

**Enacting Privacy and Everydayness online: The case study  
of the Spiteful Tots community**

Terri Chih-yin He

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## Abstract

This thesis focuses on an online Taiwanese community named the Spiteful Tots. The long-term participants are mainly gay men, with several lesbian women, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and heterosexual people. The community, whilst accessible by anyone via a registered screen ID name, operates like a private club. As a part of this community from its beginning in 2000, I am interested in the community in this particular location, not least because of my own affiliation with Taiwan, but because of the cultural specificity of Taiwan as non-Western and yet Westernised. My research methodology is based on approaches inspired by ethnography. I observe the dynamics, participate in the community, collect data, and visit online and offline sites to formulate ideas in relation to both the inside and outside of the community. I use knowledge and experience gained from my interaction with the Spiteful Tots participants and with the wider Taiwanese society. I locate the community within the culture of contemporary Taiwan, utilising and critiquing previous literature on the politics of sexuality, gender theories, and critical analyses of heteronormativity. My findings are: a) the Spiteful Tots participants carefully negotiate ways of maintaining privacy within the group, and do not 'come out' in recognised LGBT ways; b) the Spiteful Tots community focuses on discussion of mundane everyday life, rather than on sexual politics. My findings have the following implications: a) privacy and everydayness enables the Spiteful Tots participants to assert 'freedom from scrutiny and created a zone of "relative insularity"' (Cohen 2000); b) a rejection to heteronormativity is enabled by (re)asserting the right of privacy and validating everyday life as a gay or queer subject, and c) therefore, there needs to be consideration and recognition of gay or queer subjects' right of privacy, as well as academic and political attention to the representation of sexual minorities' everydayness.

Keywords: everydayness, LGBT, online communities, privacy, Spiteful Tots, Taiwan

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## Author's Declaration

This thesis uses the Hanyu Pinyin system of romanisation for Chinese characters (a list of Hanyu Pinyin system can be accessed on <http://www.cnpedia.com/pages/knowledge/baserule.htm>), names and phrases, except when a different conventional or preferred spelling exists, as in personal names (for example, Chu Wei-cheng), places names (for example, Kaohsiung) and other proper names (for example, Kuomingtang).

All posts and texts typed in complex Chinese characters are translated into English language by me unless otherwise indicated.

The section of 'Sexualities' in Chapter Two Taiwan in Context is a former version of the published book chapter 'Why (Not) Queer? Ambivalence about "Politics" and Queer Identification in an Online Community in Taiwan', edited by Thomas Peele, *Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film, and Television*, Palgrave-Macmillan (2007 pp.197-214) '.

The following articles have been published using materials collected while undertaking this research; however, they pursue very different arguments from those presented here: 'Cyberqueers in Taiwan : Locating Histories of the Margins' in *International Journal of Women's Studies* (2007, <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/Feb07/He.pdf>), and 'Hybridity Online: the Cybercommunity of Spiteful Tots', edited by Mark McLelland and Gerard Goggin, *Internationalizing Internet Studies*, Routledge. (Forthcoming in 2008, Chapter 19)

## Chapter One | Enacting Privacy and Everydayness Online

*The special combination of anonymity and accessibility characterizing the Net becomes important here, enabling rapid and safe initial connections and communications so that people may quickly establish levels of mutual confidence and understanding, and then either move into less user-friendly offline space or continue to operate effectively in the localized Net spaces they have created to fit their particular needs.*

(Berry and Martin, 2005: 106)

I am often faced with the question: ‘So, what is your (PhD thesis) topic?’ I want to produce a straightforward answer, but cannot help worrying that a short reply might give the wrong impression of my research and research subjects. Therefore, instead of saying ‘an online *tongzhi* community that refuses to come out as a *tongzhi* group’, I find ways around the question, revising it to ‘I am doing work on an online community of gay men, which the participants insist is *not* a gay community’.<sup>1</sup> But this explanation is a little convoluted and therefore quite difficult for people to follow, necessitating a lengthy explanation, when the inquirer may simply want a short explanatory statement. This recurrent experience demonstrates the complications involved when I try to be clear about my work. First of all, I need to explain how it is possible for an online community to ever *not* be a gay community when it is populated by gay people who spend their time discussing their everyday lives through the lens of the gay subject in contemporary Taiwan. I should add that the participants

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis I will be using gay and *tongzhi* interchangeably. Since, as will be explained later, one of the thesis’ focuses is on the everyday, I thus find it significant to employ gay and *tongzhi* as they are those most frequently used in everyday contexts in Taiwan in relation to the discourse of same-sex sexuality. For one, gay and *tongzhi* are treated in an interchangeably manner in common parlance in Taiwan. And, for the other, despite the quite different genealogies of the two referents in terms of the languages, locations and cultures they are based on (which will be a part to be expanded in Chapter 2), gay and *tongzhi* in meaning both suggest people’s same-sex interest, desire, preference, relationship and/or behaviour. Therefore, they do overlap with each other, and sometimes the dividing line in between them can be unclear for their usage in everyday life.

are not simply rejecting stigmatisation by not claiming a gay identity; they<sup>2</sup> actually prefer *tongxinglian* (homosexual)<sup>3</sup> when forced to refer to their sexual identity.

Secondly, I need to elucidate the difference *and* similarity between ‘gay’ and ‘*tongzhi*’, both in terms of their contextual and semantic meanings. These two levels of explanation involve discussions of the Taiwanese politics of sexuality when complicated by the Western/Anglophone<sup>4</sup> paradigm in sexuality studies and academic disciplines. On one level, it is related to how the marker of ‘gay’ or ‘*tongzhi*’ is conceptualised as that which encompasses a wide range of critical differences, that is, from the mainstream heteronormative social order, culture and conceptions. It is also, on another level, due to this difference that a community formed by a group of gay

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<sup>2</sup> I choose to use ‘they’ throughout this thesis when referring to participants in the Spiteful Tots community. This is for the sake of distancing myself from them, so that I will not end up thinking it’s a ‘we’ and neglect the fact that, when making a generalisation, or doing analysis, I am in fact a researcher whereas they are far from research-based or related. In other words, the ‘they’ should not be read so much as a manifestation of me not belonging to their community, but as a careful gesture implemented to avoid any (even potentially) harmful decision that is based on a ‘we’. In practice, at the beginning (1998 or even earlier) when most of the participants in the Spiteful Tots community had not yet formed a community at all, but was really connected together due to the bulletin boards of several friends who used the same BBS site, I was then not a Spiteful Tot at all. But concerning the Spiteful Tots community that was established in 2000, I have every reason to claim identity of this, as I have been participating and interacting as much as many other Spiteful Tots members. This has given me leverage in conducting my research, although not necessarily in how I perceive the distance between myself and them. As I see it, some distance remaining between the researcher and researched is a must and even a healthy division. It may be argued that issues of relativism and subjectivity may deeply influence what the researcher sees and reports from her/his social location (Bretell 1993), or that the work itself is still valid and useful even if the study does not meet all challenges of validity, as long as it is looking for ways to make a positive impact on society (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Therefore, the division that I am insisting upon may not really produce significant difference for my research. However, while agreeing with these points of view, I still find myself held responsible for whatever I say about the community and would really like to avoid the danger of misinterpretation, over-interpretation or other undesirable situations. That is, situations where I might feel overly comfortable and forget that there should be some kind of boundary, and instead remind myself of this possibility from time to time.

<sup>3</sup> My observation is that ‘*tongxinglian*’ seems relatively more old-fashioned than ‘*tongzhi*’. Spiteful Tots can thus stay away from the fashionable terms and phrases, revealing their differences or uniqueness while objecting to the combination of homosexuality and a sense of trendiness.

<sup>4</sup> Neither the use of Western paradigms or Anglophone paradigms are perfect here. By ‘Western’ and ‘Anglophone’, I mean strongly associated with the intellectual conditions and traditions of Western, Anglophone society, politics and culture. I understand that ‘Western’ and ‘West’ are highly problematic terms and not every Anglophone society is part of the historical and geographical contingency of this hegemony (for example, Singapore and Belize) yet I use it via a defence that, first of all, people in Taiwan usually use ‘*xifang*’ (West) customarily to mean countries that are located in the Eurocentric West and where the inhabitants speak English. Secondly, I argue that the West has long been employed in such a way that it is no longer based on geographical location, but includes a much wider significance. This takes it beyond the mapping of Western Europe and America and instead relates to a more fluid cartography.



people in (or out of) the internet<sup>5</sup> must be characterised as a ‘gay community’ in common parlance. Removing this label of ‘gay/tongzhi’ is to omit crucial information about the community and its participants. While on the one hand, activists and academics might think that designating a community as ‘gay’ gives a sexual minority representation and visibility; on the other hand, when such a naming goes against the will of the participants of a community, they should still have the right to choose where they (i.e., each individual or all participants) wish to position themselves and the community they have created without being condemned or pressurised.

In the hope of pursuing a more equal and friendly world for people of variant sexualities, it is both necessary and significant that a community identifies itself as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer, in order to show that its participants are people with such an identification and/or awareness. While there might be some agreement to this point, the case of the Spiteful Tots community, which I have been studying since 2003, however compels me to ask, how far can this go? To what extent should gay, lesbian or queer subjects identify as such when they are in a community whose main focus is on relaxing and hanging out? I argue that the community I am studying represents a good entry point for understanding an insistence upon issues of sexuality being both publicly private and communally everyday.

Regarding this study, there is also the central issue of the Western, gay-affirmative formulation of ‘coming out’. In the community that I am looking at, it is, however, *not* so much about what Jonathan Alexander (2002) observes as the salient presence of the sexual minorities on the internet:

With more and more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and

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<sup>5</sup> I use ‘internet’ instead of the capitalised ‘Internet’ throughout the thesis because I do not think there is only one kind of ‘Internet’, but in fact many different ‘internets’. The internet is not a collectivity, but highly context-dependent and culture-based. However, I keep the uncountable noun in its singular form, but simply refuse to capitalise it.

questioning (LGBTQQueer) people “coming out”[. . .] on the Internet, [and] it is worth asking how computer technology is being used by queers to communicate, make contact with others, create community, and tell the stories of their lives. Certainly one of the great advantages of contemporary Internet technologies is the overwhelming wealth of information and connectivity it brings (2002: 77).

In Alexander’s presentation of the LGBTQQueer people online, it seems to me that when LGBTQQueer people use the internet to talk about sexuality, it somehow follows that they simultaneously come out. However, I find it worth asking: when LGBTQQueer people ‘tell the stories of their lives’, are they coming out with such stories, or simply using the internet the same way heterosexual people do? One immediate reply to the question, as well as to Alexander’s call to find out ‘how’ computer technology is being used to develop LGBTQQueer communities is perhaps another question: what can be understood about the computer-mediated connections among gay and lesbian people who do not want to highlight or treat their online community as gay? I believe that this study on the Spiteful Tots community will offer some pointers as well as throw some light in response to this question about self-identified gay participants in a community that is not a gay community.

While this study is certainly positioned at the intersection of sexuality and the internet, I am more concerned that the researched community and its participants do not come out on the internet— while they do not deny their sexuality, they do so without self-categorising discussion in the community as *tongzhi*-related. While ‘tell[ing] the stories of their [everyday] lives’ as Alexander expresses it, the Spiteful Tots community participants do not share their coming-out stories and there is little attempt at self-revelation or disclosure of the ‘how I became aware of my gayness’ type. Rather, this online community has always been involved in a kind of rejection of the act of coming out as gay or *tongzhi*; which is significantly facilitated by the

private and everyday contexts in which the internet is utilised. I discuss this at length in Chapters 5 and 6.

This is why, although I examine an online community of people designated as a sexual minority, my work should be more precisely anchored in the research field of gender and sexuality, with the internet part understood as facilitating certain kinds of networked, computer-mediated expressions and communications from a local perspective of non-normative sexuality. My own reading of such a community has led me to understand the importance of privacy on the internet and a kind of everydayness about it that helps characterise how such communities can be established and maintained. In other words, online connectivity and information exchange is only possible when respect and agreement of keeping an online community a private, everyday arena (at least to a certain extent) is clearly shown and executed. In this way, the community is not merely about the participants being gay or *tongzhi*, but more significantly, as Cheng (1998, 28) suggests: about ‘diversification of [homosexual] behaviours’ being ‘seen and respected, not just...treated as fighting positions in the politics of sexuality’.<sup>6</sup>

### **Spiteful Tots**

The community under investigation is called the ‘Spiteful Tots’. About 20 people regularly participate, most of them born in the late 1970s,<sup>7</sup> with a good standard of education, that is, a university degree. They mostly self-identify as gay men, but the group also includes some lesbians and several heterosexual and bisexual women.

Initially, the group was not a community, but simply friends/participants in the same

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<sup>6</sup> The original words in Mandarin Chinese are as follows: They (the interviewed lesbians in Cheng’s book) demand that diversification of lesbian (*nütongxinglian*) behaviours should be seen and respected, not just treated as a fighting position in the politics of sexuality (她們要求女同性戀行為的多元化應該被看見、被尊重，不應只被當成是一個性別政治的戰鬥性位置). I changed the ‘a position’ to ‘positions’ due to the English grammatical agreement between ‘behaviours’ and ‘positions’.

<sup>7</sup> This information was gleaned from offline chats and through the revelation of clues that referred to their age in online chats or posts.

BBS site by owning their personal boards there. Before their joining and setting up the Spiteful Tots community in yet another BBS site, the hanging around the same site began and lasted for two or three years when almost all of its participants were still students in the same university department.<sup>8</sup> It may therefore also be deduced that the community is a result of their friendship in the context of university courses and/or in other internet-facilitated encounters. I also got to know some of the people who started this community when I was a university student myself in another city during 2000. When I now go back and reread some of our email correspondences from the first year of the Spiteful Tots community, I recall having recognised the situation as quite unique, especially in the shy feelings it provoked in me about ‘meeting people online’. Before meeting participants from the Spiteful Tots, I had already been active online for three or four years, and had also met many Spiteful Tots through other boards and communities. But this time, I felt somehow quite bashful, as if I were to ask somebody to dance with me. In one email where I asked which university department the majority of the participants of the Spiteful Tots community were from, they asked me to guess ‘gently’. The guesses were conducted in a specific manner suggested by them. For example, ‘Do you like eating *Yunnan*<sup>9</sup> dishes?’ If they replied yes, it meant they were from the Department of Ethnology; ‘Do you fix toilets?’ if they replied yes, then they were from the Electronic Engineering Department. ‘Are you gay?’ is not understood to be a rude question, but the same kind of probing

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<sup>8</sup> I know these demographic details, alongside other information about the participants and the community, based on the following three sources. First, I immediately knew which university the online participants are from, by paying attention to the IP address that shows up on the screen either at the end of the post message, or in the page showing current online users. As long as the participant accesses the internet via the Taiwan Academic Network, the IP address will be a series of numerical combinations starting with 140. For example, National Taiwan University is 140.112.xxx.xxx, Chiao Tung University is 140.113.xxx.xxx, National Sun Yat-sen University is 140.117.xxx.xxx. Secondly, as will be illustrated later, I once asked them which department they were based at, via BBS within-site emails. Thirdly, I came to know many facts about the participants and about the community from reading posts and chatting to participants online. I also also attended a couple of offline gatherings with Spiteful Tots participants and naturally came to learn things from the ensuing conversations.

