

Shadow Lives and Public Secrets: Queering Gendered Spaces in 1950s and 60s Tampere ¹

T u u l a J u v o n e n

Living in a non-metropolitan area myself, I have been intrigued about the ways in which the relationship between spatiality and homosexuality has been coined as an urban one. Yet how are other kinds of spaces, notably smaller cities or towns, affecting the formation of a liveable homosexuality?

While I wanted to understand how the scale of space establishes conditions for experiencing homosexuality, I was particularly interested to find out how these very conditions differ according to gender. Often the major U.S. lesbian and gay histories have had their focus on either gay male or lesbian experiences, most notably George Chauncey (1994) on gay New York and John Howard (1999) on male homosexuality in Mississippi, or Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis (1993) on lesbian bar culture in Buffalo, New York. Until recently it has been rather exceptional to look at both male and female communities together, the way Esther Newton did it in her study on Cherry Grove (1993). I maintain that such inclusive studies have potential both to complicate and shed new light on our understanding about construction of homosexuality.

In order to explore such questions I have examined as a case in point life in 1950s and 60s Tampere, Finland. At that time Finland was still recovering from World War II

and just about to shift from agricultural to industrial production, with 46% of the nation's population still working in farming in 1950 (Alestalo 1980, 104)². This transition was evident also in Tampere. At that time it was, with a growing population from 100 000 to 125 000, the second largest industrial town of the country and one of the key centres of post-war rebuilding. Nonetheless its position between urbanity and agrarian life, characteristic also for the nation itself, is well captured in a telling anecdote stating that in the late 1950s the major challenge of the town police was try to teach residents to use pedestrian crossings.

Within a larger heteronormative society and its dominant gender system, the position of Tampere between agrarian and urban life affected also the ways in which emerging concepts of homosexuality were incorporated and experienced there. Many features relevant to establishing homosexual communities in larger urban centres, such as sexual tourism with nightclubs or other commercial venues were not to be found in a town the size of Tampere. Living there resembled in many respects rather rural conditions (c.f. Halberstam 2005, 26–45). Moreover, some particularities of the Finnish culture and its post-war climate meant that same-sex sexualities took distinguishable

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shapes. One of the defining features was that “*fornication with another person of the same sex*”, as it was coined in the Penal Code, was illegal in Finland for both women and men between 1894–1971, and could be fined with a maximum of two years imprisonment (about the process of criminalisation see Lofström 1998).

When paying attention to Finnish homosexuality as a historically emerging concept, referring to a particular way of life, identity and community, I have found it useful to make a distinction between material and cultural spaces. By cultural spaces I refer to those textual concepts and visual images about homosexuality which were publicly available, whereas focus on material spaces makes it possible to ask questions about the use, access, and control of certain physical spaces for homosexual encounters in a local context.

In the following article I will first explore the conceptualization of female and male homosexuality in Finnish post-war print and visual media. Looking at tabloids, magazines, advertisements, and films, I trace what possibilities were offered for sexual self-identification to those women and men who might have had feelings for the same sex. From such cultural spaces I move on to analyse the gendered conditions which affected the use of material spaces for advancing same-sex sexual encounters in Tampere. Here I use materials from oral history interviews I have conducted between 1994 and 2001.³ I pay particular attention to the issues of access and surveillance, in order to find out how these determined the gendered character of the use of public, private, and semi-public spaces

respectively.

I maintain that the forms and uses of cultural and material spaces affect the creation of such a frame of mind, or a mental space, which allows for an active formation of a self-identified gay and lesbian community. This article seeks to explain if, how, and for whom it was possible to claim public space with such effects in the 1950s and 60s Tampere.

Swedish Men and Invisible Women

Newspapers, tabloids, magazines, advertisements and films all took part in reconstructing post-war ideas about acceptable forms of gender and sexuality by pointing out what is desirable and what is to be avoided. Although regular newspapers also reported about homosexual crimes, the post-war novelties of the Finnish print media, namely scandal papers and adult entertainment magazines, were the most likely places to discuss this intriguing phenomenon in more detail.

Inspired by the homosexual scandals taking place in Sweden at the time (Söderström 1999) *Kalle*, the newly founded adult entertainment magazine, hurried to introduce the medicalised and pathologised concept of “homosexuality” to the general public in its second volume in 1951. According to the homosexuality survey of 1993, conducted by the Folklore Archives of Finnish Literature Society, prior to this people had been talking vaguely about men who were considered to be “onanists” or “like that”. After the war, also the derogatory words “hinttari” and

“hintti”, known in Finnish slang since the 1930s and etymologically derived from German words “hinten” and “hinten rum” (indicating a participant in anal intercourse), were more broadly used (SKS/KRArk 1993; Löfström 1999, 27, 62, 258, endnote 6; Juvonen 2002, 154).

In a double feature *Kalle* thoroughly informed its readers with text and photos what homosexuality is about (a crime and an illness) and what one can do about it (be cautious, stay clear from suspect places, and defend oneself decidedly from unwanted approaches). Interestingly, it also reprinted translations of articles featuring Swedish and Danish organisations for homosexuals. These articles showed how in Sweden and Denmark the first such associations had been formed already in the late 1940s, and how they offered parties for the like-minded as well as social services for people who struggled to come to terms with their homosexual condition (see also Söderström 1999, 630–647; Wolfert 1997, 233–237).

These amazing reports created in the Finnish readers’ minds a permanent connection between homosexuality and Sweden. Notions of Swedish disease, Swedish love, and endless jokes and references to effeminate Swedish men who were all “like that” started their never ending circulation in popular media and in general conversation. Such proliferation of talk about homosexuality after World War II suggests an increased exposure to the striking idea and practice of same-sex sexuality over the war years also in Finland (c.f. Bérubé 1990/1991 for the situation in the United States), and accordingly the Swede-talk can be read as a means of displacing disturbing homosexuality safely

somewhere over the Gulf of Bothnia.

