addition to the life stories and studies on them, on my interviews with Professor Emerita Elina Haavio-Mannila, Research Professor Osmo Kontula, and the former head of the Estonian Cultural History Archives of the Estonian Literature Museum, Rutt Hinrikus, as well as with theater director Merle Karusoo.[19] In these life stories, I have searched for all types of experiences and opinions of same-sex desire and analyzed how the writers drew on prevailing cultural understandings of homosexuality. As is often the case when covering queer pasts, the analysis of this material has required me to read these life stories against the grain and to "read the silence" by mapping out what the writers do not directly express in their texts.[20] I place both what is explicitly stated and what is not in the context of life stories as narratives of the past that were constructed in the 1990s and within the particular framework of sociological sex research.

I begin with the few narrators who identified themselves as homosexuals or bisexuals or whose life stories can be interpreted as homosexual life stories. Next, I discuss the same-sex desires of those living ostensibly heterosexual lives. Finally, I analyze how the writers incorporated the same-sex desires of others into their own life stories and how, particularly in the Finnish case, the possibility of same-sex desire was used to construct a writer's heterosexual self. Before addressing the autobiographies themselves, I concentrate on the context in which these stories were gathered.

Life Stories in Sex Research and Same-Sex Desire in Society

Collecting life stories through an open call was a creative means of combining qualitative and quantitative sociological research. In Finland a tradition of collecting folklore through an open call for writings dates back to the nineteenth century and, from the 1960s onward, had gradually begun to include the gathering of personal reminiscence writings and written life stories.[21] By the 1980s large life story collection projects were bridging the traditions of folklore studies and sociological research, despite their distinct research trajectories.[22] In the field of folklore studies and ethnology, the

[19] The interview of Karusoo was conducted together with Rebeka Põldsam. As the interview took place in Rutt Hinrikus's office, Hinrikus was also present during the interview. All interviews were recorded, and the recordings are in my possession.

[20] Howard, *Men Like That*, 28.

[21] On Finnish traditions of collecting folklore and reminiscence writings, see, for example, Outi Fingerroos and Riina Haanpää, "Fundamental Issues in Finnish Oral History Studies," *Oral History* 40, no. 2 (2012): 81–92; and Anne Heimo, "Nordic-Baltic Oral History on the Move," *Oral History* 44, no. 2 (2016): 37–58.

[22] See, for example, J. P. Roos, *Suomalainen elämä: Tutkimus tavallisten suomalaisten elämäkerroista* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1987); and Jyrki Pöysä, "Kilpakirjoitukset muistitietotutkimuksessa," in *Muistitietotutkimus: Metodologisia kysymyksiä*,

collaboration between Estonia and Finland has been vivid, with connections between researchers dating back to the nineteenth century and similarities in methods of gathering written folklore. Scholars gathering and studying the folklore, as well as leaders of the nationalist movements, utilized these collections and studies based on them in building the nation-states.[23] That said, and even as these collections of life stories on sexuality were created for the purposes of the comparative study, the contexts in which the respondents wrote their life stories were rather different. The Estonian cultural and heritage organizations—the Estonian Literature Museum, the Estonian Heritage Society, and the Estonian National Museum—had started collecting Estonian life stories in the late 1980s. Then, the collection and publication of life stories offered a means to resist the official Soviet interpretation of the past and to offer an Estonian view of historical events, particularly about World War II and subsequent Soviet annexation, and to discuss previously silenced experiences of repressions. When they were published in newspapers, magazines, and anthologies, and when they served as material for Merle Karusoo's theater works, the life stories offered an important medium for Estonians to remember and discuss the recent past.[24]

The 1996 Estonian call for life stories about sexuality was the first public activity initiated by Eesti Elulood, the Estonian Life Stories Association, which had been established earlier the same year to coordinate and advance the collection and research of Estonian life stories.[25] This association received a small sum of money from the Finnish research project "Mosaic Life: Life Stories in Finland, Russia, and the Baltic Sea Area" to organize the collection of writings.[26] While the Finnish call for writings had relied

ed. Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo, and Ulla-Maija Peltonen (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2006), 145–71.

[23] In detail on the participation of folklore scholars in the nationalist movements in Finland, see Pertti Anttonen, *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2005), 155–77. On the cultural connections between Finland and Estonia since the mid-nineteenth century, see Timo Rui, "'Vankan tammen kaksi haaraa': Suomen ja Viron kulttuurisuhteiden historiaa," in *Kaksi tietä nykyisyyteen: Tutkimuksia kirjallisuuden, kansallisuuden ja kansallisten liikkeiden suhteista Suomessa ja Virossa*, ed. Tero Koistinen, Piret Kruuspere, Erkki Sevänen, and Risto Turunen (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1999), 373–93.

[24] On the importance of reinterpreting history in the process of the restoration of Estonian independence, see Meike Wulf, *Shadowlands: Memory and History in Post-Soviet Estonia* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016). On the life story collections, see Rutt Hinrikus and Ene Kõresaar, "A Brief Overview of Life History Collection and Research in Estonia," in *She Who Remembers Survives: Interpreting Estonian Women's Post-Soviet Life Stories,* ed. Tiina Kirss, Ene Kõresaar, and Marju Lauristin (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2004), 21–25. On the post-Soviet "memory boom" in Estonia, see Kõresaar and Jõesalu, "Post-Soviet Memories." On how the references to Soviet repression prevented the public performance of Merle Karusoo's play based on student's life stories in Estonia in 1982, see Karusoo, *Kui ruumid on täis*, 107–14.

[25] "Eesti elulood on vaja kirja panna," *Postimees*, 7 March 1996, 3.

[26] Rutt Hinrikus, *Kahe vahel: Artikleid kirjandusest ja elulugudest* (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi Teaduskirjastus, 2016), 258–61.

on an advertisement published in newspapers and magazines that asked interested authors to order a leaflet with comprehensive writing instructions, the Estonian call was considerably shorter and was published in newspapers in its entirety. The Estonian call was titled simply "Elulugude kirjutamise võistlus" (Competition on life story writing), placing the collection into the established national tradition of life story collections, even though the questions posed for the writers focused solely on sexuality.[27] The importance of Estonian life stories as conveyors of the national past and as a means to remember and publicize previously silenced aspects of that past meant that the stories were first and foremost *life* stories. It was left to the narrators to judge which aspects of their lives were important, and some discussed sexual experiences only in passing. The Finnish writers, in contrast, in responding to the call, which was titled "Seksuaalisuus osana elämää" (Sexuality as a part of life), adhered more strictly to the stated topic of sexuality.[28]

Since participating in the collection required the will and skill to tell one's life story in written form, the participants often had both experience in writing and an interest in it. The collections were also writing competitions that awarded minor prizes, which may have encouraged a literary style of writing, as some participants included poems and other literary texts within their autobiographies.[29] In addition to a marked interest in writing, one common motivation was the participants' desire to contribute to research by recounting previously untold stories. Some narrators explicitly noted that they wanted to tell the kind of story that they would have found it helpful to have heard when they were young. The anonymity promised in the call, as well as the promise of confidentiality and the discreet protection of an academic study, gave them the confidence to tell such stories. According to life narrative

[27] "Elulugude kirjutamise võistlus," *Postimees,* 6 July 1996, 15.