<sup>9</sup> Yunnan is situated in a mountainous, Southeast area of China. In Taiwan, Yunnan dishes are usually promoted as similar to those from Thailand.

question showing their possible affiliation to a Fine Arts Department.

I was not very deft in asking such questions, which I figured were intended to ridicule common stereotyping. However, in the initial interactions and explorations, I came to understand more and more the interesting and special ways in which the Spiteful Tots participants act *both* indirectly and critically. They are very careful about the way they disclose personal information, and also try to be aware of the identity of posters (I felt the need to let them know where I was based after I learned which department they were from as a way of showing sincerity, and I could tell at the time they appreciated this small gesture). While being careful, the Spiteful Tots also tried to keep the atmosphere of the community relaxing and friendly for new people whose screen names were unknown. There were plenty of considerations like these in the first few years: on the one hand, this is indeed a community in which the active participants are mainly friends and acquaintances from other contexts (whether offline or not); on the other, they are not claiming it exclusively for themselves. Instead, they consciously organise the community in such a semi-private-and-semi-public way, so participation from others who enjoy the community will also be possible. There is thus clearly a conflict in their online behaviours: both trying to keep this online place private and secure, as well as opening it up a little to enable new people to join. Issues related to this conflict will be discussed more clearly in Chapter 4 and 5.

### **Non-tongzhi?**

Sliding in between attitudes of cautiousness and open-mindedness, the participants are, also very critical of the sexual identity of *tongzhi*. They clearly state that the Spiteful Tots community is not a *tongzhi* community, and that the participants should not limit themselves in this regard.<sup>10</sup> I grew very interested in this aspect of ‘not-naming’ and wondered what it might signify for the contemporary politics of sexuality in Taiwan.

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<sup>10</sup> This will be further discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

A significant part of my endeavour is, as a result, to establish an academic and practical stance of engaging in sexual politics from the position of private and everyday homosexuality. Relatedly, I wish to challenge existing sexuality studies that have for so long neglected the dimension of the ordinary and everyday, and have not sufficiently considered the perspective of those who are conveniently thought of as ‘silent and invisible’. There has not been much scholarship focusing on those visibly uninvolved in events and moments of gay/queer activism, or those who may not even be leading an openly gay or queer life, but who still have to find practical ways in their daily lives for dealing with their sexuality in the context of a society where heteronormative values and systems constitute the mainstream. There are, too, certain ways of assumptions about these people which have been omitted or poorly represented in academic discourse. I think one of the assumptions is that these people are silent and invisible to the public in general because they are relatively privileged, which implies that they do not need to fight for their existence and that they can earn their living by conforming to the dictates of mainstream society. For this study of the Spiteful Tots online community, this particular possibility seems quite true, as I have already revealed that the majority, if not all, participants come from a more privileged, well educated social position. This may bring about certain anxieties: in many ways, we researchers feel that we must not be in the service of the privileged; rather we should voice ideas from the perspective of the underprivileged. And yet I argue that the privileged and underprivileged are perhaps never so polarised in reality; while people are privileged in some aspects, they can however be rendered much less so in others. I also argue that people experience access to and denial of privileges in an intersected manner. In other words, experiences tend to be juxtaposed with each other, rather than occur independently as isolated events or phenomena.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, I

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Dr. Ingunn Moser’s ‘On Becoming Disabled and Articulating Alternatives’ (2005) has

hope that alongside my attempt at understanding those much less studied, this thesis will open itself to the sphere of (self-)assessment rather than merely follow conventions.

My research question hinges upon how the Spiteful Tots community negotiates with the contemporary politics of sexuality. This question is constructed to serve as a means for helping build my key argument, which is that coming out is a far from universal paradigm. For people who do not wish to come out as gay or lesbian, they can still ‘be themselves’ in a safe and easy-to-access space where they may enjoy the feeling of being cared and understood. While coming out can be theorised as a speech act that helps one escape from ‘the defining structure of gay oppression in this century’ (Sedgwick 1990: 71), I propose that we must also think about how a society’s perspective affects the act of coming out. Many factors in relation to social aspects of life - work, family and friends - play an important role in coming out, and these factors may well determine whether people do come out, when to come out, and if it is possible to stay out at all. Most contemporary cultures and societies do not favour homosexuality or queer sexuality, and Taiwan is no exception. However, just as oppressive heterosexist structures are not the same across different cultures and societies, so do they vary in terms of escaping or coping strategies. In presuming that LGBT<sup>12</sup> people should come out of the closet in order to oppose heteronormativity, one thing is neglected, and that is that often, when applying the passionate and powerful application of the dark closet, it is done in a location that is different from its origin in Euro-American culture. That is, heteronormativity for participants in the Spiteful Tots community may differ from what has been theorised and known in most

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discussed how this intersection of privilege and under-privilege orders disability, and makes one become disabled in some ways above others.

<sup>12</sup> Instead of following Alexander’s LGBTQQueer, I use instead just LGBT for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender when referring to different identities of non-normative sexuality.

Western/European countries and cultures. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to delineate the contour of such difference, it may however be useful to affirm that, no matter how different heteronormative values and systems are from culture to culture, any theorisation and argument in relation to how the Taiwanese gay/queer subject deal with heteronormativity should be based on first-hand materials and understood from their perspective. If, for example, they treat heteronormativity as a given, that they must culturally, socially and economically engage with on a daily basis, then these so-called 'closeted subjects' are surely themselves part of the heteronormative familial and societal structure (whether they are themselves inside or outside the institution of marriage). By recognising their symbiosis with heteronormativity, it therefore becomes conceivable to formulate an alternative that does not need coming out, and can be kept away from the metaphor of the closet. The closet, after all, is something that would not simultaneously confirm the power of heteronormativity. So if the gay/queer subjects are not outside of the heteronormative structure but have managed to find ways to live alongside with it, then either coming out nor the closet will be as relevant or helpful in their dealing with their lives in contemporary Taiwan. I will come back to this argument at the end of this thesis, after developing my discussions via issues of privacy and everydayness that are based on observation, participation and my reading of the internet interaction in the Spiteful Tots community.

Berry and Martin (2005) observe that Taiwanese online communities '[enable] rapid and safe initial connections and communications so that people may quickly establish levels of mutual confidence and understanding' (p. 106); and I find this true for the Spiteful Tots community. In addition, I suggest that the 'rapid and safe connections and communications' of the Spiteful Tots community may actually be treated as a topic worthy of research on its own. By doing so, what actually is facilitated by rapid and safe connections and communications can be explored, and



provide the data and evidence to support a less politically committed, broadly defined activist stance— such a position may be exactly what widens the possibility for an improvement of equal sexual rights. In other words, instead of criticising the Spiteful Tots community for not identifying as gay or *tongzhi*, my research takes on an affirmative point of view and attempts to find out what kind of insight this perspective may engender for the discourse and studies of sexuality. Consequently, my research into online privacy and everydayness builds an argument for the importance of *not* coming out.

### **Coming Out**

Coming out, in contemporary understanding ‘revolves around the concept of a common marginalized sexual identity’ (Groves et al. 2006: 115). To come out as being in possession of a less mainstream sexual identity is about beating the ensuing stigma. Since the opposite of coming out is usually thought of as ‘staying in (dark) the closet’, (a dark place), then ‘coming out (and into to the light)’ is thus grasped as a sign of political power and credibility (Martin 2003; Lin 1997). Darkness in this instance is compared to a kind of sabotage, or hindrance, caused by closeting sexual progression. This is because the concept of ‘staying in the closet’ implies that the gay/queer subject is silently and invisibly colluding in his/her own oppression. This collusion takes away the credibility and validity of those gay or queer subjects who may just prefer to keep their sexuality private. Their preference for privacy would also render them less politically powerful, precisely because they are not ‘visible’. In other words, not only does this action of coming out fail to affirm the value of retaining one’s own privacy, but it also functions as an imposition rather than an invitation to the gay subject. For any gay or queer subject has to come out as such before s/he can fight for sexual rights. If they choose to stay in the so-called darkness of the closet, then it follows that they are not as out and, perhaps, not as proud of their sexuality. The associated idea of

remaining closeted is therefore that they are not as entitled to obtaining political validity.

However, this context of championing ‘visibility’ presumes coming out as a strange exception, as the concept of coming out itself sets the default of everyone being heterosexual, which is why there is a need to come out as not straight. This is also a situation that has been noted and described in arguably more liberal surroundings, which is the environment where almost all of the Spiteful Tots participants first explored their sexuality, that is:

in an academic setting where coming out in the classroom or lecture hall is a jaw-dropping exception, where heterosexuality need not be spoken because it is always assumed, speaking “as a lesbian feminist” will always be heard as at once isolated and highly individualized phenomenon and, paradoxically, a speaking *for* every other lesbian or gay person (Pellegrini 1994: 12; original emphasis).

Pellegrini suggests that, despite everyone is a gendered and sexed self, speaking as a lesbian feminist is however taken to be isolated and individual cases. Paradoxically, though, this isolation and individualisation is taken as representative of all other gay or lesbian people. Although this paradox, resulting from the act of coming out, is set against the backdrop of the classroom and lecture hall, it is significant to note that the arguably more liberal space of the campus might not necessarily aid expressions of queer sexuality, but simply provide a chance for non-queer people to learn from the mistakes and misunderstandings that occur when dealing with non-normative sexuality. Pellegrini, for instance, was later confronted by a female student who, upon learning her teacher’s identification as a lesbian feminist, wanted to understand how Pellegrini was able to be so sure of her sexuality, asking what it meant to ‘really’ be gay and how it felt when she fell in love and what she did in bed (1994: 11). Pellegrini

comments on the experience of conversing with her young interlocutor:

[I]t seemed to me that her discomfort with my coming out brought into high relief the kind of knowledge claims implicit on both sides of any coming-out scene. It also suggested a rupture between what she (and other students) would accept as a valid intellectual exercise, on the one side, and dismiss as unnecessarily provocative and frivolously personal disclosure, on the other. [. . .] Because she interpreted my self-declaration as “lesbian feminist” as the most personal and intimate thing I could have shared with anyone (in this case, with 480 strangers), she also took my coming out as an open invitation to press for more and more information. (2000: 11)

This interpretation of the young female student puts Pellegrini in a position that invites little privacy. Loss of privacy is then cited as a unique phenomenon because, as Pellegrini writes, ‘I find it difficult to believe that she has ever asked one of her presumptively heterosexual teaching fellows or professors how they knew they were straight’ (1994: 11). In other words, coming out is interpreted as a self-declaration that invites all other people to probe into non-normative sexuality, and since coming out is only associated with people who are of non-normative sexuality, members of normative sexuality will therefore be always able to keep intact their own privacy.

While it may be strange for me to make a comparison between what would be the case for Spiteful Tots participants in 2000 and what Anne Pellegrini personally encountered in Harvard’s largest classics course in 1990, I find however that Pellegrini’s account is highly relevant to our discussion of privacy and everydayness. Her interpretation of this particular experience illustrates the kind of dilemma a gay or *tongzhi* person might experience. Although obviously in 2000 the Spiteful Tots were only students and probably did not even think about coming out in front of 480 people in a lecture hall, there is still something significant in what happened to Pellegrini in 1990. This is the issue of the mainstreaming of heteronormativity. I am referring to

Pellegrini in order to aid our understanding of the kind of social surroundings which initially confronted the Spiteful Tots participants when their online community was started. Pellegrini's story explains the situation well and brings to our attention the great insufficiency of institutional sites in which gender and sexuality can be enabled as relevant when they are (made) visible.<sup>13</sup>

The following should further prove that such a comparison is not at all far fetched. According to Sang (2003) in her book *Emerging Lesbians*, a study of lesbian representation in contemporary Greater China (a region including China, Hong Kong and Taiwan), for example, lesbian identities are 'ineluctably lived through "mainstream" discourse as well as in the semi-enclosed spaces of T-Bar and the liberal university campus' (2003: 227). T-Bars certainly have their limits, in that they are also products of capitalist/consumer culture and more often than not youth-centred, and neither are university campuses, as illustrated above, perfectly self-contained havens where young students always feel safe and accepted (Sang 2003). Therefore, there is further evidence that supports this understanding of the contemporary politics of sexuality on university campuses in Taiwan, but without including personal accounts and further interpretations that can be read into the empirical data.

Susan Talburt's (2000) 'On Not Coming Out; or, Reimagining Limits' draws attention to a dilemma that was previously explored by Pellegrini (1994): should gay and lesbian teachers of queer literature, theory and studies come out in the classroom, in order 'to combat heterosexism and homophobia, to offer gay and lesbian students role models, and to counter institutionalized silencing of gays and lesbians' (2000: 55)? Although coming out seems a good idea, 'the logic of taking a gay or lesbian subject

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<sup>13</sup> Despite this critique, I must also give credit to the university association and student campus network, as they have played a crucial role in making the gay/queer movement of the late 1990s possible in Taiwan (see for example, Martin, 2003, Wang, 1996; Chao, 2005; Lan, 2008). However, I still argue that there are not enough academically based sites which encourage and promote sexuality studies, let alone resources devoted to raising the awareness of sexual and gender equality.

position is [yet] linked to oppositional pedagogies that would challenge ideologies of the instructor as universal bearer of truth, knowledge as disinterested, and pedagogy as properly detached from political concerns' (2000: 55). Talburt further contends:

I really have a problem with the whole idea of role models and all of that stuff, particularly with sexuality, because it involves a reification of stereotypes and the entrapment of people in a particular place [. . .] it's also a self-limiting narrative of self-discovery that keeps circling on itself, and if people treat you like that's the only salient fact about you, it actually is playing on the homophobia that you would like to get rid of (2000: 61).

In order to affirm a status that enables political validity, a gay or queer subject— in this case, a teacher— has to come out as one so as to represent 'my people' and be prepared to sacrifice his or her right to privacy for educational purposes. In this way, political activism is often intertwined with studies of gender and sexuality. This intertwining usually entails a process of revealing one's identity, speaking out, and fighting for infrastructural access, benefits and human rights. Such actions symbolise a sign of progression, as well as a public gesture of hope. However, in practice, identity politics can become problematic, as Talburt notes in scenarios of classrooms and lecture halls. What happens after coming out can unwittingly set a trap that further consolidates the idea of making the coming-out subject representative of all other gay and lesbian subjects, thus running the risk of essentialising the coming out subject and rendering her or him vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion.

In addition, coming out and assuming a personalised resistance position in LGBT activism may bring about a feeling of helplessness, as it may become very limiting for those who identify as such. Verta Taylor and Nicole Raeburn's 'Identity politics as high-risk activism' (1995), for instance, has found out that gay, lesbian and bisexual sociologists as caucus members have encountered 'discrimination in hiring', 'bias in

tenure and promotion’, ‘exclusion from social and professional networks’, ‘devaluation of scholarly work on gay and lesbian topics’, and ‘harassment and intimidation’ (1995: 261-68) due to their ‘various forms of personalized political resistance’ (1995: 259). These material consequences, which can seriously alter the career path of activist academicians, are the result of an activist strategisation of identity politics, in which they ‘have [been] made [. . .] easy targets of exclusionary practices and discrimination’ (1995: 269).