However, homosexuality was not to be confined to Sweden only. A younger informant vividly remembered when, as a twelve-year-old, he curiously read his father’s *Kalle* magazine, where he found a feature about the homosexual subculture.

*“It was mostly about what was going on in Helsinki, and in Sweden, in Stockholm, and how you can find contacts in Helsinki. They emerge in restaurants, and then in certain parks and toilets. So already there you had this hint about the toilets, and there were lots of public toilets at that time. [...] So that was how I got the idea that in places like that you could meet other like-minded people.”*⁴

Similar excitement was reported in a letter to the editor from a lonely reader V. Heleman from rural Finland, who heartily thanked *Kalle* for the two part feature. Now he felt encouraged and well equipped to move to Helsinki, since he was assured he could also find company in the capital. However, as Heleman aptly observed, the magazine had firmly discussed the male homosexuality only. “By the way”, he wrote at the end of his letter,

“Kalle forgot one thing, or maybe it did not want to make public that here in Finland we also have homosexuality among women. I know personally of some such cases. Maybe among them are also some uninformed who do not know how to seek each others company. Could Kalle not sacrifice one more issue and cover the topic for them as well.” (*Kalle* 12/1951, 7.)

I argue that it is emblematic of the time in question that *Kalle* failed to publish a parallel story about homosexual

women. Adult entertainment magazines aimed at men featuring girl-on-girl action as one of their obligatory features was yet to become a norm.

The tabloid press of that same period, especially *Viikon Totuus* (Truth of the Week, in print from 1958 to 1968), eagerly followed the lead of *Kalle* in matters of homosexuality. *Viikon Totuus* did not grow tired of publishing lurid articles about paedophiles and homophiles, those allegedly intertwined sick perverts in need of severe punishments for endangering the health of the nation and especially that of its youth. The more *Viikon Totuus* got carried away with its own outrage, the more detailed information it managed to offer for men looking for male company (cf. D'Emilio 1981/1983, 52; Churchill 2004, 827, 843). But in the early 1960s it reported only briefly about women who had been charged for same-sex sexual activities.

The reported events took place ten years earlier at Yrttilehto, the Herb Grove.⁵ The Herb Grove was an orphanage in Eastern Finland, run by an all female religious sect called the Apostolical Congregation. The sect was an anomaly by itself in a mostly homogenous Evangelic Lutheran country, yet the orphanage was esteemed for its valuable social work. However, its everyday social encounters with caresses, embraces and kisses were exceptional for a more reserved Finnish culture, and even more so the forms of religious rituals practiced in the orphanage, including the rather intimate anointment with oils. Following a denunciation, its leader and several of the co-workers were accused in 1951 for continued fornication with another person of the same sex. After long and

complicated court proceedings eight of the women were sentenced (Sorainen 1998, 122–124; see also Sorainen in this issue).

Despite the fact that male homosexuality entered the nation's public discourse as a form of crime and illness, and the stories that were published in scandal papers and tabloids were invariably rather negative and stereotyped well into the 1970s, they still granted the concept of male homosexuality public visibility. Men's homosexual deeds reportedly took place in easily accessible everyday environments, and the stories managed to connect isolated homosexual men across the nation and even link them internationally (cf. Nealon 2001, 9). Furthermore the lurid tabloids assured that the idea of active male sexuality – even when directed towards other men – was culturally potent and multiply enforced when written, talked, or, for that matter, joked about. This constant exposure to the idea of male homosexuality habitually changed people's mental space to include the idea of men desiring other men sexually.

While male homosexuality as an existing, although an undesired variation of human sexuality firmly entered the public discourses, similar visibility did not apply to female homosexuality. The press had comparatively little to offer women in search of validation for their budding same-sex feelings. *Kalle* failed to deliver further details about the existence of female homosexuality, and the scandalous reporting by *Viikon Totuus* about the criminal events in the Herb Grove only managed to displace women's same-sex sexual activities as something quite exotic and unlikely to happen in average environments. Neither did the firm

framing of same-sex sexual deeds of women as a crime take reference to older agrarian concepts, such as “playing a flat cunt” or “being a woman-lover” (SKS/KRArk 1993). All this fostered ignorance about the idea of female homosexual activity, and made it a rather unlikely concept for women to relate to in Tampere.

If adult magazines and tabloids failed to educate women on female same-sex sexuality, so did high literature. Internationally known lesbian classics were either never translated into Finnish, or their lesbian content was censored unrecognisable up to the mid and late 1960s. One notable exception was *Olivia*, published in Finland already in 1950 (Mustola 1996, 67–113). Nevertheless, lesbian pulp never was available in the country. Even if the attitudes towards lesbianism would have been more permissive, in a country where the total population was just about to reach the four million mark in 1950, lesbian pulp would hardly have been considered a profitable enough product.

Instead of letting female homosexuality to enter the public picture, the pronounced patriotic war time era had taught young women to keep up their sexual morals and see heterosexual wifehood and motherhood as their most important contribution to the prosperity of the Fatherland. This well anchored respectable middle-class trajectory could hardly be seriously questioned even after the war, particularly since the presence of belittled war widows and excess spinsters clearly showed the consequences of falling outside of heterosexual normativity.

After the war heteronormalizing ethos could also be seen as a nostalgic gesture towards rebuilding an imagined

normalcy of peace times. No wonder heterosexuality was constantly repeated also in advertisements. According to Riitta Niskanen advertising posters pictured women either as objects of gaze or as housewives. Posters rarely showed more than a single woman in one picture, and if so, in none of the pictures were the women even so much as looking at each other, discussing together or smiling at each other (Niskanen 1996, 118–119). No surprise then, that stumbling upon a same-sex encounter could have been a rather confusing experience for a girl who grew up in such a climate.