[28] Even though the writers were instructed in the calls to write about their sexual life, many of the writers also described their experiences of love, a subject that has received considerable attention in the research on these collections. On the Finnish collection, see Marja Kaskisaari, "Rakkauden täyttymys: Seksuaaliset erot ja romanttinen rakkaus," in *Liikkuvat erot: Sukupuoli elämäkertatutkimuksessa*, ed. Matti Hyvärinen, Eeva Peltonen, and Anni Vilkko (Tampere: Vastapaino, 1998), 273–309; and Elina Haavio-Mannila and J. P. Roos, "Pidättyvyyden polven naisten ja miesten rakkaustyylejä," in Hyvärinen, Peltonen, and Vilkko, 239–72. On love in the Estonian collection, see Ingvar Luhaäär, "Armastus eesti seksuaaluuringu valgusel," in Poolamets et al., *Seksuaalsus Eestis*, 233–46; Rutt Hinrikus, "Deportation, Siberia, Suffering, Love: The Story of Heli," in Kirss, Kõresaar, and Lauristin, *She Who Remembers Survives,* 62–88; and Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, "'Not Much Love Lost between Me and My Husband': Love in Estonian Women's Life-Stories of the Soviet Period," in *The Soviet Past in the Post-Socialist Present: Methodology and Ethics in Russian, Baltic and Central European Oral History and Memory Studies*, ed. Melanie Ilic and Dalia Leinarte (New York: Routledge, 2016), 110–28.

[29] The Cultural History Archives (Eesti Kultuurilooline Arhiiv, hereafter EKLA) at the Estonian Literature Museum (Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum) in Tartu contain correspondence from the time of producing the anthology and the play based on the life story collection. One of the participants had obviously hoped to have her poems recognized as art works, not merely as a part of an anonymized collection. EKLA, fond 350a, Elulood, Erikogu.

researcher and literary scholar Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, the promise of anonymity for the Estonian collection gave the writers the freedom to discuss difficult recollections of violence or alcoholism in their family.[30] Another factor that appeared to strengthen the protection of anonymity was that the researchers were not Estonian. It was reassuring to tell these intimate stories to outsiders because Estonia is a small country where it is common to think that everybody knows everybody and anonymity is much more difficult.

At the same time that Kontula and Haavio-Mannila were gathering the Finnish collection of life stories, they were working on a quantitative, survey-based study of Finnish sexuality. This study was a follow-up, tracing the changes in Finnish sexuality since the first major quantitative study on sexuality, conducted by Kai Sievers, Osmo Koskelainen, and Kimmo Leppo in 1971. That study was modeled on a 1967 Swedish predecessor and aimed to investigate the entire Finnish adult population through random sampling and personal interviews.[31] Sievers, Koskelainen, and Leppo had inquired about attitudes toward homosexuality or, more precisely, about whether the respondents considered homosexuality to be a private matter.[32] Then, 43 percent of the sample of 2,126 respondents at least mostly agreed that homosexuality should be regarded as private.[33] In Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's follow-up study in 1992, this portion had risen to two-thirds of the net sample of 2,964.[34] Despite this change in attitude toward homosexuality, the number of respondents reporting their own same-sex desires did not increase. In 1971 approximately 1 percent of the male respondents and only 0.5 percent of females had reported sexual interest primarily or exclusively toward their own gender, and the numbers were roughly the same in 1992.[35] Both the findings and the researchers'

[30] Kurvet-Käosaar, "Not Much Love Lost."

[31] See Osmo Kontula, "Kirjan aineistot," in Kontula and Haavio-Mannila, *Suomalainen seksi*, 21–33. In addition to following the model set by the Swedish study, this survey was placed in the tradition of sex research influenced by the Kinsey reports. See Kai Sievers, Osmo Koskelainen, Kimmo Leppo, and Jorma Nousiainen, *Suomalaisten sukupuolielämä* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1974), 9–23. The Swedish study is reported in Hans L. Zetterberg, *Om sexuallivet i Sverige: Värderingar, normer, beteenden i sociologisk tolkning* (Stockholm: Statens offetliga utredningar, Utbildningsdepartementet, 1969). Both Finnish and Swedish studies were early examples of using random sampling in sex research. This practice only became standard in the 1980s. See Ericksen and Steffen, *Kiss and Tell*, 8. For an early example of random sampling in British Mass Observations's sex study, see Liz Stanley, *Sex Surveyed, 1949–1994: From Mass-Observations "Little Kinsey" to the National Survey and the Hite Reports* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995), 4.

[32] The survey stated that "homosexual behavior among adults is a private matter of the people concerned, and officials and the law should in no way interfere with it" (quoted in Haavio-Mannila, Rotkirch, and Kontula, "Contradictory Trends," 335). For a discussion of how to interpret this statement, see Tuula Juvonen, "Niin makaa kuin petaa: Lomaketutkimuksen ongelmat ja homoseksuaalisuus suomalaisissa seksitutkimuksissa," *Sosiologia* 39, no. 4 (2002): 309–21.

[33] Sievers et al., *Suomalaisten sukupuolielämä*, 131.

[34] Haavio-Mannila, *Seksuaaliset vähemmistöt*, 245–49.

[35] Haavio-Mannila, 251.

conclusions were heavily criticized for methodological flaws in the journal of the Finnish gay, lesbian, and transgender association, Seta. According to the association's educational secretary, Jukka Lehtonen, the study had reduced homosexuality to a form of "minority behavior," and the researchers had made generalizations based on an extremely small sample of only fourteen respondents with solely or mostly homosexual preference.[36] In 2000 Haavio-Mannila conducted the first Estonian study on sexuality in Estonia based on representative survey material.[37] In this self-funded study, Haavio-Mannila found that 50 percent of male and 63 percent of female respondents in the net sample of 1,031 agreed with the statement that homosexuality should be perceived as a private matter, and she noted that Estonians reported same-sex sexual interest slightly more often than Finns in a comparable survey.[38]

Although Haavio-Mannila and Kontula proposed the greater visibility of homosexuality in the media as one of the reasons for the increased tolerance in the 1992 survey, a notable change in the visibility of homosexuality in the Finnish media occurred only after the survey was conducted and the collection of life stories had been gathered. For example, in December 1992 the writer Tove Jansson attended the Finnish Independence Day reception at the presidential Palace with her female partner, Tuulikki Pietilä, the first openly gay couple to attend the most important event on the calendar of Finnish high society.[39] Likewise, it was only after this that bisexuality entered the discussion in the mainstream media and became a publicly available sexual identity.[40] By the time the Estonian collection was being gathered in 1996, same-sex civil partnerships were already being discussed in Finland; the first motion supporting the right to register a same-sex partnership had been filed in the Finnish parliament in 1993.[41] Yet neither the Finnish debate nor the earlier debates in the other Nordic countries were visible in the Estonian writings.[42] The only reference to discussions on homosexuality abroad was made by a male writer who mentioned the "American calls for the legalization of same-sex relationships."[43]

[36] Jukka Lehtonen also criticized Kontula and Haavio-Mannila for bypassing most of the existing research on gays and lesbians and giving far too positive an image of the prevailing attitudes toward homosexuality in Finland. See "Suomalainen seksi on heteroyhdyntää," *Seta*, no. 3–4 (1993): 65.

[37] Haavio-Mannila, "Seksuaalsed tavad," 102–3.

[38] Haavio-Mannila, 217–18; Haavio-Mannila, Rotkirch, and Kontula, "Contradictory Trends," 334–38.

[39] Tuula Juvonen, *Kaapista kaapin päälle: Homoseksuaaliset ihmiset ja heidän oikeutensa edustuksellisessa politiikassa* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2015), 49.

[40] Jenny Kangasvuo, *Suomalainen biseksuaalisuus: Käsitteen ja kokemuksen kulttuuriset ehdot* (Oulu: Oulun yliopisto, 2014), 43–49.

[41] Juvonen, *Kaapista kaapin päälle*, 79.

[42] On the Nordic discussion about same-sex partnership, see Jens Rydström, *Odd Couples: A History of Gay Marriage in Scandinavia* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2011), 39–68.