This is not only the case of the Sociologists’ Lesbian and Gay Caucus in the US prior to 1995 (Taylor and Raeburn, 1995), but also true for today’s associations in Taiwan. For example, when I took part in the 968 team in Kaohsiung, an offshoot under the Tongzhi Hotline Association<sup>14</sup> based in Taipei. I was firstly asked to designate myself as *nantongzhi* (male homosexual), *nütongzhi* (female homosexual), bisexual, or transgender. This implies that it is either identification as a *tongzhi*, or as a bisexual that may facilitate feeling related to being a *tongzhi* in contemporary Taiwan, that rationalises one’s participation in the gay and lesbian movement. This process of shifting from an individual to being a part of a group of devoted activists is therefore usually associated, again, with a public self-identification as a gesture of coming out of the closet. Not only is coming out the first thing to do when joining in a *tongzhi* association like 968 and Hotline, but this is also what we do in various talks, events and groups for the public. The declaration, or official taking up of a sexual identity, justifies both the activist and the organisation/association’s attempts at making related appeals or claims. Therefore, the seemingly unproblematic public citing of the coming out, as counterposed by the privacy afforded by the image of the closet, has to be in this process translated into political promises of hope, change and

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<sup>14</sup> Tongzhi Hotline Association is one of the largest and most historical (founded in 1998) social welfare organisations devoted to issues and services related to sexuality.

resources within the official transformation of personal to political. If a gay person happens to champion his or her privacy in this process, then the subject may just have to defer the kind of political activism that requires coming out or showing up at certain public occasions or moments. This sexual progression is therefore majorly facilitated and advocated by a gay-affirmative politics and activism, which entails one's coming of the closet.<sup>15</sup>

As cited in Tom Boellstorff's (2005) study of Indonesian *gay* men and *lesbi* women:

In the West, claims to cultural citizenship are articulated through a language of the visible: *identity* allows the state and civil society to *identify* claimants to equality. For the Western queer subject, being "out" is a prerequisite to a progressive politics. But for many *gay* men and *lesbi* women [in Indonesia], visibility would jeopardize important boundaries between islands of their archipelagic subjectivities. Rather than label *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians as self-hating or backward, the details of their own self-understanding might offer clues. Over and over again, these Indonesians emphasize acts rather than statuses [ . . . ]. Alongside a politics of recognition, this suggests the possibility of an ethics of recognition. (2005: 227; emphasises in original).<sup>16</sup>

A similar resistance to visibility in the case of Boellstorff's study in Indonesia can be witnessed in the Spiteful Tots community, though from what I have accessed, it is hard to determine whether this is primarily because they care more about acts over

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<sup>15</sup> At the annual charity party held by Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association in July 2008, the host at some point joked about how coming out has become a professional activity for people in this association, evidenced by those who need to come out, doing so on various public occasions. The Tongzhi Hotline Association provides counselling service and community support to LGBT people in Taiwan via the 'phone and emails. It is one of the earliest registered groups in Taiwan and perhaps is also one of the more resourceful organisations. Devoted to LGBT issues, the Tongzhi Hotline recruits volunteers annually and is not only concerned with homosexual equal rights, but has also collaborated with the Taiwan Transgender Butterfly Garden for many years. In 2009, I joined in the volunteer training program for the southern Taiwan 968 subdivision under the name, Tongzhi Hotline. I started to see why the host back then would make such a joke. I was asked to come out in front of other volunteers as well as to be mentally prepared that I might need to do so during other occasions, especially when I helping at the afternoon-tea gatherings that included the parents of *tongzhi* sons and daughters.

<sup>16</sup> Tom Boellstorff's italicisation of *gay* and *lesbi* here is due to the fact that these are the Indonesian terms, not English, referring to gay and lesbian.

statuses, or because they just value their privacy, or both. While they are, as I will argue in my thesis, private people who want a semi-public community for themselves and their friends/acquaintances, it is beyond my interest and intention to say that they are like the *gay* and *lesbi* Indonesians in Boellstorff's description, or completely different. What I can be sure of is that any regular participant of the Spiteful Tots community would not avoid mentioning their sexuality or sexual identity and practice with other members of the group. However, they do not see the point of disclosing themselves to the general public.<sup>17</sup> As will be noted, they have their own strategies for making themselves visible, both online in the community and offline during the annual LGBT Pride parade in Taipei. They allow only a certain amount of visibility – that is, in specific ways that allow some kind of protection between themselves and potential public representation. This 'not coming out' into the realm of the public has a dual consequence. Firstly, the participant may be easily excluded from political leverage, possible resources, media exposure and academic representation in terms of their sexual minority status. Secondly, they may also find the whole *tongzhi* movement not applicable, or even irrelevant, to them. At the same time, they may also be severely challenged by *tongzhi* activists or straight friends who are keen to participate in the movement.<sup>18</sup> These devoted activists and other straight but friendly allies might, despite their efforts, find it devastating that their *tongzhi* peers remain invisible and even oblivious to *tongzhi* activists.

### **Gender Imbalance?**

As I have already indicated, there are more gay men than lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people, and others in this community. This may seem strange for a thesis

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<sup>17</sup> Here 'public' means that they would refrain from coming out to anyone or type of media that does not seek ways to publicly or privately show their familiarity and friendliness to the community. That is, to them as individuals, or to anything related to sexuality.

<sup>18</sup> I discuss this situation in length in Chapter 3.



written within the discipline of Women's Studies. My stance towards this obviously imbalanced representation of gender in the researched community is that for one, it is an accident or a coincidence that such a community turned out to be focused on gay male participants,<sup>19</sup> because a) at the time of joining the community, I was not informed of the posters' gender or sexuality, and of course, b) coincidence does not stop a researcher from asking questions or from finding a deeper meaning to an existing phenomenon. While it may be assumed that gay men seem more likely to dominate the dynamics in the community, this community is nevertheless filled with texts produced from the point of view of gay men, with their 'mind's gender' tilting toward a feminine or feminised one, as they endeavour to find ways to express themselves adequately. By claiming this, I am actually capable of supplying data, which involves the constant rendering of themselves as differently represented social types of women. They had/have bulletin boards devoted to *shaonü* (its meaning similar to the ingénue), *obasan*<sup>20</sup> (elder women), sluts (sexy women), Cinderellas (miserable women) and queens (dominant women).<sup>21</sup> Due to the overarching themes of privacy and everydayness, I am not able to dwell much upon texts taken from these boards. I do nevertheless want to highlight this for two reasons, one is to clarify the community's relationship to feminist thought and gender-related theories, and the other is to further position this thesis as a piece of work dedicated to the Spiteful Tots, as well as those outside of this community but able to identify with their emphasis on privacy and

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<sup>19</sup> However, most of the participants in the Spiteful Tots community are from a department that is not male-dominant, so this gay dominance is not because of the department they were based in. Moreover, several of those who were not based in that particular department but ended up in the community nonetheless did come from a more engineering oriented university program, though they did not at all constitute the majority of the community.

<sup>20</sup> *Obasan* is aunt in Japanese, usually used in Taiwan nowadays to call women who are in their middle ages and are no longer young. *Obasan* is also a novel by the Japanese-Canadian author Joy Kogawa in 1981.

<sup>21</sup> Here I have made an omission of several other boards under this category; they are 'Bitch', 'Fairy', 'Virgin', 'Women who faint' and 'Romance' boards. These are no longer in function and have relatively fewer posts, but they are all obviously related to the female types in which the Spiteful Tots participants tend to take an interest.

everydayness when dealing with contemporary sexual politics in Taiwan.

While the Spiteful Tots do mock these gendered stereotypes and representations, it is noteworthy that they also identify themselves with such roles and characters in their recounting of different moments in their lives. It is not uncommon for me to have read a variety of sentimental/sexy/sad stories in which they, as the protagonists, assume those female stereotypical roles. In other words, while it is quite obvious that they are making fun of these female role models, they also take up these roles as part of their own identities, as if extending themselves into these personas allows them to better express their own feelings and ideas. I thus have reason to believe that they utilise these stereotypes so that they can better confront what has been rendered (by heteronormativity) as abnormal or unacceptable about themselves via typed textuality.<sup>22</sup> So while I do not think representing an online community that has more gay male participants than others is really an ideal situation for a student of women's studies, I also do not believe the goal is thus necessarily about reinforcing the imbalance of gender representation. Feminist theories and critiques are highly relevant in trying to understand what the Spiteful Tots are trying to say in between the mobilisation of stereotypes. Moreover, their online textual drag may be theorised as a determined push for the transgressive. For this, queer theory may well contribute to the Spiteful Tots' textual play around gender identity as well as its refusal to be fixed or categorised. Once the concept of queer visibility and transgression is broadened and different ways of being visible are considered as influential (such as being textually visible), the queer space of the Spiteful Tots community may then be understood as questioning the usefulness and relevance of the identity politics of coming out, as textual drag becomes associated with the concept of gender as

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<sup>22</sup> In this thesis, I use 'textuality' to mean the collectivity of texts, 'texts' the various typed symbols, signs and characters, and 'words' the complex Chinese characters translated into English words.

masquerade (Butler, 1993; Phelan, 1997). However, by saying that ‘gender is masquerade’, it actually means that performativity is

not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted; it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self. (Phelan, 1997: 17).

In this respect, both Foucault’s (1978, 1990) and Butler’s writings on sexuality and the notion of the body being immersed in discourse makes a significant impact towards actually seeing the Spiteful Tots community as a queer(ed) space. Adopting a queer position, the Spiteful Tots community is where online participants celebrate their marginal, outlaw status by actively denying the meanings attached to sexual identity, such as that of gay or *tonghzi*. This is far from their hope for assimilation of ‘gay’ into ‘straight’, but rather a celebration of continuing marginality via their insistence upon privacy and everydayness. The Spiteful Tots are happy to stay at the periphery, which is their online community, silent and invisible as they put the centre - the heteronormative- under constant scrutiny.

In this regard, the Spiteful Tots community can be understood as a new kind of queer, which has emerged after some adjustment. The participants are no longer so drawn into the lure of being cast ‘offensively visible’. On a slightly different track, the newly queer Spiteful Tots are convinced that they can employ the social scripts of gender and sexuality in a space for themselves so as to find new and better ways to express themselves and communicate. The main point of this queer space is not so much to act provocatively for a heteronormative audience, but to dismantle the usefulness of gender binary distinctions. This is done by applying textual drag, and also asserting that queerness must also be a kind of ordinariness, with re-examination of the Spiteful Tots’ role in the compulsion of heterosexuality— where privacy and

the everydayness of queer must also be validated, recorded, and established. However, despite the potentially even more appealing result I might get by further applying queer theories to my studies, I have not undertaken research in that direction. Over the years, one of the things I have come to learn about the Spiteful Tots is that they are increasingly tired of theoretical debates and propositions. Queer theory and discourse might help formulate the positive assertion of an endlessly energetic and multiple self who is able to forcibly transgress and counter a culture of heterosexism. But it does not, as the many years of reading the Spiteful Tots' comments have made me realise, alleviate the pain and injustice that takes place in the everyday lives of those who are stigmatised, excluded or hated because of their sexuality. In the end, the Spiteful Tots are not in the community primarily for the sake of queering that space or enjoying the pleasures of transgression, but for enjoying a place where they can just relax and hang out. While one may argue that research is not about only using theories where the researched think appropriate, I argue that relying more on first-hand perspectives and research resources than on ready-made theories should instead be the way towards understanding the research subject. As much as interesting theories (like queer theory) can easily attract a researcher into making an immediate application, I find the task of rejecting my desire to use queer theory as a much more significant step forward. By doing so, I will not introduce a theoretical means that might blur the centrality of my joint foci (privacy and everydayness), and I can also remain more faithful to the community in my interpretations – that is, without being irredeemably swayed by how such a theory might value one and devalue the other.

### **Key Inquiries**

My research question asks how gay (and lesbian) people negotiate contemporary sexual politics in Taiwan, using the Spiteful Tots community as a case study. The research is based on long-time participation in and observation of the Spiteful Tots

community. However this does not suggest that my thesis is without any theoretical basis. The point of departure, as has been discussed, is that there is a lack of academic representation and support for those who are not as actively visible and voluble in the gay or queer movement. There is also the idea that much scholarship has neglected or greatly underestimated the differences between heteronormativity in the Western and Eastern cultural and social contexts in which sexuality is embodied and censored. Based on these, I begin this thesis by attempting to use it as a complement to queer theory. For the convenience of discussion, I will call it the ‘new queer stance’, which shares the same goal of countering heteronormativity but offers revision with its emphasis on visibility. In the hope of avoiding, or at least reducing, the previously mentioned paradox (as quoted in Pellegrini’s essay), I formulate the new queer stance as inspired by my research by focusing on the Spiteful Tots community. This stance lays stress on the necessity of protecting the queer subjects’ privacy and everyday life from any media exposure that might lead to harmful stereotyping or more intolerance and exclusion.

My aims of undertaking this study are therefore: a) to add to the growing body of work that aids understanding of the process by which internet technology is utilised by and for sexual minorities; b) to critique assumptions about the position of a non-coming-out sexual minority in Taiwan; and c) to critically engage with the idea of privacy in this online community, and examine its implications in and for a contemporary politics of sexuality in Taiwanese society, lastly, d) to (re)introduce the idea of the everyday into contemporary understandings of sexuality. While the Spiteful Tots community is the focus of my study, I examine the context of the group’s lives in order to substantiate the way I interpret their posted texts. I move between the Spiteful Tots’ textual discussions of the home, everyday life and other more politically implicated experiences, for example, discussions about Pride parades,

political correctness and *tongzhi*.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 illustrates this Taiwanese background and its current implications for LGBT communities in general, so as to embed the Spiteful Tots community in relation to other similar communities. Chapter 3 further discloses my premise in the researching of the thesis, which deals with the previous academic works in relation to this study here, and discusses the Euro-American influences on Taiwanese development of sexuality. Chapter 4 addresses my methodology, and I discuss in detail how I conducted the research, including how I selected and appropriated texts and utilised them as data. In Chapters 5 and 6, which constitute the substance of this thesis, I investigate and probe into the issue of online privacy and the everydayness of the Spiteful Tots community. The privacy chapter, though mainly focused on online privacy, also deals with the concept of privacy in daily-life situations for the sexual minority, as such a concept is necessarily the basis for understanding online privacy as a part of the Spiteful Tots' lives. I also introduce the issue of coming out; this is framed by the idea of the Taiwanese masked coming-out which occurs in Pride marches. In doing so, I wish to make multiple connections among online and offline pursuits of privacy, and examine how privacy can actually be *enabling* for the Spiteful Tots. In the next chapter of enacting everydayness in the Spiteful Tots community, I explore how the participants choose to stand up for 'being everyday and ordinary' as opposed to 'being offensively extraordinary' in the queer way. Perhaps due to an inability to imagine queer or *tongzhi* as part of ordinary human everyday living, the Spiteful Tots participants are very concerned about being able to represent and reproduce the kind of routine and banality found in their own lives through this textually mediated arena. Interestingly, combining the internet with the notion of everydayness seems much more effortless than might have been expected. At a time when the Taiwanese people can be

ubiquitously connected across space and time via innovative technologies such as the internet and mobile phones, visiting an online community can be an activity both ordinary and mundane. Therefore an internet community may be said to enable and extend the continuum of ordinariness in everyday life and the Spiteful Tots participants can therefore be positioned as quite capable of claiming their everydayness, even in an online context. The fact that enacting everydayness can be easily facilitated enables an expression (or sometimes demonstration) of subjectivity that is both ordinary and sexually non-normative.