“I did not even realize it at first, when I noticed that she rather liked – at that time I was still slim – to hold me on my waist, or when passing by brushed across my breasts, or something. Until that one time. I remember it well. We were discussing some matters after school, in the natural science class, between all the owls and such. And then I suddenly startled. I realized this here is something else.

I got slightly scared, and I did not realize what it was about. But somehow it was frightening, because anything relating to sexuality was taboo. [...] At least in our school and in my home, girls that age, 16 to 17, you were allowed to look, but touching somebody’s... Boys, for example. Among other things I had this problem, that when a boy hugged a bit, held his hand around my neck and nothing more, not even kissed, I felt myself enormously sinful. And now I felt something similar in front of this teacher I so admired. A conflicting feeling, like, what next.”

This relationship between a teacher and her pupil grew to be emotionally and physically intense, even if it never became a genital one. However, the young woman was

relieved when, after a few years, she was able to change schools and give up this complicated secret affair. Later on she moved away to Helsinki and eventually got married. In hindsight, she looks back at this relationship as a rewarding experience, and clearly a more positive one than her unhappy marriage.

If tabloids, books, and advertisements had failed the women who were vaguely searching for ways to escape the trappings of heterosexuality, Finnish films also did not offer them any viable alternatives. Here again male homosexuality featured more prominently. Prolific writers Kaarlo Nuorvala and Mika Waltari both delivered film scripts which included homosexual themes. Consequently a moralistic drama *Suomalais-tyttöjä Tukholmassa* (Finnish Girls in Stockholm, 1952) stunningly showed Swedish (sic!) men dancing together cheek to cheek; a romantic comedy with cross-dressing *Rakas Lurjus* (Dear Knave, 1955) exhaustively considered the consequences of a man kissing a boy; and a murder mystery *Kaasua, komisario Palmu!* (It's Gas, Inspector Palmu!, 1961) introduced a dandy who was motivated to his murderous deed by an "abnormal relationship" with his roommate.

However, Finnish post-war films offered no comparable public display about female homosexuality for its audiences. It had still been possibly in the early 1940s that women could have enjoyed a brisk romantic comedy *Perheen musta lammas* (The Black Sheep of the Family, Finland 1941), featuring a young single woman who ends up cross dressing and rampantly flirting with other women before entering marital bliss. But by the 1950s any women who even so much as hinted at anything but normative hetero-sexuality were,

after some initial rebellion, eventually tamed into a heterosexual marriage (as was the tomboy in *Ruma Elsa, Ugly Elsa*, 1949), or either killed or doomed to bring devastation to their loved ones (Ollila 1986, 50).

Like in these films, also in real life a female sexual subjectivity outside of heterosexuality was facilitated only by taking distance from conventional femininity and leaning on to masculinity instead. Those women who I managed to find for an interview and who were both looking for female companion already in the 1950s and continued to have same-sex sexual partners beyond that were women who had always thought they should have been born a boy.⁶ That they fell for girls and later for women came naturally to them. Nevertheless, due to the lack of accepting discourses around female homosexuality they figured it is something one should better not discuss with others.

For women the only discourse known about same-sex sexuality was a juridical one. Yet here the knowledge about possible consequences effectively silenced women and men, likewise. It is telling that a mother, who was informed that her minor daughter walks in her lunch breaks hand in hand with her female colleague at the factory yard, resolutely (however technically slightly incorrect) educated the girl about the illegality of being a woman-lover. So no wonder the daughter fiercely denied that she was one, despite the fact she had an ongoing liaison with that very same colleague.

So while some women obviously did have relationships

with other women, there was nothing in the public realm they could lean on when trying to make sense of their feelings. Accordingly in the absence of any public representations of homosexually active women the idea of thinking of oneself primarily as a sexual being, not to mention deviantly sexual on top of that, was in the 1950s for most women beyond their cultural horizon. This was in sharp contrast to men who could not only read from the papers that there are men who were sexually interested in other men, but also learned where to go to meet others similarly inclined.

This situation started to change also for women gradually in late 1960s. The sexual revolution had radicalized students in the capital since mid 1960s, and there was some support for new kinds of groups which aimed to change sexual politics. In 1969 the time was right for founding the first officially registered homophile organisation, discussion club Psyke in Helsinki. It started to run dance evenings for its members in a cellar at Kalevankatu and to publish its own magazine *96, Ysikutonen* (Haapala 1983, 52–55; Anonymous 1983, 98). Its personal columns finally allowed women to get in touch with each other throughout the country.

Male Privilege and Outdoor Meeting Places

What is so self-evident that it most often remains unsaid in all the work written about gay urban geography is that men, as men, have had unquestioned access to public spaces, and, moreover, occasionally have been able to

subvert them to their will. Likewise homosexual men have been able to move freely there, particularly if they paid due attention to their masculine performance. It also goes without saying that, apart from maybe public toilets, all the venues men used to meet other men were venues entered at occasions of leisure. This suggests that the leisure time of working men is simply taken as a given, and with that also their ability to earn and spend excess money.

It hardly gets noticed in work that focuses on men only that like in 1950s Tampere, also elsewhere these were male privileges, hardly available to average women. Women's smaller wages, double duties at work and home, responsibilities for family, siblings and children kept them busy beyond regular working hours. Also women seldom had undisturbed access to male-dominated public places and likewise little powers to modify them to better accommodate their own sexual needs.

Therefore the traditional outdoor meeting places were meeting places for men only. Well known conventional features of gay male urban geography, such as city parks, public toilets, and bars can be found in Tampere as well. As Simon Churchill has noted, they all are places which already have established other uses, thus providing a protective cover for their appropriation as homosexual spaces (Churchill 2004, 829–830).