[43] EKLA, fond 350a. Elulood. Erikogu, 2. I adopt the number given in the archive and the letter E for the writings in the Estonian collection. Thus, the reference to this writing

Estonian public discussion about homosexuality had begun in the late 1980s, when the Soviet restrictions were eased and sexuality in general started to be addressed in public. Only the period of Gorbachev's glasnost during the mid- and late 1980s led to explicit discussions about sex in the media and to addressing even homosexuality, which was regarded as one of the hidden "social problems" of Soviet society.[44] In May 1990, while Estonia was still a part of the Soviet Union, the first conference on homosexuality, which brought together Estonian and foreign activists and researchers, was held in Tallinn.[45] Presenter Ivika Nõgel stated that during the Soviet annexation, in Estonia the topics of sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular were silenced, and he noted that access to Finnish television offered the sole ray of light, as the topic of homosexuality occasionally came up in Finnish broadcasts.[46] Watching Finnish television transmissions was relatively easy in northern Estonia, despite Soviet attempts to discourage this access through technical limitations and propaganda.[47] Nonetheless, Estonians watching Finnish television would still have seen very few references to homosexuality, since public discussion of the subject had been suppressed by a peculiar ban on the "exhortation" to homosexuality that was instituted as part of the 1971 decriminalization of homosexual acts and was officially in effect until 1999. Although the ban never led to an actual criminal conviction, it promoted self-censorship, particularly during the 1970s, and it limited how the Finnish public broadcasting company, Yle, could discuss homosexuality.[48]

At the end of the Soviet era and immediately after it, topics concerning homosexuality were discussed in the Estonian media, first in relation to

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is E002. I have changed the names mentioned in the original collection but retained those that are used in the anthology and play based on the collection. The translations are mine.

[44] Anna Rotkirch analyzes the Soviet silence on sexuality in "'What Kind of Sex Can You Talk About': Acquiring Sexual Knowledge in Three Soviet Generations," in *On Living through Soviet Russia*, ed. Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson, and Anna Rotkirch (London: Routledge, 2004), 93–119. Dan Healey describes the change in the public discussion on homosexuality, first within the paradigm of social problems during the late 1980s, in particular in Moscow: *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 104–9. Igor Semenovič Kon discusses the sudden chance in Soviet discussion on sexuality since 1985: *The Sexual Revolution in Russia: From the Age of the Czars to Today* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 107–25.

[45] The conference presentations were published in Teet Veispak and Udo Parikas, eds., *Sexual Minorities and Society: The Changing Attitudes toward Homosexuality in the 20th-Century Europe* (Tallinn: Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia Ajaloo Instituut, 1991).

[46] Ivika Nõgel, "How Homosexuality Is Regarded among Students in Current Estonia," in Veispak and Parikas, 115.

[47] On the Soviet struggle to prevent Estonians from watching Finnish television, see Marek Miil, "The Communist Party's Fight against 'Bourgeois Television' 1968–1988," in *Behind the Iron Curtain: Soviet Estonia in the Era of the Cold War*, ed. Tõnu Tannberg (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 317–58.

[48] Kati Mustola, "Finland 1889–1999: A Turbulent Past," in *Criminally Queer: Homosexuality and Criminal Law in Scandinavia 1842–1999*, ed. Jens Rydström and Kati Mustola (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007), 238–41.

AIDS.[49] As it had in Finland, the AIDS crisis broke the public silence on homosexuality in Estonia, and the need for cooperation in HIV prevention helped the national LGBT organization, Seta, to establish itself as an essential partner in the fight against AIDS.[50] In both countries the early 1990s were also a time of increasing gay and lesbian activism. By the time the life stories on sexuality were collected, Finnish lesbian activists had organized to collect their own oral histories. As early as the mid-1980s, a lesbian activist named Terhi Saarinen had interviewed women in Helsinki, and her work was distributed as a photocopied leaflet. A collection of lesbian life stories that was primarily based on interviews was published in 1992.[51] In Estonia the 1990 international conference on homosexuality led to the establishment of the Eesti Lesbi Liit (Estonian Lesbian Union), the first gay organization in the country.[52] Estonian gay and lesbian activists also conducted interviews and surveys on gay and lesbian lives.[53] Thus, both the Finnish and Estonian collections of life stories on sexuality were gathered at a time of rapidly increasing publicity on homosexuality and, especially in Estonia, at a time when public political activism had become possible for the first time after the era of Soviet annexation.

Untold and Unheard Stories

Even though the life story writers were protected by an anonymity that lifted some of the restrictions on what the writers felt comfortable sharing, writing always involves making choices, a process that leads to considerable self-reflection. For instance, a Finnish male writer born in 1948 pondered in his autobiography: "My account is not all-embracing but just a tiny sliver of the sexual part of my life. If you think of my life as a sphere, this autobiography would have just brushed its surface. While writing, I doubted

[49] Heidi Kurvinen, "Homosexual Representations in Estonian Printed Media during the Late 1980s and Early 1990s," in *Beyond the Pink Curtain: Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe*, ed. Roman Kuhar and Judit Takács (Ljubljana: Peace Institute, 2007), 287–301.

[50] Hanna Nikkanen and Antti Järvi, *Karanteeni: Kuinka aids saapui Suomeen* (Helsinki: Siltala, 2014). On the Finnish AIDS crisis in the Nordic context, see Rydström, *Odd Couples*, 47–50.

[51] Auli Kaartinen, Marjaana Kurkinen, Outi Malinen, and Johanna Pakkanen, *Toisenlaisia naisia: Elämäntarinoita* (Helsinki: Meikänainen, 1992). Terhi Saarinen's work was later published by Seta: *Alussa oli kellari: Viisi helsinkiläistä lesbotarinaa* (Helsinki: Seksuaalinen tasavertaisuus SETA, 1994).

[52] The founding of Eesti Lesbi Liit was reported in Leena Tamminen, "Viroon syntyi lesboliike," *Seta*, no. 4 (1990): 22; and the connections between Estonian and Finnish women during the years following the conference were described in Pia Livia Hekanaho, "Fuck a duck! Nyt ne puhuu—lesbon identiteetistä," *Seta*, no. 4 (1992): 22–27; and Kati Mustola, "Eesti lesbiliit 2 v," *Seta*, no. 4 (1992): 3–5.

[53] The interviews were intended for a book, but before they were transcribed, the tapes apparently were stolen. Personal communication, Kati Mustola, 29 November 2017.

whether this is the correct way to study these issues. Perhaps an interview or a survey would have worked better than a written autobiography. I don't know what is important, what is less important, and what could have been essential. An enormous number of things and experiences has been left untold" (F058). This excerpt demonstrates how the writers consciously constructed their own life stories and reveals their questions about what the researchers wanted to learn.

As Ulla Savolainen has observed, a collection of autobiographies and reminiscence writings can be conceived of as a dialogue between the collector and the writer; the call for submissions frames but does not limit how the writers construct their narratives or choose the topics they discuss.[54] These particular calls inquired about sexual experiences without referring to gender, a framing that was consistent with the gender-neutral equality paradigm employed by the researchers and their assumptions about the similarity of male and female sexualities.[55] The lack of grammatical reference to gender in both Finnish and Estonian languages (personal pronouns do not differentiate between genders) enabled a choice of words that avoided assumptions concerning the partners in sexual encounters or the gender of objects of desire in the fantasies that writers were invited to recount. Although this neutrality offered an opportunity to disclose same-sex desires, the authors were not specifically encouraged to report homosexual feelings or sexual experiences with a same-sex partner. The concept of homosexuality was not mentioned, and only the expression of "searching for sexual identity" in the introduction of the Finnish call could be perceived as a disguised reference to homosexuality.