While the aim of this thesis is not to proclaim the liberatory potential of technologically mediated sociality for sexual minorities, I do want to conduct this study on the premise that this community is a place where sexual minorities can feel more intimate with each other and certainly more comfortable than in more physically situated communities. This Spiteful Tots community provides an irreplaceable form of connection that can be quite endearing to each of its otherwise uneasily and infrequently connected members. This connected experience of the Spiteful Tots community is ‘real’ for the participants.<sup>23</sup> While I am aware of the common criticism of virtuality<sup>24</sup> as an escape or a lie (such as identity deception: Donath, 1999, or other kinds of virtualness that are read as misleading about reality, for example: Beauregard, 1993; Deutsche, 1996; Goss, 1993; 1996; Sorkin, 1992; Wark, 1994; Huxtable, 1997), such commentaries presume ‘real life’ as being without any imaginative elements and instead, purely materialistic. I, however, argue that real life is extending with the

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<sup>23</sup> Reality, according to Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English (2005), is

1. the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them.
2. a thing that is actually experienced or seen.
3. the quality of being life like.
4. the state or quality of having existence or substance.

Real life can then be regarded as the life that exists in reality. It is generally a term used in reference to life or reality outside of a corresponding environment which is seen as fiction or fantasy, as in the internet, virtual reality, dreams, novels, or movies.

<sup>24</sup> Virtuality should be understood in this case as associated with actions, thoughts and artefacts that are the result of the imagination, whether being aided or implemented by the internet or other kinds of innovative technology.

popularisation of the internet. The material and physical aspects of life, while certainly pinning down what the concept of real life is, have also codified the regulation, formulation, interaction and understanding of the internet. So while in the online the ways we present ourselves may be purely textual or media-based, yet the content of such presentation is not at all ungrounded when presented within the context of pre-internet or offline knowledge and skills. As previously suggested, the Spiteful Tots community is a place where its participants respond to the real life that surrounds them every day. In such circumstances, a concern about privacy naturally arises and is hinged upon something ‘real’ about a person that would render him or her vulnerable and that potentially needs protected. This concern springs from a belief that if their homosexuality is known, they may well be stigmatised. But it may also be used to show that the Spiteful Tots participants input into the online community a ‘real’ part of themselves and that this must be taken great care of.

Having established the importance of viewing the Spiteful Tots community as real and necessarily maintained as, to certain extent, private,<sup>25</sup> I want to further discuss why the ordinary, or the enactment of everydayness in this online community, is worthy of attention. For a sexual minority, conventional communities may mean an entirely different thing than they do to other less sexually marginalised people. Even when people are able to interact physically, a Spiteful Tots participant may well be unable to find those physically around as supportive as other online participants would be in this online community. On the one hand, a sexual minority cannot expect other gay or queer subjects to be always able to present themselves in a candid or unrestrained way in their social dealings with other (presumably heterosexual) human beings. On the other, while online sexual non-normative users are not automatically

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<sup>25</sup> I feel that the community is actually quite public and yet I have to recognise it is also private, but with every participant there knowing about its public status.



connected together when they are on the internet, they can asynchronously co-present in their textual encounters and interactions, that is, through the mediation of an online community. Therefore, the kind of everydayness that the internet enables them to collaboratively enact in an LGBT community is vital to their understanding of themselves and others, as it is something that cannot easily be done in an alternative scenario or context, where one does not know the sexual identification of other participants. From this point of view, however, I do not feel ready to explore or posit any formulation of ‘gay (and lesbian) ordinariness’, though I certainly endorse the importance of such theory-building and probing. This is partly due to everydayness existing as a concept yet to be demarcated with a certain boundary, as well as one to be shown within a context (what may be seen as everyday for one may be seen as extraordinary for another), and partly because what the Spiteful Tots community is able to provide me with (i.e., its data) is not sufficient to enable me to work with such a theorisation.

This introduction emphasises the importance of staying away from the lure of the Western/Anglophone paradigm of coming out and avoiding nativisation, while conducting research on non-Western cultures. This chapter sets the scene for the whole thesis by delineating the outline of the project on the Spiteful Tots community when it is deliberately positioned by its participants as a non-*tongzhi* community and participated in by those who may however be identified as gay or *tongzhi* by our researchers. It also exposes the insufficiency of recognising so-called ‘local specificities’ when conducting research based on a gay-affirmative perspective. In a way this insufficiency may be easily understood as something that closely relates to ‘local specificities’; however, this understanding seems to reiterate an awareness of local specificities to the degree of missing the simple and obvious, which is the consequences as a result of coming out. On the one hand, this thesis acknowledges

that the Spiteful Tots participants are more privileged than others in the sense that they are well-educated, have access to networked computers and can enjoy the internet through the creation of their own spaces. However, any kind of advocacy and activism has to be related to the mobilisation of resources and knowledge, sometimes even to social and cultural privileges. Therefore, such privileging of people like the Spiteful Tots participants actually promise better continuity and stability for the development of a *tongzhi* movement in its broadest sense. As a result, this is a thesis about a less researched and exposed group who, despite their privilege, is not part of the existing structure and organisation of *tongzhi* activism. By studying them we may gain insights into an underrepresented group of lesbian and gay people, a group that is making a contribution to the *tongzhi* movement in a much less conventional and less easily recognisable way.

## Chapter Two | Taiwan in Context

This chapter highlights the unique political and cultural situation of Taiwan, focussing particularly on the relationship between international affairs and the politics and discourse of sexuality. The chapter gives a clear idea of how and why sexuality has been expressed in a particular political voice that treats sexuality as something Westernised, and demonstrates the necessity of this political strategy that started from the 1990s.<sup>26</sup> In order to illustrate the kind of ‘particular political voice’, I offer below the first LGBT Civil Right Movement Festival in 2000. I hope that this gives a significant and useful example of the relationship between sexuality and politics in action, as well as demonstrates the accumulation of movements and discourses in relation to sexuality since the 1990s. The bulk of the chapter then teases out the meanings of and relationship between ethnic identities, Taiwan’s international status, the politics of sexuality and sexual identities as a way to prepare the reader for more major discussions on the Spiteful Tots Community.

The LGBT Civil Rights Movement Festival is one of the most important gay and queer movements in Taiwan. It is publicised as being officially supported by the city government of Taipei and yet has benefitted from limited government funding since 2000. According to Hsü (2007), the symbolic gesture of supporting gay and lesbian communities by the city government of Taipei was due to ‘Mayor Ma<sup>27</sup> [keeping] his promise to support LGBTIQ<sup>28</sup> groups, [despite] the pressure from the internal civil

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<sup>26</sup> For more evidence that supports this date please refer to Chu 2000; Chao 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Mayor Ma is now President Ma Ying-jeou of Taiwan.

<sup>28</sup> Since Hsü’s work was written in Mandarin Chinese (other than the English dissertation title and abstract), there is no explanation of what she had in mind when she used both LGBT and LGBTIQ in her work—whether there is any difference between them, or whether different politics of sexuality are represented by these terms in the context of contemporary Taipei. While it may be valid for the reader to speculate that she uses LGBT and LGBTIQ interchangeably to designate sexual minority, I need to highlight that this remains unclear as straightforward notes or references to these English acronyms are lacking (in the Chinese abstract,, Hsü simply uses *tongzhi*, which in the Taiwanese context means

service system and religious groups' (2007: iv). By foregrounding the way the LGBT Civil Right Movement Festival came into play, Hsü also hints at the ramifications of this event being part of electoral promises and political manipulations. Moreover, on September 6<sup>th</sup> 2000, the Christian Newspaper Tribune<sup>29</sup> publicly opposed the Taipei city government's involvement in the LGBT Civil Right Movement Festival. The argument reads:

Homosexual parades and gatherings in foreign countries are full of lust and pornography. The city of Taipei does not need to call for participation based on homosexuality, and nor should the city use this as a sign of being lifted up to the standard of an international metropolis.<sup>30</sup>

It appears that the objection is to the image of the Taiwanese government endorsing Taipei as an 'internationalised' place, implicating unwanted foreign decadence. In this example, the chief editor of the Christian Newspaper Tribune hopes that Taiwan's reputation as a liberal and urban city with open-minded and progressive-thinking citizens does not automatically suggest Taiwanese support for homosexuality, which is, according to this editor, scandalous due to the inappropriate desires of homosexual people.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the city of Taipei need not align itself with "lust and pornography" in the hope of being recognised as progressive. The existence of homosexuality, the editor implies, is irrelevant to whether or not Taipei can be lifted up as an international city.

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homosexuals or homosexuality, rather than LGBT or LGBTIQ).

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.ct.org.tw/>

<sup>30</sup> The original passage in Chinese is '國外的同性戀集會都充斥著淫慾與色情，台北沒有必要以此集會，作為晉升國際都會的指標。'

<sup>31</sup> The Christian Newspaper Tribune has been disagreeing with LGBT Pride parades for a long time, and finally in 2009 they have decided to take some action. On October 24 2009, Christian Newspaper Tribune has called for Christians and churches in Taiwan to amass in Taipei and join in a parade whose appeal is set to oppose to the annual LGBT Prides. From 2 to 4 o'clock in the afternoon on this Saturday, the Christians express their discontent during the past years of LGBT Prides by saying a prayer for all homosexuals in order to show that God's love is so powerful that it surpasses homosexual love, as well as cleanses the impure sky of Taiwan.

Clearly, there is an intention behind the city government's involvement in the LGBT Civil Right Movement Festival, and this intention has been deduced as a way of helping Taiwan appear both international and liberal. The discourse of progressiveness can also be discerned in the web pages devoted to this LGBT Civil Right movement, which are based on a neutral web address of 'dot net', free from governmental association (dot gov), NGOs (dot org), or even the profit-making dot com.<sup>32</sup> The current English version home page (2009) gives information about the latest LGBT Civil Right Movement held in 2007, and states: 'the event features the theme of "Stand by Queers, Love Taipei" with the "Catching Lesbian and Gay movies" Film Festival and the "Getting to Know Queers" Panel Discussion'. The slogan 'Stand by Queers, Love Taipei' interestingly suggests that the major audience for this event is assumed to be 'non-queers' who choose to support ('stand by') queers. This action of 'standing by queers' is immediately associated with 'love Taipei', explicitly exposing the belief that 'standing by queers' may be understood as a way of showing one's love for Taipei. The series of film showings and panel discussion events, in addition, display the presumption of audiences being non-queers, as the film festival is not just about catching any movies, but 'Catching Lesbian and Gay Movies', and discussions are provided to let straight people 'get to know them'.

From these two examples, it is possible to begin to understand how the politics of sexuality is an integral part of the promotion of the city of Taipei. These examples indicate that the liberal and progressive discourse of sexuality has been introduced into Taiwan from 'the international', has been locally negotiated and formed in order

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<sup>32</sup> The website is on <http://www.lgbttaipei.net/en/index.htm>, last accessed in 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009. Currently the site is not accessible; however, there is another website that becomes available for the LGBT Civil Rights Movement Festival 'Rainbow Taipei, Health City' in 2009, which is on <http://www.rainbowtaipei.org/>. According to this website, the 2009 LGBT Civil Rights Movement is still sponsored by the Taipei City Department of Civil Affairs, and the main idea is still evolved around the kind of well-rounded development of city of Taipei as an international metropolis that welcomes diversities in sexuality.

to become as ‘internationalised’, and that, despite the controversy, the city government is willing to adopt this discourse in its aligning with LGBT Civil Rights Movement Festival. I am therefore interested in how these complex relationships affect the everyday lives of the Spiteful Tots. In order to explore this further I shall now offer an in-depth investigation into several political issues occurring in contemporary Taiwan. I do this as a way of preparing the reader for more critical thinking about the interplay between sexuality, location and technology. The changing and unsettled socio-political conditions that I will be considering are: ethnic identities, Taiwan’s international status, the status of technology and the politics of sexuality and sexual identities. Following this, an overview and critique of how local politics of sexuality have influenced the development of sexuality studies in Taiwan will be provided. In this chapter as a whole, I attempt to offer a detailed impression of the academic, international and technological situation of Taiwan. These topics deal with the national and international politics of Taiwan, and indicate how such politics condition the way knowledge and practice is transferred and localised. These notions are introduced from a cultural perspective, offering a taste of ‘what it is like to have lived in Taiwan since the 1980s’, as well as giving an academic and theoretical interpretation, or narrative, of what it means for Taiwanese citizens.

### **The Position of Taiwan**

The close interactions of Taiwan with other countries, especially China, the US and Japan, evidence a complex history of diplomatic relations. Taiwan is not the only East Asian nation with these issues, but due to its uneasy relationship with China, Taiwan has been more heavily influenced by them. In order to elucidate these issues of power, I first address the ethnic conflicts in Taiwan, as they have greatly influenced how Taiwan has been developed economically, politically and technologically, leading to its current state of national ambiguity. I then move onto a more local politics and

history of sexuality, focusing on the special way that feminist thought, along with discourses and theories of gender and sexuality, have found their way to Taiwan. This leads me to the Spiteful Tots community, and I hope by then to have convinced readers of my argument that the current situation of the Spiteful Tots needs to be understood in terms of ethnicity and China-Taiwan relations, and that this political and cultural context has changed the way sexuality is understood in Taiwan.

While there is an obvious paucity of Anglophone scholarship on gender and sexuality in Taiwan,<sup>33</sup> researchers are in contrast much more intrigued by Taiwan's politics when framed in (dis)connection with China,<sup>34</sup> focusing on nationalism-related discourses from diversified perspectives, or on various contemporary social, cultural, political, economic, governmental and cinematic moments (for example, Robinson, 1991; Ferdinand, 1996; Hood, 1997; Hughes, 1997; Cooper, 1999, 2003; Hsiao, 2000, 2004; Brødsgaard and Young 2000; Corcuff, 2000, 2002; Lijun, 2001; Lu, 2002; Katz and Rubinstein 2003; Roy, 2003; Brown, 2004; Makeham and Hsiao 2005; Friedman, 2006; Wachman, 2007). These scholarly accounts, generally speaking, focus on the construction of Taiwanese identity for those who are either recent immigrants from China (mainly from the 1950s under Chiang Kei-shek's government) or long-term residents (who immigrated to Taiwan in

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<sup>33</sup> Exceptions are, to name just a few, *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture* written by Fran Martin, *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same Sex Desire in Modern China* written by Tze-lan D. Sang, *East Asian Sexualities* edited by Stevi Jackson, Liu Jieyu and Woo Juhyun, Song Hwee Lim's *Celluloid Comrades: Representation of male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinemas*, and Pei-chia Lan's *Global Cinderellas: Migrant Domesticity and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan*. Later in this chapter there will be more detailed discussion on this phenomenon.

<sup>34</sup> This is especially true of the Centre of Taiwan Studies which is situated in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. The research focus is on Taiwan's politics, social and economic situation (see <http://www.soas.ac.uk/taiwanstudies/>). Since 2004, annual Taiwan Studies conferences have been held by the European Association of Taiwan Studies, to which I have submitted several abstracts on gender and sexuality, though these have never been accepted. An online article on the recent research interest shown in Taiwan can be found at <http://taiwanreview.nat.gov.tw/ct.asp?CtNode=119&xItem=24694>

larger groups from the 1700s onwards).<sup>35</sup> The reason for such a long lasting interest in this relationship is rooted in the contemporary democratic development of the East Asian region, with Taiwan's shift to political liberalisation having been implemented under threats of Chinese missile tests and military manoeuvres. However this focus on Taiwan's politico-socio- historical trajectory is not without its limitations. Despite the special conditions that enabled this particular democratic shift in Taiwan, it would be a shame to forget that Taiwan was within America's sphere of influence in the Cold War, while China operated within that of the Russians. In other words, political development in Taiwan has never been 'on its own', but always already related to both its Western and Eastern counterparts. As Rey Chow (1993) has pointed out, 'while plenty of work is done on East Asian women, much of it is not feminist but nationalist or culturalist; while plenty of work is done on the modern history of East Asia, much of it is not about East Asia's shared history with other orientalised cultures but about East Asia as a "distinct" territory with a distinct history' (Chow 1993: 7). Chow manifests the way most work has been done in the name of East Asian Studies in the recent past. These studies generally lack a critical spirit and thus fail to challenge the reinforced boundary between East Asia and other regions, especially the West.