In Tampere certain parks and toilets had a reputation even among heterosexual men as places “where perverts gather”. Eteläpuisto, the Southern Park, was known not only in Tampere, but men interested in the company of other men were drawn to it from smaller towns, and occasionally even

from the capital Helsinki for visits in the long and warm July and August nights. All the interviewed men who frequented Eteläpuisto had fond memories about the social and sexual life that took place in the secluded park. Men of all walks of life passed by, including some well situated gentlemen or celebrities from the theatre world. This fact, duly noted by the extensive mutual gossip shared by the crowd, provided great assurance for young men just entering the scene (c.f. Nilsson 1995 for an extensive outdoor subculture in Gothenburg).

Likewise the “green angels”, as the outdoor public toilets with dangling doors scattered around the town were nicknamed, provided for many an entrance to the gay male subculture. Especially the illustrative and inviting graffiti on their walls encouraged men to make contacts.

“Next to the rapids there was one of those sheet metal boxes and there was some scribbling. So obviously I was posing there, after having seen those greetings on the walls. I was standing on the bridge and looking into the night, and exactly as expected, one of the persons I was trying to pull happened to walk by. “How are you, Paavo” he said. Like, he was called Paavo himself. So that’s how the story started.”

However, for one of my oldest informants it took a longer detour to find out about the male subculture in the local public toilets. Coming from a cultivated family he had learned that dirty and smelly public toilets were to be avoided at all costs. It was only when he went to study in Helsinki in the 1940s that he found out about their more compelling features. Some other men, although visiting parks, drew a definite line at frequenting public toilets.

“They [the public toilets, TJJ] were such disgusting places, that I never did anything. But sometimes we used to tease them, by throwing a stone at the door, and watch how horrified folks streamed out. That was a culture we would have never needed.”

Anyhow, as the example of *Kalle* magazine showed, toilets may have been crucial for the eventual creation of a gay male culture and its entrance into a public discourse.

Obviously, the police officers in Tampere were also well aware of the goings-on in these public places. Even though homosexual deeds were illegal in Finland, the court statistics of Tampere between 1947 and 1959 show no more than 17 trials of men being convicted under the section 20:12,1 of the Penal Code, and none of women.⁷ Only three of these offences, all before 1954, took place in public toilets.⁸ From 1954 to 1959 the only cases brought to the town court were nine incidents where working class men, having been brought drunk to jail, had been caught having sex with other men on the police premises.⁹ In such situations, police officers sometimes decided simply to throw a bucket of cold water on the offenders and put them in separate cells, and merely reprimanded the men upon release in the morning without filing an official report.

If not forced to take action because of a call from the public, in principal patrolling police officers rather evaluated the situation around public toilets as one not in need of urgent measures.¹⁰

“We knew about them, the undertakings of the homosexuals. It was somehow a closed circle. And some signs they had for each other. They met through messages they wrote on the toilet walls.”

And often, being old friends, they recognized each other from afar. [...] They were such a belittled and despised tribe. And basically they all were kind of soft, living their own lives, so that mostly they did not bother others. It was their own way of life. Yep.”

While such an approach reflects the more rural attitude of live-and-let-live (c.f. Halberstam 2005, 70), the police officers I interviewed also mentioned how the whole idea of homosexual acts felt shameful and incomprehensible to the young married officers. Thus the idea of hanging around or even in the toilets to provide evidence of “fornication with another person of the same sex” sounded rather unpleasant to them.

The quote above also indicates that police got to know the men by sight. Since Tampere was a rather small place it can be safely assumed that the police was able to identify at least some of the regulars. In any case they must have recognized Eino Salmelainen, who was at that time a highly esteemed director of the Tampere Workers’ Theatre. The town rumour was that among other men he also had cultivated the habit of cruising around the public toilets.

“There used to be a loo down there, next to the Hämeensilta Bridge. That was a regular pulling spot for Eino Salmelainen. He used to sit on the bench next to it, and I have heard that the townies were well aware what he was sitting there for.”

That social standing protected some men from police action is also evident in the fact that the first – and last – academically educated man taken to court in Tampere for a same-sex sexual offence between 1947–1959 was a visitor from out of town.¹¹ In a town of the size of Tampere (cf. even

the case of Stockholm, Rydström 2003, 256) making a raid that would have compromised a well-situated man could have easily resulted in a mess that might have caused more harm to the police officers than to the accused men themselves.

Since the police were not interested in intervening and gay bashing was unheard of in Tampere in the 1950s and 60s, men looking for the company of other men could feel relatively safe in outdoor meeting places. They only had to be careful about divulging any details about themselves to their partner or taking him home, because that could, so the men had heard, sometimes lead to blackmail attempts or robbery, which obviously could not be reported to the police (Gumpler 1966). Sometimes the fear of exposure also led the men to leave their cars with their telltale number plates behind. However, since only 7 in 1000 owned a car in 1950, private cars were rarely used for sexual escapades in Finland.

So the men I have interviewed, affirmed by the reports in scandal papers and the graffiti in the toilets, and finally by the sheer number of likewise inclined men in the outdoor meeting places, felt perfectly fine strolling around in parks at nights or frequenting public toilets looking for the company of other men. However, the same did not apply for women. Apart from the fact that it would have been quite an extraordinary urge for a woman to go out and start looking for female company in the cultural landscape of the 1950s, she would have been quite puzzled as to where to go. Even in the daylight a woman sitting alone on a park bench would have been

seen as fair game to any proposals, so late walks in the parks would have been ill advised.¹² Neither did women feel comfortable visiting the public toilets, especially since the men, having monopolised the places, had carved holes in the wooden walls between the compartments to facilitate either peeping or anonymous sex between men. So would the indoor facilities of the town prove to be more promising venues or women looking for same-sex company?

Indoor Cruising for Men Only

Saunas, swimming halls, bars, and restaurants are those places which have usually enjoyed popularity among men looking for the company of other men. In Finland, however, saunas have traditionally been places where families, infants and elderly included, went on Friday or Saturday evenings to cleanse off the hardships of the working week. In the 1950s Tampere much of the housing did not have proper bathrooms, so public saunas were still extensively used instead. There neighbours and co-workers threw off their clothes in sex-segregated but open-spaced dressing rooms before entering their respective washrooms and climbing up the wooden benches to enjoy the steamy heat and the invigorating flapping of fresh bunches of fragrant birch twigs (Kivimäki & Laiho 1996).