Violence was another topic that was not mentioned in either of the calls for writings, an oversight that can be interpreted as an effect of the gender-neutral equality paradigm, since violence within sexual relationships reveals power imbalances and the likelihood that men and women might experience sexuality in quite different and sometimes even contrasting ways.[56] Not only did Kontula and Haavio-Mannila fail to mention violence in the call for writings, but their analysis of the Finnish collection marginalized the topic altogether. In her review of Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's study, Marja Kaskisaari criticizes them for neglecting the experiences of violence.[57] This

[54] Ulla Savolainen, "The Genre of Reminiscence Writing," in *Genre—Text—Interpretation: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Folklore and Beyond*, ed. Kaarina Koski and Frog with Ulla Savolainen (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2016), 203–31.

[55] The Finnish call is reprinted in Kontula and Haavio-Mannila, *Matkalla intohimoon*, 595–99; the Estonian call is in Karusoo, *Kured läinud*, 5–6. There was one exception to this neutrality: the Estonian call asked whether the "relationship between a man and a woman" was discussed at a respondent's home or during their childhood.

[56] Kontula and Haavio-Mannila address experiences of violence and rape together with different forms of sexual harassment (*Intohimon hetkiä*, 550–61). On the emergence of violence as a topic in American sex surveys, see Ericksen and Steffen, *Kiss and Tell*, 123–29.

[57] Marja Kaskisaari, "Seksiä seksin vuoksi," *Naistutkimus* 9, no. 3 (1996): 72–74.

critique, along with the fact that violence nevertheless surfaces in the writings, reflects the Finnish debate in the 1990s, when discussion of domestic violence was gaining ground. Tuija Virkki has described that decade as a "breakthrough" in the Finnish public discussion and the formulation of policies against domestic violence. This change was largely a reaction to initiatives from both the United Nations and the European Union, which Finland joined in 1995.[58] What was not discussed at all at the time, however, was same-sex sexual violence or men as rape victims. The life stories reveal one experience by a man born in 1947 who recalls how an older man violently raped him as a teenager. He had kept this experience secret for thirty years after it took place, and only in writing his autobiography was he able to reveal these still painful memories for the first time (F173).

The Finnish researchers similarly briefly mentioned same-sex desire in their analysis without acknowledging the diversity of its description in the life stories. Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's two-volume research publication devoted only a short subchapter to these desires under the title "Erikoinen seksi" (Peculiar sex), creating the impression that same-sex encounters were only marginal elements in heterosexual life stories. In somewhat contradictory fashion, Kontula and Haavio-Mannila noted that descriptions of homosexual feelings and experiences in the life stories were considerably more frequent than in the 1992 survey: according to them, 25 percent of male writers and 19 percent of female writers mentioned homosexuality or same-sex desires at least in passing. They evaluated this relatively high percentage by arguing that sexual minorities were likely overrepresented among the writers.[59] However, only two of the stories in the Finnish collection and one in the Estonian can be read as having been written by self-described members of a sexual minority, and only the two Finnish writers name themselves directly with identity-based labels of gay or bisexual.

One of these very few gay-identified writers was a Finnish man who was born in 1956 and who titled his life story "Gay and a Sadomasochist" (F054). The whole text focuses on his self-discovery and his desire for masculine men and pleasurable suffering. As he came of age in Finland in the 1970s, he had very little access to information about homosexuality and even less about sadomasochism. In his autobiography he described his feelings in his youth: "I was really so naive that I could not connect my fantasies and the feelings caused by them to the romantic world as sex is usually represented. I knew that there are men who are interested in people of their own gender, but I had nothing to do with them. My fantasies were full of men, but I anticipated something completely different from going to bed with them." The writer describes how in his loneliness he felt that even

[58] Tuija Virkki, "At the Interface of National and Transnational: The Development of Finnish Policies against Domestic Violence in Terms of Gender Equality," *Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2017): 5–8.

[59] Kontula and Haavio-Mannila, *Intohimon hetkiä*, 564–65.

being an ordinary gay would have been a relief, because when searching for information on sadomasochism, he was only able to find it classified as a sick deviance with no promise for a cure. When he was a student, he married a woman who believed that his homosexual feelings were merely a passing phase. Kontula and Haavio-Mannila discuss this story briefly in the framework of homosexual experiences and again in the context of sadomasochism, noting that the writer's marriage ended due to his wife's infidelity.[60] Their thematic discussion of the life stories disrupted the narrative framework of each life story, and in this case they failed to address the context of the simultaneous development of both a homosexual and a sadomasochist sexual identity. Kontula and Haavio-Mannila do not even mention the writer's own clearly stated sexual self-identification, revealing only that he could not even find satisfaction in a same-sex relationship because his male partner did not understand his "sadomasochist wishes."[61] The writer describes how the combination of his sexual desires had led him to consider options for monogamy that he perceived as more possible in a homosexual than in a heterosexual relationship. He also continued to search for knowledge about sadomasochism and eventually discovered studies that refrained from condemning the practice and even described it as normal and emancipating. He found American researchers who had argued that "s/m was not only acceptable behavior but it was radical sex, searching for novel ways of behaving. S/m meant a way to find oneself and spiritual growth. The perspectives were dazzling." At the very end of his text, the writer concluded that, having reached the age of thirty-six, it was still not too late to live as "he was created": "The search continues." Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's analysis entirely ignores these hopeful conclusions.

In her 1998 study, Marja Kaskisaari focuses on discussions of same-sex and bisexual desires, feelings, or experiences in the Finnish collection, and she thanks Haavio-Mannila for granting her access to those life stories that "reveal, according to Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's understanding, bisexual or homosexual thoughts, feelings or experiences."[62] Yet the list of stories that Kaskisaari evaluated does not include that of the sadomasochist gay writer, leading her to the conclusion that none of the writers expressed a gay identification.[63] Despite Kaskisaari's stated interest in the life stories that address same-sex desires and her intention to analyze heterosexual life stories from a nonheterosexual perspective, it is possible that her own underlying assumptions about the role of same-sex desires in autobiographies

[60] Kontula and Haavio-Mannila, 571, 579–80.

[61] Kontula and Haavio-Mannila, 571.

[62] Kaskisaari, "Rakkauden täyttymys," 273. Marja Kaskisaari's article formed a part of her dissertation on life stories and bodily experiences. Her dissertation has now been published as a book: *Kyseenalaiset subjektit: Tutkimuksia omaelämäkerroista, heterojärjestyksestä ja performatiivisuudesta* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2000).

[63] The list of life stories that she consulted is published in Kaskisaari, "Rakkauden täyttymys," 308–9.

may have led her to overlook some allusions to these desires. For example, Kaskisaari implies that none of the writers identify as bisexual, even though one writer rather clearly does: a woman born in 1962 tells of her relationships with women, first in feminist circles in Stockholm, where she stayed after finishing secondary school in the early 1980s.[64] Two years later, she had another affair with a woman in Finland and recalled: "I had found my bisexuality, but also realized that it is easier to have (sexual) relations with guys due to social attitudes" (F086).