This is indeed true of much research on Taiwan, including popular topics such as Taiwan's presidential elections, its international status, ethnic conflicts, and money-based diplomatic relations.<sup>36</sup> This is because they are, in my opinion, wrongly investigated, emerging from the perspective whereby Taiwan is treated as a distinct entity, with its own conspicuous historical, national and cultural context. However,

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<sup>35</sup> About 1.9% of the population belongs to yet another category, which is constituted of Taiwanese aboriginals. These are descendents of people who speak Austronesian languages, and yet it is not clear where their ancestors may have come from. For further information, please consult the Taiwanese governmental web pages, [http://www.apc.gov.tw/english/docDetail/detail\\_ethnic.jsp?cateID=A000427&linkRoot=101](http://www.apc.gov.tw/english/docDetail/detail_ethnic.jsp?cateID=A000427&linkRoot=101) and <http://www.tacp.gov.tw/ENGLISH/INTRO/FMINTRO.HTM>.

<sup>36</sup> Also known as 'dollar diplomacy'.



though much scholarly work has presented Taiwan in a limited perspective, one that grants little critical or reflexive thought on the region's interaction with other parts of the world, I still find it necessary to recap and respond to this scholarship. There are two reasons for this. One is that I might be able to contribute to the way people in my age group (i.e., most of the participants of the Spiteful Tots) think about these issues.<sup>37</sup> The other is that reviewing this particular field once again, still helps illuminate how ethnicity has been understood and contextualised. Consulting the work of local academics, I outline the history of colonialism and conflict of ethnicity, and then point to the current situation of social assimilation among ethnic groups occurring within a climate of continuing political tension.

### **Ethnic Conflicts**

Ethnicity in Taiwan has long been a controversial issue, especially at election time. It is a common belief that people might agitate for candidates from the same ethnic background as themselves, disregarding their actual mission which is to select those candidates who are particularly capable. This is because, ethnically speaking, Taiwan is very diverse, and at election time, there is always a sense of suspicion and distrust towards those of other ethnicities. To clarify, the 'Taiwanese' today are dwellers from four major ethnic groups - descendants of earlier settlers from China who arrived in the *Qing* Dynasty, who are *Hoklo*<sup>38</sup> but now call themselves Taiwanese (*taioanlang*),<sup>39</sup> *Hakka*<sup>40</sup> people, Mainlanders, and Aborigines. Other than the Aborigines, *Hoklo* and *Hakka* people are considered most 'Taiwanese', as they migrated from the coastal provinces of China more than two centuries ago and have therefore been living in Taiwan for generations. However, historically speaking, the

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<sup>37</sup> This may however be biased, as I am a Mainlander who grew up in the 1980s and 90s and self-identifies as a Taiwanese despite being from a Mainlander family background.

<sup>38</sup> This romanisation is based on Taiwanese, not Mandarin.

<sup>39</sup> This romanisation is based on Taiwanese.

<sup>40</sup> This romanisation is based on Hakka.

sense of 'being Taiwanese' did not quite emerge until 1895, when the *Qing* Empire signed the Treaty of *Shimonoseki* with Japan, and ceded Taiwan to the victor of the Sino-Japanese War, which took place between 1894-95.<sup>41</sup> At the moment the contract was signed, people in Taiwan sought independence by declaring Taiwan a new country, but this attempt failed after the Japanese troops landed and overcame this local bid for independence. The Japanese as colonizers thus confronted the colonized - the Taiwanese - and for the next 51 years, Taiwan remained a colony of Japan. During this period, Japan materialised military suppression in the first two decades of colonial rule. Then, some time before handing Taiwan to China, Japan adopted a different strategy in order to modernise Taiwan. Through its control of the Taiwanese islands, which it undertook with a systemised measure of conciliation, the Japanese strongly encouraged the Taiwanese to assume the identity of a people ruled by a Japanese Emperor.<sup>42</sup> This resulted in both resistance and conformity to the Japanese on the part of the Taiwanese; some rejected the ideology of becoming Japanese, whilst others located some sense of belonging to Japan. This sense of belonging produced a lasting sentiment of nostalgia for Japan in a significant portion of the Taiwanese population.<sup>43</sup> At any rate, self-naming as a means to identify and represent oneself as 'Taiwanese' or 'Japanese in Taiwan', vis-à-vis Japanese, during these years, developed to become a way of life.<sup>44</sup>

After WWII, the Nationalists (*Kuomintang*) from Mainland China took over

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<sup>41</sup> With regard to China's long-time indifference to Taiwan, please consult Alan Wachman's text, *Why Taiwan?*

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Leo Ching's *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation*.

<sup>43</sup> Please see, for example, Leo Ching's *Becoming "Japanese" Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California UP, 2001), and Lee, Ming-Tsung's *Absorbing 'Japan': Transnational media, cross-cultural consumption, and identity practice in contemporary Taiwan* (PhD thesis, Cambridge UP, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Hsü's '*Taiwan kunghekuo xienfa caoen*', (Draft of Taiwan Republic Constitution). 1993: 40-3.

Taiwan from Japan.<sup>45</sup> This handover was based on the Cairo Declaration of December 1943, an occasion at which President Franklin D. Roosevelt of the US, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the UK, and Generalissimo Chiang Kei-Shek of China announced that ‘all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa [Taiwan], and the Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China’ (Shen 2002). By 1947, Chiang Kai-Shek’s government knew that they would soon lose the civil war to the Chinese Communists, and subsequently arranged retreat from China to Taiwan. It was at that time the Taiwanese again fought for their own identity, as the Mainlanders who followed Chiang belittled the Taiwanese islanders, and ‘the islanders’ deemed that the then Chinese Nationalists were backward and uncivilized in comparison with the modernised Taiwanese.<sup>46</sup>

The term, ‘Mainlanders’ (*waishenren*) now refers to people who are descended from those 1950s immigrants from China. Born and raised in Taiwan, second-generation Mainlanders may speak fluent Taiwanese and never have visited Mainland China. While their family roots (usually meaning their fathers’ families) are in various Chinese provinces, they do not quite know how to deal with the drastic differences between the ‘home’ in their memories and the ‘home’ in developing China. As much as they are part of the ‘Taiwanese’, they still enjoy political and social privileges unavailable to other ethnic groups. For example, many of the Mainlanders have experienced greater political and social access, as well as more socio-cultural resources, especially during the martial law period (1949-87), when many of them served in the government and education sectors. This has greatly affected how their offspring now live. Even today, Mainlanders are still more likely to receive higher

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<sup>45</sup> *Kuomintang* refers to the Nationalists who came from Mainland China in 1949. These were led by Chiang Kei-Shek when retreating to Taiwan after losing the civil war to the Communist Chinese.

<sup>46</sup> This observation arises from remarks made by my Taiwanese friends and acquaintances. Their fathers experienced this period and later made comments to the effect that they were deeply disappointed with the Mainlanders when they first came to Taiwan.

education than people from other ethnicities (Luo, 2001; Wu, 2002). Such exclusion has been related to the reason for martial law enforcement, which was that, in the intervening years when first-generation Mainlanders settled in Taiwan, an infamous event, termed the 228 Massacre, occurred. The 228 Massacre was an uprising that took place in 1947 and heightened the mutual resentment and repulsion between the Taiwanese and the Mainlanders. It was put down brutally by Chiang's government at the time. Following this, and up until 1987, the whole country was under martial law that legalised political persecution, while any mention of this incident was strictly prohibited. Since its liberalisation in the late 1980s, Taiwan's ethnic relations have entered a new stage. Here, the Mainlanders no longer fully control governmental and educational resources, and the Taiwanese are no longer excluded from political, social and educational arenas. However, although different foci have emerged in Taiwanese politics, it must be admitted that the enmity and sorrow of the previous generations still lingers.

In fact, ethnicity has also been one of the topics to cause heated discussion in the Spiteful Tots community, especially on the PC or political correctness board. My inclusion here of their postings on ethnicity not only give a more socio-cultural and personal specificity to the issue of ethnicity, but also show how ethnicity has set the stage for a major understanding of 'politics' in Taiwan. The example I offer is one that demonstrates the tensions that cluster around ethnicity and how participants address this tension. This example identifies one of the first topics on the 'PC' board and which became enduringly popular; 'So how many Mainlander *tongzhi* are there?' (*Suoyi waisheng tongzhi yio duoshau?*). This discussion raised questions about ethnicity through the punned usage of *tongzhi*. This was possible because the word has, as will be elucidated, a double meaning— that of Communist comrades and of homosexuals. Owing to the fact that Mainlanders are indeed more connected, though

antagonistically, to Communist China than any of the Taiwanese ethnicities, it is rather derisive for the participants to call those with a Mainlander family background *tongzhi*. The discussions are premised on the idea that, in Taiwan, to inquire after one's ethnicity has been understood as a way to provoke ethnic conflict. This is because, as previously explained, during the 1960s and 1980s, people of Mainlander descent possessed more political and social capital. In comparison, people of *Hakka* or *Hoklo* ethnicities were generally employed in business rather than serving in the government or receiving a higher education. Mainlanders are therefore seen as non-Taiwanese, and their sense of belonging, to both China and Taiwan, is compelled to be mutually exclusive. Therefore, political correctness as an implanted concept in the Taiwanese socio-historical context has been primarily understood and utilised to untie the complex knots around ethnicity. In the Spiteful Tots community, while such discussions about this particular political and factious topic cannot be avoided, both confrontation and resolution are sought through the use of humour (and pun).

#### ***Discussions of Ethnicity by the Spiteful Tots***

In the beginning, Spiteful Tots participants responded to the question of ethnicity by 'outing' themselves as coming from a Mainlander family, and then they would add more information about how they themselves identified with their Taiwanese identity and/or their various experiences of being positioned as Taiwanese *or* Mainlander.<sup>47</sup>

Below are two messages under this particular discussion thread, which may be indicative of the tension involved:

Author: Sam

Board: PC

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<sup>47</sup> This does not mean that they are really from Mainland China, but that they are related to the people who migrated to Taiwan. Those who are Mainlanders in the Spiteful Tots belong to those second-generation Mainlanders who were born in Taiwan to a family that immigrated/retreated to Taiwan in the 1950s with the Nationalist government. Because at the time of posting, these participants were roughly between the ages of 25 to 35, it is very unlikely that any of them would have spent time living in Mainland China. This is due to the fact that, before the lifting of martial law in 1987, visiting Mainland China was illegal and could lead to the death penalty.

Title: So how many Mainlander *tongzhi* are there?

Time: Fri Nov 17 23:47:42 2000

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[←Leave] [PgUp] [PgDn]

Like I know Rick's boss is Mainlander gay aunt,<sup>48</sup> I myself am a Mainlander sweetheart, and Tom and Mark seem to be Mainlander lasses too. Ken is also *Shandong*<sup>49</sup> big (girl)?<sup>50</sup>

Author: Mary

Board: PC

Title: Re: So how many Mainlander *tongzhi* are there?

Time: Fri Nov 17 00:07:50 2000

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[←Leave] [PgUp] [PgDn]

Rob is waishen big sister, Holly is a handsome T-like bufen<sup>51</sup> from Loyang<sup>52</sup> (such a PC language!)<sup>53</sup>. Betsy is a waishenren who believes that we shouldn't disunite and polarise the difference between ethnicities.

As the first person to reply, Sam outs other Mainlanders he knows of in the community as people of a Mainlander ethnicity<sup>54</sup>, and Mary, without describing herself a descendent from both *Sandong* in China and Seoul in South Korea (a piece of information she has disclosed in previous posts on other boards, but for other reasons), outs other regular participants. A point of interest about Sam and Mary's posts is that they both out people (and themselves) with their genders attached. In Sam's post, all the female specific terms actually refer to the idea that they are male

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<sup>48</sup> This is a common way of addressing a slightly older gay male participant in the Spiteful Tots community.

<sup>49</sup> *Shandong* is a province of China.

<sup>50</sup> Here, the gender forms of addressing people (aunt, lass, sweetheart and girl) are used to refer to different gay male participants.

<sup>51</sup> Bufen is a gender for lesbians in Taiwan, which means that you are not particularly masculine or feminine in your appearance, sexual behaviour, and way of dealing with people. A 'T-like bufen' means that Holly may possess more of a masculine disposition whilst she identifies herself as a bufen.

<sup>52</sup> Loyang, situated in the province of Honan, was the capital of the Eastern Han Dynasty.

<sup>53</sup> I use brackets for quotations, and square brackets for putting in my own notes so as to better present the texts.

<sup>54</sup> Although I use 'a Mainlander ethnicity' here, I do not mean that Mainlanders are from the same town, city or province. In fact, 'Mainlander' as it stands is perhaps a term only valid in the context of Taiwan, because there is certainly no similarity between these Mainlanders who come from all parts of Mainland China with distinct dialects, cultures, customs, ways of life, etc.

homosexuals. In Mary's, she again refers to a gay man, Rob, as a 'big sister', and gives a fairly clear and detailed description of Holly's gender as a lesbian. Mary also mentions Betsy's political belief along with her Mainlander connection. Other than responding to this question and giving some personal information about the mentioned people, both posts blend gender and sexuality in terms of 'coming out as Mainlanders'. This suggests that ethnicity and sexuality may somehow need to be conflated when a discussion on (Mainlander) ethnicity occurs.

There are also discussions about why a question relating to identifying people's Mainlander ethnicity is placed on the PC board. This obviously has to do with the idea that inquiring after people's ethnicity can sometimes be seen as 'touchy'. Mary from the second post throws out this question to provoke further thoughts:

Title: Ethnicity

Time: Mon Nov 27 22:22:05 2000

-----[←Leave] [PgUp] [PgDn]

PC is that you cannot casually ask people whether they are Taiwanese or Mainlander. If the person happens to be a very PC Mainlander, then s/he will probably answer nervously: What kind of age is it now. We are all Taiwanese, no need to differentiate Taiwanese from Mainlander. And those Mainlanders who are in-betweeners would comment: Oh. We are all new Taiwanese. Taiwanese would then say: Wa si tai wan lang<sup>55</sup>.

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People just read into it so much. I just want to know if you have special food for Lunar New Year<sup>56</sup>.

However, Betsy is not completely persuaded by this objection of 'people reading too much into ethnicity'. Instead, she thinks that by making this point, it shows that Mary

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<sup>55</sup> 'Wa si tai wan lang' is 'I am Taiwanese' spoken in the Taiwanese language.

<sup>56</sup> Lunar New Year is a big festival for Mainlander families, and therefore there are usually many different kinds of food made specifically for this time of the year. In comparison, a Taiwanese family may appear less varied and comprehensive.

may have been so privileged that she fails to see ethnicity does matter enough to make people be careful about it. Betsy posts:

I think PC means that you cannot ask other people ‘why ask about ethnicity’? Even if behind this question indeed lays an inability to understand why ethnicity can be something to be fussed about. The other thing you must know about this [issue] is that (this is really PC), the ratio of Taiwanese people and Mainlanders is huge, but much more Mainlanders receive higher education. In recent years it’s been more like half and half, so in here [at Spiteful Tots] the ratio is different from that in society in general, but similar to that in higher education.