Hence in Finnish culture the erotic quality of naked bodies was heavily compromised by the functional and familiar nature of sauna visits. Even if those premises hypothetically gave both sexes possibilities for desiring glimpses, they offered no privacy whatsoever for sexual advances, since

one was constantly surrounded by family and acquaintances.

In comparison to sauna visits, going for a swim was not a family function but a personal hobby. Thus going to the first swimming bath of Tampere, opened in Pyynikki in 1957, gave one a novel sense of freedom. It even provided, according to its policy, the luxury of private cabins for any visitors over 16 years. As well as a mixed pool, there were also sex-segregated washrooms and saunas. It was no wonder that men of all ages, erotically interested in other men, quickly spotted and made good use of the swimming bath's erotic and even sexual possibilities. The swimming bath provided men, especially married ones, a comfortable setting in which to make discrete advances to other men – to the extent that sometimes single homosexual men felt exploited as sex toys and chose not to visit the place at all.

Most men who frequented the place for sex knew also how to handle potentially awkward situations. When one of the men misinterpreted the glances of a stranger and entered his cabin, the door of which was left invitingly open, he became angrily yelled at as a result. So he simply stated “Oh, I just thought it is a visitors' day”, turned on his heels and walked away. However, the angry complaints about “two pairs of feet in one cabin” accumulated over the years to the extent that finally the private cabins at the men's dressing room were torn down.

Those rather cleverly designed cabins can be still found intact in the women's dressing rooms of Pyynikki swimming bath. This indicates that women either knew how to cruise without anybody noticing, or, more likely that for women

the swimming hall was also not the place to execute sexual advances to other women.

In some other cultures bars have proven to be places where women interested in other women could have strolled in for good company (Kennedy and Davis 1993). In Finland, however, the stern alcohol policy instructed that alcohol could not be served without food, so until 1969 there were no licensed bars in the country, but only restaurants. Secondly, one of the definite grounds for loosing an alcohol license was to allow soliciting for prostitution on the premises. To be on the safe side restaurant owners collectively practiced a self-imposed rule that they would not allow unescorted women onto their premises – a practice that was challenged nation wide by angry women only in the mid and late 1960s. Hence the chances were slim for single women to get into a restaurant in the first place, and even worse for finding other women there “like that” (cf. Valentine 1993, 405–406, 410). If unescorted women managed to convince an acquainted doorman of their decency and were therefore allowed to enter the premises, they would only find the place full of men, most of them eager to make advances to them.

However, not all of the men were interested in women, since some bars, in early 1960s Tampere most notably Pusta, had gained popularity as a place to go also among men who were interested in other men instead. Pusta, which was renamed Tillikka in 1965, was a lively place, drawing in artists, actors, journalists, and when the College of Social Sciences relocated from Helsinki to Tampere in 1960, also university staff and students. Despite its generally mixed

clientele people from different walks of life often remained in separate tables, a custom that divided also the homosexually inclined crowd.

The rules of proper restaurant behaviour in Pusta, like in other similar places, were at that time strict. Men could enter the premises only when decently dressed in a jacket and a tie. The visitors could not walk around the place with drinks in their hands, but had to ask the waitress to reseal them at another table if needed. The waitresses had to monitor the drinking of their guests, and those getting too drunk were no longer served while any troublemakers were firmly asked to leave.

However, even in a strictly regulated surrounding the men managed to sexualize the space. When a group of well groomed and smart looking men entered the restaurant, a young man instantly knew that they must be one of “those”. Stolen glances between a Boston ivy, synchronized sipping of drinks, and silent toasts indicated the mutual interest while a “coincidental” meeting in the toilet when washing one’s hands sealed it. Then, after a formal invitation, the excited young man could finally join the table of his new friends.

Discreet behaviour was also highly welcomed by those patrons who themselves worked in the service sector. They were concerned about the possibility of exposing themselves to inquisitive questions from their clients if the campy shrieking would have gotten too wild. One of the men, whose in-law was working in the restaurant, still kept up hopes of remaining undiscovered as one of “those”. That was rather pointless, since the waitresses had understood

all along what was going on. “We used to call them ‘nice lads’”, I was informed by one delighted former waitress. The nice lads were well liked among the staff, since they were polite and well behaved, rarely got drunk and even if so, they never sexually harassed the waitresses.

Another place that grew popular among the nice lads as a late night venue was the newly opened restaurant of Kaupunginhotelli, the City Hotel. In the 1960s it was a classy place and one where you did not expect to bump into your co-workers or neighbours but rather hoped to meet some interesting visitors (cf. Churchill 204, 837). The nice lads knew how to transform their style into social capital, so the well dressed and behaved young men fitted the ambience without problems. The restaurant was run by a woman nicknamed “Miss Watti”, and over the years several homosexual men worked for her. She got along so well with the nice lads that they assumed she was herself inclined “like that”. The place grew so popular among men that in some evenings the waiters would notice how the bar was, as they said, “full of homos”.

If the men did not get lucky in either Tillikka or City Hotel, they could still walk to the fast food stand in front of the railway station. There they checked out if that “Last Hope” had something else to offer besides a hot sausage.

Just like the outdoor meeting places, the indoor venues were also mainly male dominated public spaces. The continuing male presence made it possible for those men interested in other men to subtly play with and bend the social rules to accommodate their own sexual needs. The presence of like-minded men also provided necessary validation and

support in a post-war environment that otherwise was not so welcoming for homosexuality. However, in public spaces women seem to either subordinate themselves to the male rules or disappear altogether from the field of vision.