Kaskisaari insists that in all the writings she examined, the writers lived either alone or in a heterosexual relationship. And yet she uses the label "lesbian story" to describe the autobiography of a woman born in 1949 who recounts her relationship with a woman but who never refers to herself as lesbian.[65] This writer begins her story by stating that her deceitful partner, Emilia, has just left (F079). After describing her current situation, she narrates her life starting from her childhood. Although she had lived a heterosexual life prior to her relationship with Emilia, same-sex desire figures even in her recollections of childhood: she recalls a local woman who was sexually interested only in women. After discussing how she had been married at a very young age and how the marriage had become merely a relationship of convenience before the couple divorced, the narrator describes meeting Emilia at work. Initially she found Emilia irritating, but then an attraction developed: "There was electricity between us. I remember Emilia saying to me, when I touched her hair, that I should not do so, as my touch means more to her than someone else's. At last, the day came when she asked if I would have dinner with her. I remember nothing about the conversation, but I do remember the atmosphere. I lived as if I were in a dream." The women began an unstable relationship in which Emilia abused the writer financially, betrayed her, and even had an affair with the writer's daughter. Feelings of love, desire, and affinity are combined with disappointment, deception, and abuse. Nonetheless, the author does not reflect in any way on the fact that her current partner is female. In fact, the word "lesbian" is mentioned only once in the text, in the context where the angry parents of Emilia's other partner call Emilia "a lesbian whore." Furthermore, even though the writer mentions several of Emilia's female exes, there is no mention of a lesbian community. In short, the writer constructs herself not as a lesbian but as an insecure person who was manipulated and used by Emilia, even though she describes their relationship as an uncontrollable love and their sexuality as intimate and full of fantasy.

[64] This author wrote her autobiography in Swedish and presumably had Swedish as her first language. Her position as a Swedish speaker gave her easier access to larger Nordic feminist and queer networks. On feminism among Swedish speakers in Finland, see, for example, Solveig Bergman, *The Politics of Feminism: Autonomous Feminist Movements in Finland and West Germany from the 1960s to the 1980s* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2002).

[65] Kaskisaari, "Rakkauden täyttymys," 279–80.

In tones similar to this Finnish life story, an Estonian female author born in 1971 depicts confusing feelings about a life that she describes as being otherwise in order. All the sexual experiences in this Estonian autobiography are with men, but the writer ponders in detail her growing feelings for another woman, Karin, whom she has known since their school years. The story is written to direct the reader to anticipate some revelation, as the writer hints repeatedly that something is wrong with her life. At the time of writing, the author was a psychology student, and her story includes reflections on her personal development that can be interpreted as an attempt to understand her love for another woman. The word "lesbian," however, is never mentioned in the text. The author describes how she and Karin had recently frequently discussed the "theme of homos and sapphists," and without explicitly using the word "lesbian" as a contrast, she explains that she prefers the term "sapphist" because it does not sound "so cruel." She describes her confusion about the underlying meaning of these conversations:

> We do so in absolutely neutral tones, as if the subject would not concern us. Once in a bar, with the wine going to my head, I asked how it was with her. Naturally the reply was negative. Quite often and lately even more frequently, she has emphasized this. Certainly this is no indicator. Also our greeting and leaving embraces cannot be considered odd. And if anyone around us thinks something different, that is their problem. Once we had a crazy fantasy about what our acquaintances and folks would say if we told them that we were not "alright." We concluded that it was fine as a joke but trying to explain later that it really was only a joke was difficult. (E009)

This autobiography was among the thirty-three Estonian writings that were translated into English for the Finnish researchers. Haavio-Mannila interpreted this text as an example of uncertainty over sexual identity. While the writer's affection for a woman is frequently mentioned during this life story, Haavio-Mannila summarizes the description by noting that these feelings represented a recent change in the writer's life: "She had had sexual relations with men, but now she was head over heels in love with a woman."[66] Haavio-Mannila thus ignores the fact that feelings about another woman represent an overarching theme of the entire life story.

Merle Karusoo also included this young woman's story in the selection of Estonian life stories represented in her anthology and play.[67] Karusoo's play premiered in the Drama Theater in Tallinn in March 1997 and was staged over a hundred times for a total audience of 22,500 spectators.[68]

[66] Haavio-Mannila, "Seksuaalsed tavad," 216.

[67] Karusoo, *Kured läinud*, 324–35; Karusoo, *Kui ruumid on täis*, 402–4.

[68] Piret Kruuspere, "Omaeluloolisus Eesti teatris Merle Karusoo lavastustest," *Methis: Studia Humaniora Estonica* 5–6 (2010): 131–42.

The life story just described was called "Ingrid's diary," and it was depicted as Ingrid's diary by a male actor who played Ingrid's boyfriend and read from the diary secretly. A key element of this story, same-sex affection, was, as one reviewer phrased it, reduced to "lesbian hints" through this theatrical device, which differed from the first-person monologues of all the other life stories.[69] In addition to the distancing effect of having Ingrid's boyfriend narrate her story, the passages of the diary were read in reverse order. The account begins with Ingrid and Karin lying in bed together and moves backward to Ingrid's childhood. Karusoo omits all earlier references to same-sex interest, following Haavio-Mannila's construction of same-sex desire as a recent change in Ingrid's life.

Despite the fact that Karusoo emphasized relationships between men and women as the primary theme of her play, based on a selection of the Estonian texts, her work did offer visibility for same-sex desire.[70] In addition to Ingrid's story, two other stories selected for the play referred to the possibility of homosexuality, although in these accounts the narrators recall gay others, not their own same-sex desires. Indeed, accounts of queer others and glimpses of same-sex desire in seemingly heterosexual lives are much more numerous in both the Finnish and Estonian collections than are the accounts by self-defined gay, lesbian, or bisexual writers. Inspired by John Howard's description of those with same-sex desires but no gay identification, I turn now to the "twice told stories" of "men [and women] who like that."[71]

Glimpses of Same-Sex Desires in Straight Lives

Even though the two Finnish writers who were discussed above are the only ones who identified themselves as gay or bisexual, when the gender-neutral call offered the opportunity to discuss same-sex desires, twenty-two other writers reported their own same-sex desires or sexual encounters with same-sex partners. In contrast to the relative frequency of these accounts in the Finnish collection, the Estonian collection has only one text that depicts a same-sex sexual experience. This account is by a male writer born in 1951 who recalls that at the age of sixteen, while he was attending a birthday party in Tallinn, the host began to make passes at him. He then provides a detailed description of pleasurable sex between the two men. The writer ends the account by stating: "In the morning he caressed me and said that homosexuality was something condemnable and he didn't want me to turn to it. I should be more courageous but careful, too, with girls, as there were venereal diseases and so forth. Even though this relationship was with a person of the same sex, it did leave a pleasant imprint on my

[69] Mihkel Mutt, "Palju kära, vähe villa," *Sirp*, 4 April 1997, 10.
[70] Margot Visnap, "Kured läinud, kurjad ilmad," *Postimees,* 20 March 1997, 16.
[71] Howard, *Men Like That*, 5.

feelings and my sexual development" (E050). In other words, the author was simultaneously taught how to have gay sex, warned against homosexuality, and offered guidance on how to approach girls. His partner presented homosexuality and heterosexuality as not mutually exclusive and discussed desire for both men and women as existing side by side without even being labeled as bisexuality. The writer maintains that despite this experience and his earlier encounter with a much older man in boarding school, his most unforgettable experiences were with girls, and he emphasizes that he is neither homosexual nor bisexual. He later discovered sexual pleasures with women and got married. According to Heidi Kurvinen, such descriptions of men having sex with other men while not claiming a homosexual identity frequently appeared in Estonian newspapers in the 1990s.[72] Even though the narrator clearly states that he is certain that his identity is not homosexual or bisexual, Haavio-Mannila cites this story as an example of uncertainty over sexual identity.[73]

In contrast to the Estonian account about sex in very private spaces, some Finnish male writers describe casual encounters with other men in Helsinki's parks and public toilets. For example, a writer born in 1939 depicts such experiences as entirely spontaneous—as if they were mere coincidences. He first recounts an event from his teen years when another man joined him as he was masturbating in a Helsinki park. This experience "had left a spark" in his mind, and later he "tried a gay relationship." According to his description, this occurred in the early 1960s while he was visiting Helsinki for work. He stayed in a hostel at the Olympic Stadium, which was close to a frequent cruising area: "In the evening I went to park by the Swimming Stadium. A man came up to me, asking if I were looking for company. When out of curiosity, I answered yes, we went to a tram stop" (F044). Even though the writer states that he felt no "erotic feeling" and that he "felt empty" after sex, the whole affair was the result of an earlier desire, "a spark," as he phrased it, not only curiosity. Homosexual sex in this account was also something that did not conflict with his mostly heterosexual life and self-understanding.

