

Opponent Report for Liya Ai Master's Thesis in Gender Studies at Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic.

Liya Ai has submitted a Master's Thesis entitled, "Understanding Institutional Support and Service Experiences of Lesbian and Gay Youth." In it, she focuses on gay and lesbian youth in the Czech Republic and what sort of help regarding experiences surrounding their sexual orientation they received or sought out while in school. She covers a wide range of school settings from primary all the way through university with 44 participants with another relatively wide range of ages and experiences. She has collected her research only through online questionnaires that contained a mix of set and open-ended questions. These have been done in Czech, which she then has had to have translated into English for her. She concludes that much of her research varied on a case-by-case basis, but that in general schools need to be able to relate to LGBTQ+ individuals more, gay and lesbian youth would benefit from more effective services within schools (primarily to be able to address bullying), and gay and lesbian youth often struggle the most with coming out.

In general, Liya's thesis includes a large amount of surveyed research. This is good. However, there are instances when the research is quite old and I wonder why she has chosen it, especially given how much has changed in the LGBTQ+ community and even in the larger field of identity formation in the last five to ten years. For example, all of her research on heteronormativity comes from the late 1970s to 1991. Has not this idea come under scrutiny in many societies from around the world since then? Another aspect of the research that could be different is how she discusses studies. Liya refers to studies only by author and year and often very little other information has been given. While this is acceptable on occasion, I would have liked to have known more context at least for some of the studies that relate most to the topic. Not a single mention of a study includes information like how large the study was; where it takes place; how well-accepted the findings are; what methodology has been used; etc. If I wanted to know that information, I would have to look up each and every study myself. While it is reasonable for the reader, I think, to look up a few studies for more information or just out of interest, I should not have to do that for all of them.

She also mentions that a few studies have been done on sexual minorities in the Czech Republic, but I only found the same study referenced a few times. If others were there, it is not clear that they are specifically from a Czech context.

In relation to her use of theoretical research, there were many times that I longed for more information and a better explanation. For example, she references Eve Sedgwick's book *Epistemology of the Closet* on page 26 and only gives a two sentence summary of Sedgwick's work. On page 23, she describes heteronormativity in schools in only one paragraph, even a little more explanation as to what Batsleer means by schools being "hegemonically heterosexual places" would be helpful. In general, I would have liked more engagement with feminist sources. I would have also appreciated more information about how punishment works in the school context (see page 51) and more specific information on Czech schools. What is the school environment like here in general? How prevalent is bullying? What types of relationships do teachers and students generally have? How does

that change as one moves up to the next level of schooling? How does class (i.e. being able to pay for schooling, public versus private schools) affect the school setting? (Page 52 discusses boarding schools.)

There are also other aspects of her work about which I would also like to know more. For example, why does she limit her participants to only gays and lesbians? Where do these individuals come from in the Czech Republic, and how does she (or they) think that affects their experiences? How did you decide on which options were possible when answering certain questions on your survey? Finally, the last two questions I would like to ask Liya are: do you wish you could have done interviews with a translator and why didn't you; and why does this thesis belong in the Gender Studies program rather than more generally in Sociology?

In many ways, Liya's thesis made me want to read more and also know more detailed information about the experiences of gay and lesbian children and youth in Czech schools. That is very commendable. I also think it was brave of her to conduct research in Czech without being familiar with the Czech language even if it limited her findings. At the same time, this thesis needs detail, further clarification, and some more -up-to-date sources, especially in the theoretical part.

I find the thesis is acceptable and recommend a grade of 3.

Submitted by Ivy Helman, Ph.D.

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