Private Homes

If public spaces were male dominated, private spaces were considered to be more the turf of women. Hence one could assume to find traces of female same-sex intimacy there. Even as women did have access to private spheres, most prominently homes, those were often crowded by family members and other dwellers. As much as homes offered privacy from the outside world, they were also denying it for the members within the household. In private spaces the paradoxical sexual privacy and safety in anonymity which was characteristic for public spaces was replaced by a lack of sexual privacy through constant presence of known people and continuous surveillance through them.

The post-war housing policy, however, assured that new state-subsidised one-family houses were built to ease the pressing housing shortage. These new wooden model houses had a novel floor plan, introducing a separate kitchen and a living room. A master bedroom for the parents downstairs, and a room or two for children upstairs made them just perfect for a heteronormative family life (Saarikangas 1993, 119–121).

But at the same time such a floor plan, with a staircase in the porch, made it possible for the off-spring to engage in non-normative sexuality by inviting visitors without

parents' approval. One only had to be careful with the noise – something two sisters failed to pay attention to when they had their shared girlfriend over. Alarmed by the noise of the steal springs of the bed their father stormed upstairs, only to find his daughters in a compromising situation with another woman. Although sexual freedom at home was restricted by the controlling gaze of others (Johnston & Valentine 1995, 100–101), at least one of the men interviewed successfully smuggled visitors in and out of the family house at night time by carefully placing his feet on the creaky wooden steps to the same beat as his guest.

Living together with parents and taking care of them up to old age was something unmarried children were supposed to do, irrespective their gender. One of the men I interviewed stayed with his mother until she died at the age of 90-something, thus losing his chances to live with any of his male lovers. On occasions he chose to invite selected friends to join his mother for a nice cup of tea, but other than that he outposted his sex life elsewhere.

To move away from parents in order to live independently was seen culturally improper for young women, for whom adequate housing arrangements had to be secured. Subletting a shared room at the home of ones relatives, or sharing an apartment with older siblings could provide an acceptable solution. This, once more, did not allow for much sexual freedom. In contrast young men were allowed to live by themselves if they only could afford it. This gave the daring ones an opportunity to invite particular male friends over, and also, maybe less conspicuously, to arrange little parties or get-togethers.

A common feature at that time was elderly single men who offered parties in their homes and invited younger men over (for a detailed description of such a host and his house in Turku see Hautanen 2005, 22–28; for male networks in Sweden see Rydström 2003, 256–259). Women were less likely to have the finances to live by themselves. Anyhow, rumours existed in Tampere that also some of the better off women, most likely the married ones, were leading a double life with their own selective “sewing circles”.

If subletting was not an option, also sharing an apartment with another woman was sometimes considered a decent thing to do. With a shortage of eligible men to marry, there were plenty of women in Tampere who simply had to share in order to make ends meet. The possibility of same-sex sexuality in such live-in relationships was a potential, yet a futile topic for discussion, considering the pressing financial circumstances. When publicly unrecognized intimate relationships occurred between two women sharing, they could also be easily destroyed by family crises. It happened, for example, that the “spinster” daughter with a shared flat was assigned to become a caretaker for her sick family member, who was then to move in and replace the now dispensable former “subtenant”.

However, the same failure to recognize women as sexual beings in their own terms which may have broken the same-sex relationships also occasionally facilitated them. Since the old Finnish code of hospitality required that a guest is to be offered the best bed in the house, it was well understood in a working-class family that the man of the house moved away from the marital bed to make room for

an overnight female visitor. This is how one of my interviewees managed to steal some undisturbed nights together with her married girlfriend.

Although by the 1960s the male homosexuality had become a household concept to the extent that men started to feel rather uneasy about living together, female homosexuality remained culturally invisible to a surprising extent. This cultural incomprehensibility of female same-sex sexuality, paired with financial pressures, facilitated inconspicuous joint lives of several female couples. In most cases there is little evidence to prove the sexual nature of their relationship, especially if the women in question wisely enough chose not to initiate outsiders to it. Likewise the idea that married people would engage in same-sex sexuality did not easily enter people's minds, which also provided leeway for same-sex sexual explorations.

New Possibilities through Work and Hobbies

Class was not an issue that would have been mentioned in regard to restricting the activities in men's outdoor meeting places. Men from all walks of life were known to frequent the parks and toilets of Tampere. But when looking at the working life and hobbies, it immediately became evident that the town was still painfully divided in two distinct camps. This was the case even decades after the civil war of 1918.¹³ Both the "ordinary working class people" and the "better people" clearly knew their own place, a distinction which was persistently maintained in various institutional settings. The town had, for example, two competing

theatres, the Tampere Workers' Theatre and the Tampere Theatre, and there was never a mistake in which one you patronised.

Parents clearly recognized education as the way to improve the future of their children, both girls and boys, but despite that working class children often took up some paid work as soon as they turned 15. Employment was understood to be self-evident for both women and men in industrial Tampere. Hence Tampere was known in Finland not only as the town where the first electric light was switched on in 1882, but also as the city of "cotton gals", in reference to those young women who came to work in the huge textile factories.

Those factories, just as offices, hospitals and schools provided for women safe, semi-public and most often sex-segregated environments, and hence, at least theoretically, ample possibilities to meet and to get to know other women. Occasionally passes were also made in those places, but often the tight working schedule did not leave much time for flirting. Moreover the watchful eyes and relentless gossip of the co-workers curbed accepting the advances. Sometimes mutual interest grew nonetheless to the extent that the women secured themselves some time and space for privacy in the realm of the work place.

Intimate encounters could take place when some goods had to be brought or collected from the stocks, and the couple could withdraw from the gazes of co-workers. In one of the offices two women regularly drew back to the restroom, allegedly for a cigarette break, and left the other co-workers wildly guessing what really happened behind the

closed doors. Men, on the contrary, often chose not to take such sexual risks at the workplace, but rather compartmentalised their lives and chose other more remote venues for sexual intimacies – or they used the work premises only if they were in a position where they knew for certain they were the only ones with the keys.