Random affairs in public spaces are also mentioned by another contributor, a man born in 1921. He first had sex with another man in a public restroom in Helsinki in the late 1950s or early 1960s, though the event is difficult to date precisely based on his description. A man whom the writer met by chance informed him of a gay meeting place, and the writer then occasionally went there to have sex with men: "It was like a small closed community where everybody knew everybody by looks or knew from the signs who wanted contacts between men" (F171). The writer describes his strong feelings of arousal and how quickly they turned into self-contempt. Despite having come to a firm decision to stop visiting the meeting place,

[72] Kurvinen, "Homosexual Representations."
[73] Haavio-Mannila, "Seksuaalsed tavad," 213–14.

he continued these encounters until "the talk about AIDS" made him stop. He was likely referring to the early 1980s, when, as elsewhere in the Western world, AIDS was depicted as a gay disease in the Finnish media.[74] In Estonia the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s was often the only framework within which homosexuality was addressed, and according to Kurvinen, this only changed at the beginning of the 1990s.[75] Yet the man who described how the fear of AIDS had changed his casual sex habit is the only writer in both the Finnish and the Estonian collections to construct a link between homosexuality and AIDS. In Finland the AIDS crisis had a more limited effect than in countries with more established gay communities that suffered severely with the epidemic. The writers recounting their lives in 1992 did not perhaps make the immediate connection between homosexuality and AIDS, especially as neither of these topics was offered in the call for writings. The Estonian writers, on the other hand, linked AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases to prostitution, a topic that was mentioned in their call for writings.[76]

According to my reading, the male writers who described same-sex experiences interpreted their desire as a compelling urge that was impossible to resist. For example, a writer born in 1937 described his preteen experiences of learning about sexuality with another boy his age. Even as the author states that he did not become gay and mentions dating girls later in his teens, the next section of his life story is titled "The Slipping Phase" (F048). He describes experiences of mutual masturbation with another young man during his time in the military and reflects on his later feelings of regret. He writes that if he would have continued in this manner, ignoring his bad conscience, he would have turned out to be "as miserable as most gays in old age." The account reveals a particular understanding of sexual desire and later sexual orientation as being shaped by experiences in youth: "The sex program in my computer, meaning in my brain, was programmed to a level directed rather more toward the same gender but also enough toward the other gender." What the writer considers most important is that he never had an orgasm while playing sexually with other boys. There is an acceptance of sexual plasticity in this account that questions Kaskisaari's

[74] On the change in attitudes toward homosexuality after the AIDS crisis in the UK, see, for example, Matt Cook, "'Archives of Feeling': The AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987," *History Workshop Journal* 83, no. 1 (2017): 62–64. On AIDS as a "gay plague," see Jeffrey Weeks, *The World We Have Won: The Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life* (London: Routledge, 2007), 98–103. On the AIDS crisis in Finland, see Nikkanen and Järvi, *Karanteeni*; and on the Finnish situation in the Nordic context, see Rydström, *Odd Couples*, 46–50.

[75] On Estonian media discussion on AIDS and homosexuality, see Kurvinen, "Homosexual Representations," 290–95.

[76] I have discussed the link between prostitution and disease in my previous publication: Riikka Taavetti, "'A Woman Should Not Be So Cheap': The Prostitute as a Constructed Other in Estonian Post-Soviet Life Stories," *European Journal of Life Writing* 6 (2017): 197–217.

argument that male writers in this collection "other" the possibility of same-sex desire and place it outside themselves.[77] I argue that those who recalled their own homosexual experiences instead of discussing the queer desires of others could include them in their mostly heterosexual life. In this writer's description of his youth, same-sex desire seems neither alien nor inconsistent with heterosexual self-understanding; he instead understands it simply as another form of sexual desire, though definitely not a preferred form. Several of the male authors similarly describe their same-sex desire, though few provide a theory for the origin of this desire.

In contrast to her emphasis on the othering of homosexuality in men's writings, Kaskisaari concludes that same-sex affection offered some female writers another opportunity for romantic love.[78] The Finnish women with same-sex desires and experiences do not describe any self-loathing caused by their same-sex desires, nor do they reflect on why they harbor these desires. The younger female writers in particular reveal with relative ease their affections and desires toward other women. For example, a female writer born in 1969 reflects on her only same-sex sexual experience, which was part of a group sex session: "I have thought about this a lot afterward. Despite group sex (although I could try that again), I had been thinking about sex with women before. For example, from the Hite Report I read about the joys of lesbian love and its superiority compared to hetero sex. I have never been terrified about the idea of a woman as a sex partner; sometimes it has been fascinating, even arousing. I doubt that I would be lesbian or even bi—I'm just flexible" (F080). This reflection illustrates how experiencing desire toward other women does not translate into an identification as a lesbian or bisexual. The author's reference to sex research, in this case Shere Hite's studies, is revealing of its impact on sexual self-understanding.[79] This example demonstrates that while the life stories were gathered for sex research, the writers also relied on earlier studies to describe and understand their own experiences.

For a female writer born in 1959, same-sex desire helped her to heal from an experience of violence. This author portrays her sexual life in the form of a survival story after being raped by a violent male ex-partner. This account also describes the difficulty of getting the police to take sexual violence seriously.[80] Rape in marriage was only criminalized in Finland in 1994, so the writer was only able to report the attack as a rape because she was not married to her partner. At the end of her story, after describing her gradual recovery and her return to experiencing sexual desire, the writer analyzes her search for intimacy: "I wish, though, that I would find a person or persons with whom I could enjoy leisure sex, as if it would be

[77] Kaskisaari "Rakkauden täyttymys," 285–87.
[78] Kaskisaari, 307.
[79] On the Hite Report and its impact, see Ericksen and Steffen, *Kiss and Tell*, 143–50.
[80] Virkki, "At the Interface," 8.

good food or wine. A person means here mostly a man. I have experienced sexual tensions, desires, with women, had sweet dreams of kissing women, and wanted in the uncontrolled stage of drunkenness even to fulfill these dreams. The first erotic dream after my experience of rape I had was of a woman: a woman I dared to approach, to touch" (F146). This woman's imagined desire for other women was a healing element for her—it was sexual but safely distant from her experience of violence.

The Finnish collection contains many such explorations of the emotions attached to same-sex desires. Men with queer desire wrote more about sexual experiences than affection, and they report pressing urges and ambivalent feelings about sexual acts they had performed. Women seem to have found it possible to disclose same-sex affections while continuing to define themselves as heterosexual (see, for example, F168). In agreement with Kontula and Haavio-Mannila, I interpret the women's relatively easy integration of these desires into a heterosexual self-understanding as an example of the cultural value placed on the beauty of the female body and the social acceptance of intimacy between women.[81] Despite these gendered differences, both male and female writers who describe their own same-sex desires comment on the similarity of homosexual and heterosexual desire, as if sexual desire would be essentially similar regardless if it is targeted toward a man or a woman. This understanding is consistent with the gender-neutral understanding of sexuality that framed the call for writings and that implicitly left room for the inclusion of same-sex desire in narrations of heterosexual lives. It is interesting that discussions of same-sex sexual experiences are almost completely absent from the Estonian collection. This may have resulted from the national importance of life stories in Estonia in the 1990s that may have sidelined those stories that would have indicated a minority position, such as that of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The sole example in the Estonian collection is by a male writer whose narration recounts how he integrated his same-sex affair rather easily into his mostly heterosexual life story and who expresses no self-loathing or denial. Of course, a collection of autobiographies is not a representative sample of Estonians of the time; it only reveals that those who were interested in pondering their sexual lives and providing their accounts for research were not willing to share more experiences of same-sex desires.