In Betsy’s opinion, Mary’s rejection of recognising ethnicity as a sensitive issue that must be avoided in conversations demonstrates nothing but Mainlanders’ privilege. Mary’s unawareness of this or rather, her inability to take account of the sensitive nature of making inquiries after people’s ethnicity becomes, to Betsy, supporting evidence of the great social gap between Mainlanders and Taiwanese. Although Betsy herself is Mainlander, she might find it all the more important for her to be the person who values recognition of such a difference or inequality between ethnicities.

In comparison, Mary responds to Betsy’s call for recognition in quite a different way in the following post:

You are now so serious! \*weeping\* Is it because I am no longer funny in my writing? I was trying to be sarcastic! But school sister,<sup>57</sup> your reply is so serious that I am not sure what to do with my gag.

The fact that there are indeed imbalances and differences between Mainlanders and other ethnic groups in Taiwanese society is lucidly illustrated by Betsy’s post. While educational imbalance is also stated as deserving everyone’s attention, it is however also assumed as something too serious by Mary, something that does not belong in the

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<sup>57</sup>This is a common, everyday way to address an elder schoolmate.



realm of 'being funny' and thus is not 'light enough'. Mary's response can hence be read as a form of crisis management, outing her/himself as someone who, being identified as privileged, is unaware of this hierarchy. But in response to this 'outing' as an immediate reaction of finding something 'wrong', I would like to contend as to whether there is really a gesture of provocation occurring here, or whether it is more a well-intended reminder? The statement about ethnic imbalance in higher education is wrapped up in statistical facts, not employed as political propaganda, something more often based on irresponsible speculation. Therefore, I do not consider that such a post in any way shows the replier as being too 'serious' and not understanding the other person's sarcasm. However, in this case, it can be further inferred that ethnic issues are of a quite sensitive nature; any kind of comment made about ethnicity which implies factual difference, despite being true, could be seen as a potential development of further divisiveness and polarisation. Under such circumstances, it seems that only comic and light hearted remarks should be allowed and (re)produced. Any facts articulated with the assistance of statistics may be taken to be a threat to the supposedly harmonious atmosphere of the discussion. In other words, textual discussions on ethnicity need to always be fun-oriented, rather than typed in a 'humourless' voice, such as when echoed through statistics.

If this is so, then the next question to ask is whether the unsaid, invisible rule that invites participants to lighten up anything that may potentially become 'serious', would also somehow diminish the depth of a discussion on ethnicity? Below are two follow-ups to this topic which respond to Betsy's concern about this issue. However, since Betsy later deleted her own post, what is available from the archive is the response from Mary (as Betsy's post no longer exists):

I can understand. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I also treat this

thing seriously. Maybe our difference is that I have never felt superior because of my Mainlander identity. I simply feel curious about the place where my ancestors had lived. It is simply a sentiment towards the land and history, so I will never ever let this emotional feeling be polluted by politics. [. . .] Maybe my fault is that I didn't think from your perspective. Simply thought that you were politicising this issue. After all, my familial situation is different from yours.<sup>58</sup>

This now becomes a complicated matter. In the beginning Betsy pointed out that Mary's unwillingness to regard questions of ethnicity as sensitive or even potentially offensive could be seen as a kind of privilege. Because of Mary's unawareness of the necessarily sensitive nature of ethnicity, she appears to fail in recognising the fact that for some people ethnicity is a sad and unjust fact, not something they can simply feel neutral towards or simply 'let go'. However, in Mary's response to Betsy, Mary thinks that Betsy is really the one with a problem, that is, a sense of superiority. Mary explains that she does not want politics interfering with her affections for her family from Mainland China, and therefore, refuses to view ethnicity in a politically serious way. While Mary and Betsy's ways of interpreting the situation are quite interesting and it is difficult for anyone to be sure of which is the more sensible, there is another layer to add – that is when Nora joins in the discussion by offering thoughts based on her experiences at an earlier age:

I can understand the feeling [of needing to be serious about this]. I think this should be connected to personal experiences of growing up (though I am probably much older than you?) When I was a teenager, ethnicity used to be a much more serious problem. . . In that era, whenever there was an election, there would be the slogan of 'Mainlander pigs go back to China'. And one could really be beaten for being a Mainlander, if his/her accent revealed his/her background.

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<sup>58</sup> Marked >>>>, this message was posted by the same person who thought the other participant missed the funny part of his or her post and elucidated that s/he was actually being sarcastic.

So of course I know what kind of hatred it was beneath this kind of voice. But no matter what, for someone who were born and grew up here, this kind of doubt and distrust in Mainlander descent brought to them is really unreasonable and yet deeply helpless. The Mainlander descent makes whatever you do illegitimate and useless to your justification of living here. So fighting for this justification becomes a difficult mission, and if you don't fight for it, then you further consolidate their suspicion—see, you don't love Taiwan, you don't even want to fight for it! So you have no choice, you can only employ all methods and means to prove that you identify with the local. You have to perform even more passion and persistence than other Hoklo or Hakka people. Otherwise, you are a sinner, a privileged that should be despised. Your blood is dirty, sinful and you deserve it.

Just like many people who feel nervous when they are put in a quiz when there is no longer any test in life and they are no longer students. This kind of experience of being examined, in the hearts of the elder Mainlanders, will always be there causing nervousness, and this remains so even if you know for a fact that fewer and fewer people would suspect how Taiwanese you are, or that fewer and fewer people would agree with that kind of hatred speech. You just feel extremely sick of anything that would be associated with this issue.

You just want to shout: 'I have worked so hard and hanged on there for so long. I will hit anyone who would say that I am not a Taiwanese'!

I am actually very glad that younger people now do not share with this kind of feeling anymore. It means that the horrible era has passed, and things are looking up.

In the messages from Mary and Nora, the issue of ethnicity is contextualised in different ways. The shorter one from Mary presents the perspective that whilst ethnic origin relates to a history that people may no longer be living, it still carries substantial weight and influence. The only meaningful issue now is that historical connections are considered as linked to the deep emotional dimensions of a family,

and thus can be seen as able to evoke strong feelings and sentiments. Therefore, the first post by Mary can be read as expressing a concern about ethnicity being polluted through a process of politicalisation. It suggests that, if something is particularly personal, it is not worth risking the possibility of it being twisted, misrepresented or otherwise manipulated politically. Under such circumstances, both overreaction and overprotection become understandable; sometimes such responses must be put into practice to ensure emotions towards one's family remain 'pure'. While whether or not ethnicity in Taiwan can ever possibly be seen as unrelated to the political sphere is beyond the scope of discussion here, politics, indeed in this context, are shown as being negative and indeed, as unwanted, with the ability to contaminate those things people may hold particularly dear.

The other way of contextualising and thus understanding ethnicity, as indicated in the longer post by Nora is by considering how it actually felt to be a Mainlander in the previous era (probably between the late 1970s to mid 80s). While the majority of Spiteful Tots participants did not grow up when the hate and exclusion of that period was at its height, the lingering fear and discontent, as already described, remains and continues to haunt people in contemporary Taiwan. This message also contains the irrational and inexplicable aspects of ethnicity. Such aspects indicate the categorisation of ethnicity as including the undesirable aspects of humanity, for example in terms of rationalising, externalising, and substantiating acts of discrimination. In Nora's passages, moreover, politics of ethnicity is specially associated with elections, whilst also being re-presented as something that leads to the use of strong language, biased opinions ('Mainlander pigs, go back to China') and an intense motivation for self-defence and the desire to counter-attack ('I will hit anyone who would say that I am not a Taiwanese'). In this case, ethnic politics is, so to speak, associated with fear, violence and injustice.

### ***Practicality vs. Politicality***

So what do the participants mean by ‘being serious’, ‘the political’, or ‘politics’ in their discussions on ethnicity? Obviously, whatever these descriptive terms suggest in relation to ethnicity for the Spiteful Tots participants, such nouns and adjectives are quite slippery and can thus sometimes be exhausting to deal with. Anything related to politics (*zheng zhi*) has become a tired concept for them, or perhaps for all of us in Taiwan. Politics that argue about ethnicity have caused too much conflict and tension,<sup>59</sup> cost too many lives<sup>60</sup> and for some may even be considered too traumatic to seriously think about. Despite this sensitive quality, the Spiteful Tots participants are not too intimidated by ethnicity as a discussion topic. The Spiteful Tots participants, as discussed, might prefer a lighter touch due to the sensitive nature of such subjects, but playing it light does not necessarily mean discussion will always be ‘safe’ and not create the possibility of conflict. However, their discussions still show a degree of consideration and ethical sensibility in their appeal for some sense of humour and sarcasm. I make this statement based on the fact that if safety were the primary concern, then such a conversation would not have taken place at all, the topic would have been completely avoided. Yet the Spiteful Tots still want to address sensitive issues about ethnicity, though implying that politics encourage more disruption and division than the more socialised praxis of ‘meeting people halfway’. So in these posts, it can be seen that, in spite of them lacking some explicitly shared political commitments and belief, the Spiteful Tots do not seem to lose criticalness and frankness in their online unsynchronised dialogue. They still appear honest and upfront with each other and able to delve into such sensitive subjects with both care and sympathy. In this, they are also willing to believe in each other’s good intentions

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<sup>59</sup> It is especially so between China and Taiwan, and between Mainlanders and Taiwanese.

<sup>60</sup> For example, the 228 massacre of 28<sup>th</sup> February 1947 that took place between Mainlander troops and Taiwanese civilians has cost many lives, both during and after the incident.

and meanings. I think that the key element for being able to achieve all this lies in the fact that they keep alive a level of fun that still allows the critical and continues to be humorous. Via the deployment of banter, sarcasm and sometimes ridicule, the Spiteful Tots members participate in an interactive game of online posting that encompasses many issues, including those which are critical and controversial.

Taiwanese society is widely believed to have serious problems with ethnic conflict, both due to a) historical conflicts such as the 228 Massacre and b) the political manipulation of indigenisation and desinicisation appeals (see for example Makeham and Hsiao, 2005). While ethnicity as a site of contention has intensified, due to Taiwan's current political disagreements with China,<sup>61</sup> issues of ethnicity in daily life, as illustrated above, might not have truly caused heightened disputes. If anything, I believe that ethnicity seems to be more a political product nowadays. People may well be much more concerned to lead a life free from military threat (from China) and economic difficulty (by collaborating with the Chinese in trade and business), than to be 'rightfully' positioned as a *Hoklo*, *Hakka* or of Mainlander descent, in order to honour their respective cultural heritages. It also seems to me that behind these pursuits towards safety and economic stability lies an attitude of 'being practical' about ethnic politics. Although prioritised as urgent, thinking practically about ethnicity does not entail so much political debate or calls for culture preservation, but is simply based on national security and economic prosperity.

In addition to the emphasis on the practical maintenance of people's everyday life and production-related engagement in the society, ethnic diversity, which here includes the aboriginals, is necessarily linked here to the more complicated issue of

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<sup>61</sup> In a nutshell, China (the People's Republic of China) represents Taiwan (Republic of China) in the United Nations and there, Taiwan is seen as a rebellious province of China, not an independent country. Despite Taiwan's almost 60 year long independence, China still declares sovereignty over Taiwan, while Taiwan, eager to be independent, does not dare to object and trigger warfare over the Taiwan Strait.

finding a ‘Taiwanese’ identity. Ethnic groups hybridise Taiwanese identity and significantly add to the socio-cultural depths of Taiwan as a distinct and unique entity. While the government stance argues that all ethnicities have become integral parts to what is conceptualised as Taiwanese, it is a stance that remains ambiguous as to ‘what Taiwanese actually is?’ The seemingly simple question of identifying a Taiwanese identity nevertheless compels an answer that is difficult to write. At the moment, although conflicts and agitations due to ethnicity in Taiwan may be complicated enough in their own right, issues of national identity are being further challenged and complicated by forces of globalisation; for example, migrant workers and Southeast Asian brides/spouses are now brought into Taiwan, unwittingly foregrounding the shared sentiment of Han Chinese<sup>62</sup> (racially speaking) as inimitably different from than those darker-skinned women and men. This means that the quest of actively defining ‘who is Taiwanese?’ has become a daunting task.

### **International Status**

This question of how a Taiwanese identity can be positioned is deeply implicated in two particular aspects, which I will now discuss. On the one hand, Taiwan’s elevated importance is partly related to the status quo of Taiwan-China relations, framed in considerations of international politics and diplomacy. On the other, the scholarly attention paid to Taiwan’s national and ethical identity is also closely related to the rapid economic and technological developments that have increased Taiwan’s international exposure and importance as a global player in today’s economy and as a trading and collaborative partner. For such a complex issue and the enormous problem of situating Taiwan internationally, in terms of the economy, technology and politics, I do not intend to dig deep, however the context still deserves some probing. This

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<sup>62</sup> Han Chinese people have the same skin colour, but the Aboriginal people tend to be slightly darker as they are not Han Chinese. South-east Asian people have the darkest skin colour of all, and this makes a great visual difference to the Taiwanese people.

section therefore simply aims to give a brief account of the current situation.

As observed in earlier scholarship,<sup>63</sup> Taiwan's feminist and *tongzhi* movements and corresponding discourse has been the result of globalisation as well as modernisation. When bringing in aspects of modernity and globalism, it is worth acknowledging the mediation of newly available technologies that not only make globalisation possible, but which have also become the very embodiment of globalisation themselves. Newly developed technologies in Taiwan, in the form of websites, forums, mailing lists, 3G mobile phones and many others, have facilitated the dissemination and popularisation of discourses that equalise the social status of women and sexual minorities. The power of such networks is however not intended to create consent or support of equalising discourses and ideas,<sup>64</sup> but is largely due to the practical and urgent need to create a technological niche that is part of the construction of a better Taiwan. In a way, such a spread of liberal discourses latches onto the innovative technology movement and becomes an integral part of what technology unwittingly brings into people's lives.

Taiwan, a country with very limited land, space and natural resources,<sup>65</sup> has long depended on the hard work of its people as well as their devotion to its economy. In the early days, the major lifeblood of the Taiwanese economy came from labour-intensive industries such as textile and bicycle production; nowadays, it is the technicians, laboratory researchers and engineers who have proliferated to dominate

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<sup>63</sup> Almost all recent works on gender and sexuality in Taiwan (or even East Asia in general) would recognise the irreversible influences of globalisation and modernity.

<sup>64</sup> For example, the infrastructure of information and communication technology as well as the implementation of the Taiwan Academic Network (TANet) throughout colleges and universities began in the 1990s. This work was implemented to modernise Taiwan, as well as to latch onto the technologically slanted wave of development.