Considering that the big factories provided secure rental housing for many of the workers, the eagerness to take sexual risks at work was remarkably reduced. I was told that therefore one of the cotton gals preferred getting to know pen-friends outside of Tampere to seducing co-workers at hand when trying to find herself a new girlfriend – something that was a rather complicated manoeuvre, keeping in mind the need for coded pen-friend advertisements, six day working weeks, and lack of private cars peculiar to that time.

Although women were often bound at either home or work by their responsibilities, they were also busy passing between different sites when running errands for the whole household (cf. Lindholm and Nilsson 2002, 137–144). Visiting small grocery and speciality shops allowed for meeting friends and having little breaks from other duties. Some of the shops were even women run and owned.

Particular female shopkeepers succeeded in building up a certain reputation among their female customers. For example warnings were exchanged about one garment shop owner, who was known to get a little bit too friendly when clothes were tried on. Nevertheless, buying new clothes gave a legitimate excuse to visit the shop, and the rumours might have been just the extra bit of information

needed for women who were keen on exploring some same-sex intimacy. Like shopping, visiting health services was also something that simply had to be done. One could not become a suspect just by visiting a dentist, even if that dentist allegedly made passes on her female clients. Although it is impossible to know whether such rumours stood for anything real, their sole existence carved out for women new possibilities and a sexual cityscape that was otherwise not visible and available in public discourses.

Despite long working hours and household duties some young women managed to engage in various hobbies. Many of them were sex-segregated as well, and it can be easily assumed that they offered women ample occasions to get to know each other. In Tampere, for example, Varala, founded by and for women already in 1909 offered gymnastic courses for female factory workers in order to help them maintain their physical health. Moreover it organized physical education courses for women willing to become gymnastic trainers. By the 1950s a persistent rumour had established itself, maintaining that all the women gymnasts are “like that”. This was hardly the case, but the fact that the place was in its early decades resolutely run by women, many of whom were spinster teachers already tightly associated with their female companions, greatly supported the rumour. The rumour in turn might have made some young women curious enough to go and see if the “Paradise for Women”, as the place was introduced in a similarly named short film in 1947, would have something to offer them as well.

Moreover such activities as singing, poetry reading, playing

instruments, dancing, and theatre provided possibilities for girls and young women, as well as boys and men, to leave home and get to know new people. However, the class segregation of the town invariably limited the choice of people women could easily meet and become friends with. Even the adult education classes were neatly divided between workers' academy and civic academy.

For some people moving to Tampere from the surrounding countryside was just enough to provide a feeling of freedom, but for those born in the town its social divisions and small circles could feel confining. Especially for those young women who felt restricted by the predictable sphere of family, neighbourhood, and school, the idea of moving to the capital meant more chances to make new acquaintances. This certainly worked for men, who easily found their way around by taking advantage of the network of likeminded men they would encounter in the already familiar public meeting places. Similarly the well-intended warnings were used by young woman. Indeed, they directed a young woman, who only recently had moved to Helsinki, to the trails of a small group of women "like that". That is where she finally found herself a girlfriend.

Those looking for more freedoms did not necessarily stop at the national borders but chose to move right across the Gulf of Bothnia to Sweden. The move was easily legitimised by the worsening unemployment that hit particularly rural Finland, but it could have been inspired by sexual motivations as well. Since early 1950s the audiences in Finland had been exposed to the stories of homosexual Swedish men, but the news reports highlighted also the fact

that homosexual deeds had been legal in the neighbouring country since 1944. This bit of information made Sweden appear to be a country "somewhere over the rainbow" for many homosexually inclined, and especially the 1960s witnessed a steady flow of young Finnish people to Stockholm, determined to find their luck there.

This calculation also worked out for two women who both moved from the surroundings of Tampere to Stockholm, and, despite the lack of language skills, found a job there at a factory. When they were both put to work at the same machine, together with other women, they soon fell for each other. After a while they came to realise that also the other migrant women working at the same machine happened to be "like that". Related success stories by Finnish men were published in the scandal papers of the late 1960s, when the men joined the public discussion on decriminalisation of homosexual deeds in Finland by sending in letters to the editor from their new welcoming home country, Sweden (letters e.g. *Hymylehti* 10/1967; 5/1968; see also articles in *Hymylehti* 6/1967; 8/1968).

Those who could keep separate spheres of life neatly apart and then move between them freely, like men often could, were able to shake off some of the otherwise constant social surveillance and thus create autonomous private spaces that they could use also for sexual encounters. Women, for whom home, work, and leisure often fell together, were most of the time much more intensely socially monitored. It required a fair amount of independence, including a financial one, for women to simply wave aside the rumours that followed exceptional choices. Others had to either

suffice with stolen moments in the shadows or move away to start a more daring life without family ties.

Conclusions

Queering material spaces was in Tampere of the 1950s and 60s a process closely intertwined with queering cultural spaces and thus establishing homosexuality as a viable option in the collective imagination. Such a process was enhanced when the idea of homosexuality could be located in tangible, publicly accessible places. The possibility to visit such places anonymously and meet people there who were “similarly different” allowed for social and sexual interaction which eventually made self-identification as a homosexual a feasible choice.

Revisiting the mental and material spaces available for the people in Tampere highlights, however, how such a process to widen one's mental space to include the idea of one's own homosexuality was pronouncedly a gendered one. It is striking to notice the marked difference gender makes in relation to the possibilities of women and men to explore same-sex sexuality, as well as to see the heterogeneity of the possibilities for homosexual identification.

Reports in the tabloid press and scandal magazines guaranteed a cultural visibility for homosexually active men and anchored them firmly in both the cultural and material spaces available for men. Visiting certain public parks, toilets, swimming baths, and restaurants reassured men that they were by no means the only ones sexually interested in other men. Mutual support encouraged them

also to take part in the formation of the concept of homosexuality, to the extent to eventually fight for its decriminalisation.