The Queer Others

In addition to reflections on the writers' own experiences, the life stories also mention the same-sex desires of others (gays and lesbians who are the writers' acquaintances) or general statements of opinion on homosexuality. Altogether, eight Estonian and forty Finnish writers mention homosexuality or same-sex desire while only disclosing their own heterosexual desires.

[81] Kontula and Haavio-Mannila, *Intohimon hetkiä*, 565.

These accounts were not discussed in Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's studies, as their focus was on the narrators' personal experiences. But I would argue that these opinions about homosexuality and the inclusion of some detailed accounts about gay and lesbian friends or acquaintances indicate that the topic of same-sex desire was important to the writers, particularly given the fact that homosexuality was not mentioned in the calls for writings. These "twice told stories" offer glimpses of the lives of queer others—glimpses that are both made possible and shaped by the gender-neutral paradigm underlying the collection of the life stories.

In the Finnish collection, even some of the oldest writers include reflections about people whom the narrators could label gay or lesbian, at least in retrospect. For example, a woman born in 1912 recalls that while she was studying to become a primary school teacher at the end of the 1920s, her classmate's sister warned her about a teacher of visual arts who was rumored to be a lesbian (F164). This warning and other observations about the relationship between the teacher and her students may well have occurred at the time, but I would speculate that they were reframed through a later appreciation of the definition of lesbianism. While female same-sex affairs were criminalized in Finland between 1889 and 1971, according to Antu Sorainen, the word "lesbian" was not yet in use as late as the 1950s. Women convicted of same-sex relations were referred to as "lady-lovers" or "homosexuals" or, most frequently, by citing the name of the crime: "fornication" between persons of the same gender.[82] This is an example of how the life story authors applied new cultural understandings of sexuality that encouraged them to reconceptualize their past experiences.

While references to gay acquaintances and to general attitudes toward homosexuality were relatively frequent, there is only one discussion of a celebrity or a named cultural product. An Estonian female writer born in 1956 had recently realized that her male friend was gay and described her feelings after the revelation: "It was the kind of news that made my knees go weak. I squatted at the street corner and digested it for quite a while. Well, I had read of that sort of things. Tõnu Õnnepalu's 'Border State' is a very good book. But that there is someone like that next to me?! It was hard to internalize" (E048). The writer contemplates that this revelation did not affect her attitude toward her friend, and she describes how their friendship actually grew closer. This allusion to Õnnepalu's internationally

[82] Antu Sorainen, "Cross-Generational Relationships before 'the Lesbian': Female Same-Sex Sexuality in 1950s Rural Finland," in Bauer and Cook, *Queer 1950s*, 84–90. According to Antu Sorainen, the term "lesbian" was hardly present even in the Finnish medical or criminal discourse of the 1950s: "Productive Trials: English and Finnish Legislation and Conceptualisations of Same-Sex Sexualities in Course of Trials of Oscar Wilde, Maud Allan, Raclyffe Hall and Herb Grove, from 1885 to 1957," *SQS* 1, no. 1 (2006): 28. On lesbian as an identity category in Finland, see also Tuija Pulkkinen, "Identiteetti ja ei-identiteetti: Alkuperästä ja ykseydestä moneuteen ja toistoon identiteettipolitiikassa," *Ajatus* 56 (1999): 213–36.

popular novel, published in 1993, is the sole reference to any public gay figures. Even though the Finnish writers raise topics concerning same-sex desire and homosexuality more than the Estonian writers, no Finnish writer mentions any public figures or cultural products. According to Tuula Juvonen, who has studied gay and lesbian rights movements and politics in Finland, homosexuality became more visible in the Finnish media in the early 1990s—too late to be relevant for the life story writers in 1992.[83]

This Estonian woman's gay friend offered her access to previously unknown gay circles, where she encountered men who played women's roles and thus did not act like "real men." She describes one of these men as emotional and desperately longing for affection. Similar descriptions of unhappy, partly suffering gays are typical in these collections. These descriptions may have been inspired by the image of the suffering homosexual available in culture, which may have affected the writers' ideas of homosexuality, even though they did not cite any particular case. As Alexandra Stang has argued, queerness often appeared in novels and short stories as a "warning."[84] Especially in the life stories of male writers, there are frequent allusions to the desperate queer searching for love, intimacy, or sex, sometimes even by harassing others. Most of these individuals are described as harmless, if perhaps peculiar, as in a narrative of an Estonian man who recalled a friend's story about a business trip to Latvia when a man came to him during the night and "acted as I would when starting a play with a girl" (E002). The man did not give up for half the night, even though the writer's friend had pushed him away.

While the content of these memories of gay and lesbian others is not surprising or extraordinary, the fact that the writers recalled memories of these sometimes rather distant others reveals the importance of their sexuality to the heterosexual self-understanding of the writers. This is well illustrated in the account of a Finnish female writer born in 1929 whose reminiscences of a *poikkeava rakkaus* (deviant love) describe a woman named Anna, who owned a bookstore. In 1951, when Anna was in her fifties, a younger man, Martti, started to visit the store, and Anna fell in love with him. "What made the situation difficult," the narrator tells us, "was that the man was homosexual" (F105). Still, the couple got married, and after a while they became unhappy: "It was sad to see how Anna lost all her will to live, she even got tired of running her store. Later Martti committed suicide, and the wife has spent lonely old age in an old-age home. Her house just stands with boards on the windows, and as I pass by, it attests to the shocking

[83] Juvonen, *Kaapista kaapin päälle*, 49–52. Also, writers in a recent collection of Finnish queer youth life stories tell of the widening of available public gay and lesbian figures only in the late 1990s: Riikka Taavetti, "Reflecting the Queer Me: Memories of Finnish Queer Youth from the 1950s Onwards," *Lambda Nordica*, no. 3–4 (2016): 81–107.

[84] Alexandra Stang, "Possibilities, Silences: The Publishing and Reception of Queer Topics in Finland during the Interwar Years (and Beyond)" (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2015), 8.

story of the difficulty of life." The symbol of the deserted house paints a tragic picture of how the husband's homosexuality, somehow known to the author, caused a tragedy. The writer explains that this seemingly distant memory made a lasting impression because she was just about to get married herself when the events occurred.

Even more personally, several writers discuss their suspicions or knowledge about the same-sex desires of their partners and the problems it caused them. One Finnish woman born in 1957 describes her Estonian husband as sexually "mentally ill and totally flipped, if not even some sort of secret gay" (F144). An Estonian woman born in the early 1940s recounts the loss of her great love with obvious bitterness: "Some old boy. Quite the pederast. Seems to fit among the other gays. Which there are today" (E060). The use of the pejorative word "pederast," written with lowercase letters in a text that is otherwise written in uppercase letters, as if she is only whispering the word, emphasizes the intended insult. In a medicalizing tone, a Finnish man comments on his wife's "homosexual orientation," calling it their common "disability" for which they were seeking counseling at the time of writing (F070). He had read books on homosexuality, and while he did not think his wife's "sexual orientation" was likely to change, he was content at the moment because she had agreed to try. He had considered divorce, but especially because they had children, he wanted to keep the commitment to love her "for better, for worse." Even though his wife had divulged her same-sex desires prior to their marriage and these desires had only grown stronger, the writer does not imply that his wife wanted a divorce. Even though he refers to the concept of homosexuality—not lesbianism—the writer does not see his wife's sexual orientation as an obstacle for continuing a heterosexual relationship. This might indicate that he does not think of homosexuality and heterosexuality as mutually exclusive or unchanging or that he does not consider his wife as an independent sexual subject who might wish to start a life on her own.