<sup>65</sup> According to the government, the main island of Taiwan occupies an area of 36,000 square kilometres, while the total area of United Kingdom occupies 130,478 square kilometres. These figures are based on webpages from Taiwanese and British governments: [http://eng.taiwan.net.tw/lan/Cht/about\\_taiwan/general.asp?id=1](http://eng.taiwan.net.tw/lan/Cht/about_taiwan/general.asp?id=1) and [http://www.buyusa.gov/uk/en/introduction\\_to\\_the\\_uk.html](http://www.buyusa.gov/uk/en/introduction_to_the_uk.html).



the job market. Instead of doing the hard work themselves, Taiwanese people now pay foreign workers, as mentioned before, to complete labour intensive tasks. The restructuring of the economy proves that Taiwan has caught up with ‘the global trend’ by means of technological advances (for example, see Feenstra and Hamilton, 2006). In other words, Taiwan has shifted from the rugged to the riche. The fast development of information and communication technology (ICT) has been a significant driving force for Taiwan’s economic well-being and its heightened international status. Accompanying the substantial changes in Taiwan’s economic and social structure is the challenge of its own position amongst foreign partners and counterparts (Simon, 1988, 1998; Howe, 1998). Taiwan, as a number of small islands, cannot but endeavour to build both collaborative and competitive relations with the outside world, but its de facto status almost always hinders its access to international visibility.<sup>66</sup> For Taiwanese people, as a result, the pain of not being recognised as a country in spite of its ‘independence’ has permanently marked its national identity.<sup>67</sup>

In this sense, Taiwan has spared no effort in developing its capacity for high-tech industries in response to the shifts in the global economy, as well as in an attempt to index its society’s advancement (Lynch, 2006: 130-31). As Daniel Lynch puts it, ‘exclusion from international society [. . .] did not prevent Taiwan from being a good global citizen’ (2006: 130). This idea of catching up technologically so as to enhance international status may be common to most East-Asian countries, as they tend to run parallel in terms of economic development as they try to prove that they are ‘as successful’ as their Western counterparts. What distinguishes Taiwan in this familiar scenario is its attempt to ensure validation as a country. Scientific and technological

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<sup>66</sup> I intentionally use the word ‘visibility’ here to facilitate a later comparison between the visibility of Taiwan and the visibility of homosexual/gay/queer people in the concluding chapter.

<sup>67</sup> There are many monographs that deal with the multilayered reality of people in Taiwan and the impacts that have been made on the island’s national identity; for example, see Brown, 2001; Ching, 2001; Corcuff, 2002; and Roy, 2003.

development readily connects itself to ‘modernity’, a concept that has itself been defined by Western models, and Taiwan, despite its own drastically different context (Lee, 2000: 110-137), still cannot wait to be evaluated according to that scale of modernity and prove its worth as an independent country.

Evidence of the anxiety of ‘catching up’ may be deduced from the way Taiwan has contributed to the world’s scientific knowledge. In 1998, Taiwan leapt from 28 to 18 in the Sciences Citation Index worldwide national rankings; a very impressive feat for a country of twenty three million (Lynch 2006: 130). But as Lynch explains:

[...] despite acting as a model country, Taiwan was in grave danger of disappearing as an autonomous entity. China placed enormous military and diplomatic pressure on the island to accept an ignominious absorption into the PRC hierarchical system as a “special administrative region” akin to Hong Kong. Cross-Strait economic integration intensified the pressure.

Lynch is not overrating the threats that China poses to Taiwan. As also noted by Dennis V. Hickey (2006: 68-84), China’s isolation policy towards Taiwan may be of great consequence. For example, China’s action in excluding Taiwan from the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2003 put Taiwan in a particularly dangerous situation during the SARS epidemic, as health experts and medical professionals could neither obtain information about Taiwan’s epidemic, nor travel directly to Taiwan to investigate it without China’s consent and cooperation.<sup>68</sup> This is a cruel and yet real position for Taiwan: the status of ‘belief’ - of believing in what Taiwan is - is ultimately not objective but political. This situation has become mentally disquieting

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<sup>68</sup> Please consult the official website for promoting Taiwan’s presence in the WHO - <http://english.www.gov.tw/mp.asp?mp=3>. In April 2009, WHO, perhaps in light of the previous incident over the SARS epidemic in 2003, invited Taiwan to be an observer and attend the World Health Assembly in Switzerland. This was seen as a great success and significant Taiwanese ‘return’ to the United Nations since in the name of ROC it withdrew in 1971. Details and information regarding the way Taiwan interprets this placement of ‘observer’ at the World Health Assembly can be read on the website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan via <http://www.mofa.gov.tw/webapp/ct.asp?xItem=38126&ctNode=1901&mp=6>.

for Taiwanese people and it corresponds to the parable told by Slavoj Žižek (1989) in his *The Sublime Object of Ideology*:

After some time in a mental hospital, [a fool] was finally cured: now he knew that he was not a grain but a man. So they let him out; but soon afterwards he came running back, saying: 'I met a hen and I was afraid she would eat me.' The doctors tried to calm him: 'But what are you afraid of? Now you know that you are not a grain but a man.' The fool answered: 'Yes, of course, I know that, but does the hen know that I am no longer a grain?' (1989: 35)

Mirroring the logic inside the head of the fool in this story, the subject formation of Taiwan also functions in such a way whereby its future depends heavily on whether the 'hen' (China) thinks its citizens are grain (an appendage), or people (an independent country).

Even though China continues to spare no effort in isolating Taiwan, international networking in its various forms and channels (such as internet technology) still provide opportunities to improve Taiwan's visibility and prestige (Lynch, 2006: 142). In order to make the islands known to other people and countries, a way to secure Taiwan's reputation as a 'people' not a 'grain', it is considered vital that Taiwan throws itself into the technology race, all the time striving to take the lead. Behind this drive is again the apprehension of not being known, needed or even existing to the West or the wider world, an apprehension which originates in the general lack of attention given to Taiwan in international affairs because of Taiwan's marginal and illegitimate national status.

### **Sexualities<sup>69</sup>**

While global attention has always concerned itself with Taiwan's unrecognised

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<sup>69</sup> An earlier and quite different version of this section was published in 'Why (Not) Queer: Ambivalence about "Politics" and Queer Identification in an Online Community in Taiwan', *Queer Popular Culture*, (2007) Palgrave Macmillan

international status, local apprehension has been about the flip side of globalism, for example, migrant workers (mostly in the highly gendered spheres of the domestic and public realms) and foreign brides/spouses from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries.<sup>70</sup> The majority of these Southeast Asians are female, coming to Taiwan either to work or to marry and bear children. At the same time they are commonly thought of as ‘gold-diggers’ arriving in Taiwan to pursue economic wellbeing and social upward mobility (Lan, 2006). Academic research in response to this recent social phenomenon usually takes a feminist perspective and approach (Hsia, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004; Lan, 2006; Wang, 2004; Wang, 2008), critically identifying racial discrimination, patriarchal assertions and sexist elements by exposing the hidden hegemony operating inside the agendas of current Taiwanese policies and regulations. As feminist critiques on the issues of the female foreign spouse show, there have accumulated some basis from local efforts in learning from the social movements and academic discourses currently in North America and Western Europe.

As already mentioned, this force for liberalising Taiwanese society has much to do with an attempt to sidestep identification with Mainland China, whose human rights issues have long been of international concern. With the historical timing of the lifting of martial law, as well as a willingness to tactically accept ‘Western imports’, Taiwan has witnessed drastic changes in its popular culture (for example in bookshops, cafes, TV soaps, variety shows and movies), absorbing Western expressions of sexuality through queer films, feminism, translated novels and imported art works.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Some of them are also from Mainland China, but will not be discussed here as they are in a different analytical category.

<sup>71</sup> Please refer to Chang (1996) and Chi (1994, 1997) for academic observations on this increasingly attention-grabbing phenomenon which started occurring in the late 1990s. Later on,, TV series and films in Taiwan which feature homosexuality have remained very popular, examples include: *Niezi* (Crystal Boys) (2003), *Gulianhua* (Love’s Lone Flower) (2004), *Zuihuo de Shiguan* (Three Times) (2005) and *Ciqing* (Spider Lily) (2007).

This shift indicates how sexuality is taken to be a ‘foreign production’ and that acceptance may be based on the idea of modernising Taiwanese society through ‘new and progressive’ ideas and discourses. In a situation like this, it is modernisation that is imbibed as opposed to local values and cultural authenticity. While one may argue that this phenomenon has in part been brought about by globalisation, something which mates quite readily with capitalism and Western influence (Champagne 1999), it is also acknowledged as exhilarating for those sexual minorities living in Taiwan. As Tze-lan D. Sang (2003) writes:

The rise in Taiwan during the last decade of novels and whole collections dealing with the subject of lesbian eroticism and lesbian subjectivity<sup>72</sup> – which occurred amid a burgeoning lesbian and gay identity politics and the general proliferation of queer discourses – distinguished the cultural scene of Taiwan not only from that of the PRC<sup>73</sup> but also from that of the former British colony Hong Kong or any other Chinese-speaking society (2003: 256-57).

On the one hand, local support and accumulation of activism appears progressive and invigorating. Yet on the other this situation compels some more in-depth re-consideration and re-evaluation of the meaning of such a ‘leap forward’ for sexual minorities. The proliferation of non-normative sexual discourses and liberalism found in Taiwan, while inspiring, opens up a complex and dialectical process of negotiations between globalisation and localisation. This also seems to concern the Spiteful Tots community and Taking up a non-*tongzhi* perspective, they remain unsure about this movement towards liberalism, progress and tolerance. In a way, the local expression of same-sex desire is being defined by Western discourse and gay, lesbian and queer theories, and through these LGBT issues are able to obtain public attention. Since

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<sup>72</sup> My reading of this passage is that Sang does not mean that lesbian erotics or subjectivity arose prior to other kinds of non-normative sexuality, but that she singles lesbians out due to the topic of her book - *The Emerging Lesbians*.

<sup>73</sup> PRC is the People’s Republic of China, more commonly known simply as China.

Western discourses are generally deemed progressive and modern, drawing from them increases recognition and legitimacy. In another way, the local understanding and epistemology of same-sex desire is about finding a way out of the globalised scenarios and assumptions about sexuality, its oppression and resistance without essentialising itself. There is a concrete dilemma in this meeting of Eastern and Western contextualisation and interpretations of sexuality, where ‘each discursive mobilization is contingent, contemplated, and at times contested, be it labelling by others or a self-identificatory strategy’ (Lim, 2006: 181) But for now, I want to keep the discussion focused on this aforementioned ‘leap’ while using the later part of this chapter to undertake a detailed analysis of *tongzhi*, including how the term has been coined for gay, lesbian and queer subjects in Taiwan. Chapter 6 with its focus on ‘the everyday’ will also explain in detail how and why Spiteful Tots participants reject the *tongzhi* label, as well as the effects of their non-*tongzhi* stance in the Spiteful Tots community.

So, the simultaneous exposure of Taiwanese to feminist, gay and lesbian and queer movements<sup>74</sup> involves a multifaceted, interactive and continuing course of translation. Before proceeding with discussions on the translationality and transnationality of queer and *tongzhi*, I need to contextualise the period when sexuality as a discourse first appeared to Taiwan. The decade between 1979 and 1989 saw competition between two discourses of democratisation, the demand for appreciating the islands and culture of Taiwan, and an insistence on the belief that the *Kuomintang* would eventually beat down Communism and recover China (Roy, 2003; Lynch, 2006: 130-31). For example, I grew up in the 1980s and was educated to

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<sup>74</sup> In the West, gay, lesbian and queer respectively refer to different identities, politics and theoretical stances. The contestation of these terms and ensuing identities is extremely long due to the historical and contextual elements at work in the past as well as in the present. Barry D. Adam’s study (2002) ‘From Liberation to Transgression and Beyond: Gay, Lesbian and Queer Studies at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century’ is ideal in obtaining some grasp of the controversy and complexity of this issue.

consider myself as a freedom fighter who wished to rescue suffering fellow nationals from the communist Mainland; I thought of myself as an ‘authentic’ Chinese from open, democratic and liberal Taiwan, the Republic of China. Then in my teenage years there was a shift, demonstrated in sites as diverse as textbooks and the yearly presidential speeches shown on TV: instead of asserting this Chinese identity, we witnessed an argument for building up a democratic nation-state in Taiwan. Such a political shift was an embarrassment for the then in-power *Kuomintang*, a move which also contributed to its later failure in securing a congressional majority in March 2000.

### **The Tongzhi Movement**

Around the same period, *tongzhi* movements went through a similar trajectory. This initiation of *tongzhi* movements started out as something deeply connected to the non-local, and then developed as more localised. Following the wave of feminist movements that occurred in the 1990s, an example of this shift can be seen with the first internet group for same-sex desire: *Women Zhichien*.<sup>75</sup> Initiated in 1990, *Women Zhichien* was populated by both white American lesbians (who were also researchers) and Taiwanese lesbian women (of various occupations), each making up about half of the group.<sup>76</sup> Then in 1994 came the first sign of a queer movement in the ‘Queer Special Issue’ of the then new, left wing journal *The Isle’s Margin*, with articles such as Ta-wei Chi and Tang-mo Dan’s ‘*Ku’er Xiaoxiao Baike* [Queer Mini-Encyclopaedia]’; ‘*Zhizhunü zh Wen—Ru si zi Shiren de Gangmen Yanshen Baozhang* [Kiss of the Spider Woman—milky thin thread extends and grows from wet anus]’; and Lucifer Hung’s ‘*Kashanzhuola de Kuoqiang Yu Gaochao* [Cassandra’s

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<sup>75</sup> This means ‘Between Us’, or ‘Entre Nous’, and the name comes from a French film with lesbian themes.

<sup>76</sup> Regarding the history of “Between Us,” please see Zhuang, 2002:16-26.

Mouth and Orgasm]'.<sup>77</sup>. The authors, who were Taiwanese postgraduate students at the time, were clearly very familiar with Western theoretical terms and ideas, an indication of the significant influence of Western sexual and theoretical discourses on the queer movement at this time.

The development of LGBT use of the online sites was also on the cusp of this time. Below is a table that lists some of the well-visited or known sites for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Because there is little literature or systematic records of contemporary LGBT internet sites in Taiwan, I have made this table based on my own knowledge and chats with friends and acquaintances. This table therefore is not in any way exhaustive, but will however give readers a general idea of how the internet has facilitated the local LGBT population who are searching for company and connection.

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<sup>77</sup> I am not sure if there is any pun, metaphor or comparison intended in this title that is beyond my comprehension. Cassandra, as far as I know, is a mythological goddess, but was also the name of the elder sister of Jane Austin. Since I have not read this issue, it is quite difficult for me to determine which clue is more useful. The issue is now out of print and was published more than a decade ago. Unfortunately I have not been able to obtain a copy of it.