At the same time different social rules applied for women. Autonomous female sexuality, including female homosexuality, failed to enter the cultural visibility in accessible public realms. Fleeting and vague gossip on particular women “like that” did not make up for the lack of safe and anonymous possibilities to actually get to know other homosexually inclined women.

The strict and constant social surveillance women were exposed to at home, work, and elsewhere made the exploration of same-sex intimacy a rather difficult and risky task. Getting to know somebody happened only by chance and possible intimate meetings had to take place secretly. That the relationships of women remained fleeting and their social circles insular, is further reflected by the fact that the snow-ball method failed to deliver female informants for this study, whereas it worked quite well among homosexual men. The disparate difficulties to attract female informants for research can also be read as a sign of elderly women's ongoing difficulties to identify with the concept of female homosexuality that was absent in their youth, regardless of the actual sexual experiences of the women concerned.

Hence I would argue that research on the spatial construction of homosexuality needs to be approached in a more differentiated and subtle manner in order to capture the construction of such mental spaces which allow for the idea that there are possibilities beyond heterosexuality. Here

the possibility of naming the otherwise unintelligible feelings may be of importance, and just as crucial is the ability to find and secure safe material spaces to explore socially and sexually those feelings.

Particular attention must also be paid to women in order not to lose them out of sight. The case of Tampere indicates that both the lack of public discourse about female sexuality outside of heteronormativity and the overlapping economical and spatial restraints posed on women, moreover combined with ever present watchful eyes of the family, neighbours and co-workers, has made the actualisation of female same-sex sexual activity extremely difficult, if not virtually impossible.

In order to begin to even imagine the ways in which women still might have carved out some autonomous sexual space for themselves one needs to have a closer look at the ways in which women were bound to and constrained by their families, siblings, duties, class, and foremost, gender, which cuts through all these parameters, and then look again at their creative responses to these oppressions, such as the small stolen moments in the middle of the heteronormative female lives. Hence here the focus must shift from providing hard evidence and undeniable truths about the past to exploring possibilities and probabilities hinted at by gendered habits, ongoing traditions and secretively shared gossip.

Notes

1. This article is largely based on my doctoral dissertation *Varjoelämä ja julkisia salaisuuksia* [Shadow Lives and Public Secrets, Juvonen 2002]. I want to thank the Academy of Finland for the financial support in writing this article (project nr. 203730), and Shweta Rimmy Manjiry for assistance with language revision.

2. In 1950 those with an occupation worked to 27 % in industry and in 27 % in services. By 1970 the situation had changed as far as those working in farming and forestry comprised instead of 46 % only 20 %, while industry provided work for 34 % and services for 46 % for occupied workers (Alestalo 1980, 104).

3. Despite a careful camouflage of same-sex sexual activities and the persistent silence of those involved, many heterosexual people had observed the lives of people whom they believed to be “like that”. Therefore, altogether, my 38 interviewees include both women (4) and men (10) who themselves were implied in same-sex sexual relationships in Tampere, but also those who only observed allegedly such in the 1950s and 60s. Among these are family members, colleagues, and neighbours, but also people delivering ones professional viewpoint, such as police officers or waitresses.

4. In mid 1990s, when I started to conduct my interviews, homosexuality was still a very delicate topic in Finnish culture, particularly among older people. To overcome the informants’ reluctance to be interviewed at all for the study I had to promise to prevent them from being identified due to in-group recognition. To pre-empt deductive exposure I have chosen, contrary to common scholarly practice, not to identify quotations even with pseudonyms. The transcripts of original interviews have been donated (as far as release forms permitted) to the Finnish Social Science Data Archive, Tampere, Finland, and can be consulted there.

5. I take up the pseudonym the Herb Grove chosen by Antu Sorainen, who has studied closer the court case (Sorainen 1998). For the articles see *Viikon Totuus* No. 3 and 12/1962; 6/1963.

6 Here the bias of my sample of informants is similar to that of Kennedy & Davis 1993.

7. I thank Kati Mustola for letting me use the unpublished court statistics collected by her for her own research.

8. Tampere City Archive TKArk, 1949 RO IV; 1951 RO I; 1953 RO V.

9. TKArk, 1953 RO III and V; 1954 RO I; 1955 RO II; 1956 RO IV; 1957 RO I, III and V; 1959 RO V. Of the remaining five cases two took place in motels (1948 RO II; 1953 RO I) and three in private homes (1947 RO II; 1951 RO IV; 1952 IV).

10. Even if the police in Tampere chose not to make the surveillance of public toilets a priority, the situation in Helsinki, the capital 200 kilometres south of Tampere, was already very different. There public toilets were frequently raided, also because of the bootlegging that took place there. In Helsinki the men caught in action were regularly charged and sentenced for fornication with another person of the same sex (Löfström 1994, 191–192).

11. In 1953 two young police officers followed how an already known same-sex offender, a husband and father of seven, entered with another man the same cabin of a public toilet in Alaranta, one of the busiest market places of the town. The police detention turned into an exceptional messy court-case with attorneys, character witnesses, medical certificates and an appeal to a higher court. Tampere City Archive TKArk, 1953 RO V.

12. *Kolmen kaupungin kasvot* [The Faces of Three Cities, 1962], a short film by Matti Kassila, shows a scene shot in a park in Tampere. In that a man approaches a woman sitting alone on the park bench at eight o'clock in the sunny summer evening. They chat for a while and soon we see them leave together. The voiceover comments: "Well done, the test succeeded. Twelve minutes. What did we learn from this?"

13. The independence of Finland from the Soviet Union in 1917 was followed by the subsequent civil war in 1918, where the "Whites", forces commanded by the Conservative Senate, overcame the "Reds", Social Democrats and Communists.

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