Two female writers in the Estonian collection recalled lesbians they knew who had committed suicide. In the first account, the writer describes Julia, who moved into their *kolkhoz* (collective farm). The writer had found a love letter to another woman in Julia's pocket. The story of this discovery invites the interpretation that the writer wanted to add to the credibility of her story by pointing to physical proof of hidden desires. The story ends tragically: after being deserted by her lover, Julia hanged herself in a bathroom (E062). Another Estonian woman, born in 1942, ends her account with a description of her "live and let live" attitude toward homosexuality, commenting that she knew a miserable lesbian woman whose suicide still shocked her. She also stated that she and her daughter are "ordinary women who fall in love with men and find in them their happiness, as well as unhappiness" (E021). This is the only example of a direct self-reflection through comparison to gay and lesbian acquaintances in the

Estonian collection. Other Estonian writers simply share their memories of events they have witnessed themselves or heard about from others, or they note that there had been no gays in their surroundings (E022). The topic of homosexuality was absent neither from the Estonian media of the 1990s nor from these reminiscences.[85] However, it seems that, unlike their Finnish counterparts, the Estonian writers did not need the figure of the homosexual or the concept of homosexuality as an othering contrast to their heterosexuality, which they do not tend to explicitly name.[86] This lack of an othered homosexual figure, as well as the omission of explicit heterosexual self-identification, is evidence for the unchallenged status of heterosexuality in these life stories—an identity that is not challenged by their memories of the same-sex desires of others.

In contrast, the Finnish writers construct—sometimes through explicit naming and sometimes simply through definition—heterosexuality by explicitly discussing the extent of same-sex affection, desire, and sexual experience that can be included in definitions of the heterosexual self. In contrast to Kaskisaari's argument that men tended to distance themselves from homosexuality as something despicable, I have found other cases where women depict same-sex affections as simultaneously despicable yet tempting.[87] For example, a female writer born in 1935 writes:

> I have, by the way, several times in my life wondered if a part of me is male and only part female, as I so easily play with myself and I even have dreams in which I'm with a woman having sex, even though I have never touched a woman in that way. I can't even imagine kissing a woman, No! Once, when I was young, when I slept with a girlfriend in the same bed, she grabbed me during the night, but I quickly pushed her away and left to my own home in the middle of the night. We never talked about it, and our friendship did not break, but she never touched me again. I was disgusted by the touch. (F025)

In this expression of revulsion, the writer emphasizes that she considers same-sex affection as something completely impossible for herself. Simultaneously, however, she differentiates between what one can dream about and what one can actually do when awake. Same-sex affection is presented as compatible with the heterosexual self as long as it is something that only occurs in dreams. She insists on a clear demarcation between fantasy and lived heterosexuality by inserting a capitalized "no" with an exclamation point for emphasis.

[85] On Estonian media, see Kurvinen, "Homosexual Representations."

[86] Allusions to homosexuality in heterosexual narratives also appeared in the St. Petersburg collection. See Haavio-Mannila, Rotkirch, and Kontula, "Contradictory Trends," 336–37. The authors are not entirely clear whether it was only the Russian male writers who explicitly distanced themselves from homosexuality, but they provide only Russian examples, and my analysis of the Estonian collection revealed no similar examples.

[87] Kaskisaari, "Rakkauden täyttymys."

This writer's opening contemplation of her gender contrasts with most of the other accounts in these collections, which are more likely to subtly and implicitly associate same-sex affection with femininity in men or masculinity in women, if they address gender at all. This may have been a response to the gender-neutral tone used in the call. This same neutral approach that encouraged the expression of same-sex experiences even if experienced by heterosexual narrators might have discouraged explorations of gender differences or pondering of gender identity. Although the call contained no questions on how the writers perceived others around them, and only the Estonian call requested direct opinions on particular topics, those of extramarital affairs, porn magazines, and prostitution, the writers used the opportunity to reflect on their memories about the same-sex desires of others. They describe how these seemingly minor events had an impact on their lives. In other words, the gender-neutral wording of the call created space to construct life stories that included memories of queer others and offered an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of queer desire for their own sexuality.

The Discovered Desires

This rereading of Finnish and Estonian life stories from the 1990s has uncovered glimpses of queer desire both as "twice-told stories" of queer others and as accounts of same-sex desire within predominantly heterosexual lives. Although few of the authors I have described identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, they project these concepts onto others and even back to the distant past. These accounts of queer others are often colored with pity and include stories of tragic destinies, desperation, and harassment. In other cases, writers who disclose their own same-sex desires or experiences found ways to integrate this aspect of their sexual lives into a predominantly heterosexual identity. This is more common for female writers in the Finnish collection, who seemed to have had little difficulty understanding and integrating their same-sex desires. Male writers, on the other hand, tended to interpret same-sex sexuality as an irresistible force and a cause of self-loathing. A common element to the Finnish life stories, however, is a belief in the essential similarity of sexual desire and the absence of essentialized distinctions between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Unlike the Estonians, the Finnish writers construct their heterosexual self by drawing a line between what is acceptable same-sex desire and what is not and by deploying the recollections of queer others to underline the normality of their own desires.

I have suggested that what I have referred to as the gender-neutral equality paradigm created both an opportunity for the writers to construct same-sex desire and an explanation for why these desires have not been thoroughly analyzed in the research based on these collections. This

paradigm certainly represents same-sex desires as normal and acceptable, but there is a tendency to view queer desire as either the characteristic of only a small minority or a marginal and insignificant sexual experiment in heterosexual lives. Osmo Kontula and Elina Haavio-Mannila, who gathered these collections and conducted most of the studies based on them, focused on the sexual liberation of an assumed majority and failed to recognize the diversity of evidence for same-sex desire evident in the collections. How these life stories have been researched has thus served to *unqueer* them and to underestimate the richness of meaning in the writers' evaluations of their own same-sex desire and that of others. This represents a lost opportunity for public discussion and personal reflection on same-sex desire. Moreover, the gender-neutral equality paradigm suppressed stories in which queer desire constituted a common element of a seemingly heterosexual life—stories that would have questioned the presumption that same-sex desire is only salient for a small minority of self-identified gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.

The gender-neutral equality paradigm supported the Finnish national narrative of an equal and liberated country, and Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's study contrasted Finnish sexual liberation with the lasting impact of delayed sexual modernization in the former Soviet Union. Their reading prioritized quantitative methodologies, and they deployed excerpts from the life stories merely as illustrations. This process marginalized any accounts that did not conform to the assumptions about progressive trends. Merle Karusoo's play certainly opened space for more varied readings. Karusoo's play revealed some of the more intimate aspects of the Estonian life stories as interpretations of the Soviet past, offering more insightful glimpses into same-sex desire.

Although I would argue that Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's research concealed the diversity of sexual desire and that this concealment has discouraged researchers from viewing these life stories as a fruitful source for an exploration of the history of same-sex desire, their collection of this unique documentation is invaluable for historians researching the queer past. The gender-neutral framework did create a space for recollections of same-sex experiences and for perceiving them not as something essentially alien but as a part of the spectrum of possible sexual desires. The collection of these life stories offered writers an opportunity to recall their own queer experiences and desires and to reflect on the lives of queer others. Despite the shortcomings in Kontula and Haavio-Mannila's analysis, their work in making these life stories available for future researchers has meant that these moments of queer desire can live on and inform us in the present about same-sex affection in the past.

About the Author

Riikka Taavetti is a postdoctoral researcher in political history at the University of Helsinki. Her doctoral dissertation, defended in 2018 at the

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