	Bulletin Boards System	WWW-based Group	WWW-based Chatroom	WWW-based Forum
Either ceased to function or has become much less influential	Motss boards among various universities (1994-2000/present)  Bad Daughters (1996-2002, 2002-Feb 2009)	PChome, MSN and Yahoo Groups; ex. <i>Women Zhichien</i> (1995- 2007) and Lucky Charm (2000-2008)  To-Get-Her <sup>78</sup> (1996- 2006)		
Still available and popular at the time of writing	Gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender boards in PTT (mid-1990s-present)  Various LGBT boards and communities on KKcity (2000-present)	To-Get-Her <sup>79</sup> (2008-2009)	UT <sup>80</sup> (1997-present)  Kiss520 <sup>81</sup> (2005-present)  Les meeting point <sup>82</sup> (2001-present)	2 girls <sup>83</sup> (2001-present)  LesCircle <sup>84</sup> (2001-present)

Table LGBT sites in contemporary Taiwan<sup>85</sup>

BBS boards and communities are among the pioneers of LGBT sites. ‘Members of the same sex’ (Motss) boards, in particular, were quite influential between 1994-2000, before sites like PTT and KKcity offered additional options. Motss boards are a

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.tgh-archive.org/>

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.to-get-her.org/>

<sup>80</sup> <http://chat.fl.com.tw/>

<sup>81</sup> <http://kiss520.jw72.com.tw/>

<sup>82</sup> <http://w2.mychat.to/go/ice/login.htm>

<sup>83</sup> <http://www.2girl.net/>

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.lescircle.idv.tw/>

<sup>85</sup> This table does not include sites which are relatively less community-based, such as LGBT-themed blogs, news letters, online magazines, and shop/sales websites.

unification of many such boards situated in different universities, individually set by system operators (SYSOPs) from all over Taiwan to simultaneously forward locally posted messages to all the other boards on distant servers. Motss boards synchronise so that when one message appears on a BBS site, it will also be present on all the other BBS sites existing on that exchange protocol. This kind of interconnection amongst boards results in instant communication among LGBT people in areas and regions across Taiwan, and in most of the cases, as I and other gay participants in the Spiteful Tots community have seen,<sup>86</sup> Motss boards often facilitate flaming. However, sometime after 2000, Motss boards became much less popular, being posted on and read less and less by online participants, and were instead filled with cross-posted messages aiming to promote events, activities or even products both related and unrelated to sexuality.

In the 1990s, PChome, MSN and Yahoo groups were also widely used by LGBT online participants.<sup>87</sup> One of the most well-known groups to appear was Women Zijien, based on MSN, Women Zijien is a community that utilises both online and offline resources to facilitate the formulation and development of the group. The major advantage of starting a group on MSN is that the steps to initiate a group are preset and pre-programmed, and so the administrator can immediately start up a group with favoured discussion boards of topics or themes. The other advantage is that groups based on major portal sites usually require people to sign in with their own account and apply for membership of the online group of Women Zijien. Retaining a sense of privacy, it is similar to how BBS is accessed. This function ensures both the members and the groups an important sense of confidentiality and as a result, while

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<sup>86</sup> Every now and then, some posts in the Spiteful Tots community mention incidents of flaming on the Motss boards.

<sup>87</sup> A transgender friend of mine tends to think that such WWW-based groups were perhaps most frequently utilised by trans people, as the interface facilitates picture uploading while remaining free, easy to use, and private. However, there is no evidence to her thoughts on this, and therefore I am only adding this here as a clue to why online trans participants were attracted to these spaces at one time.

WWW-based groups are more colourful and user-friendly than BBS, such groups still retain an intimate feeling. Nevertheless, the disadvantage of this platform is that these groups are still likely to receive spam messages from some registered users.

According to my observation of *Women Zijien* from 2005 to 2007, spam usually appears to be about dating sites or internet-based dating facilities, both of which appear to be quite suspicious. I myself have also encountered similar experiences when using other Yahoo sexuality-related groups, and therefore think that these groups as such somehow are prone to attracting suspicious spam messages about meeting friends and finding online dates. Usually what happens is that, if the group is still in function, then the spam will immediately be deleted by the administrator. But if spam is instead the only thing to occupy the threads list, then it gives the idea that the group is no longer under the management of the administrator; perhaps the group members are not active or do not participate as much. Since groups as such are not based on a system that runs like the BBS, they become then much more dependent upon every one of the group members for participation and maintenance. However, under these circumstances, inattention is likely to be discerned, since there is not as much support in the management of the groups: they are not like the BBS boards, where the responsibility may be shared by both the board masters and the SYSOPs, who are technically able to do the task of management. That is, when the board master is away, there will always be someone who can take over and act as the surrogate. On BBS boards, too, participants can always expect to see new posts from others, even if they themselves have never posted anything. For the WWW-based groups, on the contrary, the task of keeping such groups active falls solely upon the group administrators. Even though it is technically possible to make every member of the group an administrator, there would still be the need for everyone to participate as much as possible to ensure that the groups will always be updated with new postings,

files or other attempts at sharing. When group updating is suspended, the group may then be regarded as non-active, and will also become saturated with spam messages thus making the group members reluctant to compose their own messages amongst the onslaught of spam.

There are also some tailor-made sites— sites which were either created or adjusted to fit the needs of LGBT online participants. For example, To-Get-Her and Bad Daughters. To-Get-Her was created and designed by a group of lesbian engineers and/or technicians who were quite skilful and able to build the website on their own. The website for a time ceased functioning. but the main concern in To-Get-Her was and is, devoted to lesbian women, and therefore immersed in issues of safety and privacy. The same goes with Bad Daughters, a BBS site maintained and managed by lesbian women also capable of rewriting BBS program language in order to enhance the site's safety and privacy. Perhaps due to the high demands of technology, both To-Get-Her and Bad Daughters found it difficult to continue due to lack or insufficiency of funds. Since hardware upgrades, reworking of computer programming codes and server maintenance are time-consuming and expensive, To-Get-Her and Bad Daughters have both closed down at times. However, Bad Daughters confronted problems of lack of time and money for upgrading their hardware, and thus was closed in February 2009. To-Get-Her was nevertheless subsidised by its participants and is able to reopen in 2008 after its temporary closure in 2006.

LGBT chatrooms and forums, however, do not seem to be bothered by funding problems. This is because chatrooms are sponsored by shops and companies and that forums such as 2 girls and LesCircles make regular profits by offering add-on advertisements and promotion packages. Chatrooms usually either provide space for Internet advertisements, or are actually combined with the paid service of Web-cam

chatrooms, or offer both. Chatrooms, like UT (for LGBT), Kiss520, and Les Meeting Point (both devoted to lesbians), are places where online users can either meet up with other online users or where they can access paying services that provide visual stimulation while chatting. There is also strengthened security and a wider variety of functions available if they choose to pay for membership. Forums, despite not connecting to chatrooms, are in a way like a mixture of BBS boards and WWW-based groups and may thus attract participants this way. Forums offer useful information, ranging from good restaurants and bars to LGBT legal advice, as well as be equipped with the socialising capacities for meeting new people online and initiating personal blogs based on the forums' internet server.

Reviewing the extensive reach of the LGBT communities online, I argue that it was following these internet-facilitated developments of the 1990s that an effort to instigate a more 'local revolution' began. Various offline gatherings, informal meetings, film screenings, forums, and dinners were held in a casual way, but, almost always via online connections, publications and communications. While these included both academic and non-academic occasions, looking back, I think that academic connections were what more or less legitimised these events. This is because much of the understanding of sexuality was 'translated' for Taiwan. By this I mean that feminist, gay, lesbian, and queer discourses were introduced to Taiwan during the same period of time, and these ideas and movements were not preceded by a successful strategy of identity politics or the long-term cultivation of an activist movement. Instead, Taiwan's feminist, gay, lesbian, and queer movements were launched simultaneously, with a good number of academic researchers holding PhDs (usually earned in a Western country such as the US and UK) actively participating in

such an inauguration. Under such circumstances, I, along with others,<sup>88</sup> became convinced that queer was not granted an opportunity to be comprehended or utilised in the way the West had theorised it. Queer, rather, was juxtaposed with other terms, such as gay and lesbian, and indiscriminately thought of as yet another term coming from the West and referring to homosexuality. In other words, queer theory, queer subjectivity and queer politics have not been clearly understood as a pre-emptive attempt to address oppression and resistance. Although queer emerged in response to the scientific and medical discourse of homosexuality (Foucault, 1978; D’Emilio, 1983) and as an opposition to the gay assimilationists, it is still taken to be ‘just another word’ for homosexuality.<sup>89</sup>

Since the late 1990s, many important works have been produced in Taiwan on gender and sexuality and written in complex Chinese (for example, Zheng, 1997; Chen, 2000; Ho, 2000; Chao, 2001a, 2001b ; Ho, 2001; Ho, 2003; Ning, 2004; Hsieh, 2004). Almost all of them are in vigorous dialogue with Euro-American theories and discourses of gender and sexuality. In comparison, however, English monographs devoted to critical gender and sexuality studies in Taiwan are disproportionately scarce. So far, I have only encountered one such book, *Situating Sexualities* by Fran Martin, published by Hong Kong University in 2003.<sup>90</sup> Individual essays or chapters in English on such Taiwanese sexuality studies are however not as small in number, though they are dispersed in variously themed publications under the rubrics of sexuality, globalisation, internet, technology and popular culture (for example, see Hawley, 2001; Cruz-malavé and Manalansan IV, 2002; Berry and Martin, 2000; Berry and Martin 2003; Aguilar and Lacsamana, 2004; Jackson, et al. 2008). If the scope is

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<sup>88</sup> See, for example, Pei-jen Chen’s (2005) ‘Queer That Matters in Taiwan’ in *Cultural Studies Monthly* (an online journal) and Kaweipo’s (1998) ‘What is Queer?’ in *Gender and Sexuality*.

<sup>89</sup> The consequences of this will be discussed below.

<sup>90</sup> Many other books are devoted to East Asian sexuality studies or Chinese sexuality studies. Although they may contain research done in and about Taiwan, it remains quite limited in terms of the scale, length, depth and comprehensiveness when compared with Martin’s book.

broadened to include the Greater China Region, then, in the form of academic overviews, Women's/Gender Studies are often seen in monographs, serving as navigators for those who interested in Chinese-speaking worlds (for example, see Hershatter et al. 1998; Sang, 2003; Farris et al., 2004). Additionally, there is also a handful of ethnographic works on Taiwan in relation to gender and/or sexuality from a more anthropological perspective (see for example, Moskowitz, 2001; Simon, 2001; Silvio, 1999; 2003).<sup>91</sup> Listing scholarship undertaken on gender and sexuality in Taiwan, I aim to highlight that in the current academic climate which enables the English language as *the* language for international research, it is very difficult for a complete, complex and committed<sup>92</sup> book project that is dedicated to researching sexuality in a non-mainstream society such as Taiwan, to be sufficiently subsidised, and fluently written as well as granted the opportunity of being published. Yet this is exactly something where the length and scale of a few book chapters and journal articles is unable to compensate. One way out of the current situation may actually be to reframe Taiwan in the East Asian region, instead of on its own or under the 'Greater China' category. To this end I think the recent book *East Asian Sexualities* has made a valuable contribution, as well as offering the possibility of shifts in conceptualising contemporary Taiwan.

### **Tongzhi, Ku'er and Tongxinglian**

I now move to the language politics of *tongzhi*<sup>93</sup> and *tongxinglian*, in preparation for reading posts made by the Spiteful Tots community. *Tongzhi*, literally meaning 'same

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<sup>91</sup> One thing omitted in this discussion is the scholarship on gender and sexuality in the East Asian region, a field that may be most seminally represented by the recent book *East Asian Sexualities*, edited by Stevi Jackson, Liu Jieyu and Woo Juhyun.

<sup>92</sup> 'Complex and committed' is a phrase that Martin (2003) uses in response to Rey Chow's (1998) emphasis on the kind of reading we need to do on non-Western texts. This can be cross referenced from Chapter One on page 47 in which I used a quotation from Martin (2003b: 37). If she wants to do justice to the intricacy of sexual culture in Taiwan, she has to complete some 'complex, committed readings of non-Western texts'.

<sup>93</sup> Professor Hsiao-Hung Chang used the [Roman translation of *tongzhi*, which is 't'ung chih', in her 1998 article in *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. These two forms of transliteration refer to the same Chinese term, although nowadays *tongzhi* is the much more popular English equivalent.

will', or comrade, is a term that first served as the translation of queer. *Tongxinglian*, literally 'same-sex love', is the Chinese equivalent of 'homosexuality'. More medically genealogised, *tongxinglian* can nevertheless be taken to be a plain word in everyday use that refers to same-sex relationships. There are extended usages, such as *nantongzhi* and *nütongzhi*, which mean male *tongzhi* and female *tongzhi*, and there is also *nantongxinglian* and *nütongxinglian*. Both of them simply specify different genders.

The first time the term queer (in Mandarin *ku'er*) was used in public was when some Western movies produced in the late 1980s were introduced to Taiwan in the name of 'New Queer Cinema'. This was a small-scale film festival organised by the same group of people who had previously organized Hong Kong's Lesbian and Gay Film Festival in 1988. In December 1992 in Taipei, New Queer Cinema was translated into complex Chinese by these same organisers, becoming the 'Tongzhi Film Festival' (Chang, 1998: 284; Chou, 1997: 365). *Tongzhi* was an appropriation of 'comrade' in the Communist context of China.<sup>94</sup> Queer's first presence in Taiwan was thus simultaneously both ironic and a political appropriation of Communism.

*Tongzhi* has now become the popular way of addressing homosexual people in Taiwan, and this kind of appropriation has also resulted in the usage of *tongzhi*, queer, gay or lesbian, as interchangeable, with *tongzhi* the ultimate all-inclusive term. Problematically, it neglects the many levels of politics and meaning inherent in different identities - gay, lesbian and queer - to the extent of divesting these of their regionally intended political intent, while simultaneously neglecting to include other sexual identities, such as those of trans people and sadomasochists. Extensively used as a euphemism for homosexual, *tongzhi* has so far been limited to sexual identities

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<sup>94</sup> *Tongzhi*, a term still used widely in China to mean comrade, originally derived from the Japanese *toshi* (comrade) coined at the beginning of the twentieth century..



such as *tongxinglian*, or gay and lesbian, and is somehow a kind of equivalent of queer. However, its original meaning does not demonstrate the politics of Western queer, for in its daily and conversational presence, *tongzhi* has become a term that offers specific inclusive boundaries, boundaries which are different from those pertaining to the Anglophone homosexual.<sup>95</sup>

Yet *tongzhi* does have its own political intent in the context of Taiwan. *Tongzhi* as an identity is deeply embedded in the marginality of the country and its society, due to the ongoing military threat of China. As an ironic appropriation of Communist comradeship, the term criticises both Chinese pseudo-communism and China's homophobia. Consequently, through satire, *tongzhi* resonates with its peripheral status, being constantly haunted by the vast shadow of China.<sup>96</sup> In this situation it embodies both the authoritarianism that objects to democracy and the heterosexism that bans homosexuality. *Tongzhi* thus encapsulates a spirit of relentless anti-assimilation as well as a constant state of 'living with the enemy': that is, in that *tongzhi* people resist as well as identify with the enemy's language. By identifying with *tongzhi* and recognising the political power endowed in this term, the irony of this simultaneous refusal and acceptance manifests as infinitely rich and subtly complex.

However, the translation from queer to *tongzhi*, which had happened as a result of a kind of mocking humour at the Taipei film festival mentioned earlier, was not undertaken without some risk. *Tongzhi*, as an all-inclusive term for gays, lesbians,<sup>97</sup> and queers in Taiwan, suggests one arbitrary way of dealing with various facets of

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<sup>95</sup> Though not having researched this in-depth, I do tend to think that *tongzhi* as a term is also used in a similar context in Hong Kong and the coastal provinces of China.

<sup>96</sup> Here it includes Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Chinese diaspora cultures.

<sup>97</sup> In Zheng's book *Nüer Quan* (Daughters' Circles) (1998) and Chao's 'Lao Ti Ban Jia' (2005), it is mentioned that the older generation of lesbians do not like, or simply do not, refer themselves as *tongzhi*, but instead as *lazi*, or *nütongxinglian*. I think that for younger lesbians today, *tongzhi* is not such a term or identity that feels distant or strange to be used to address our/themselves. Rather, trans people may find *tongzhi* specifically relating to homosexuality and therefore consider this term exclusive of transgender and transsexual people.

identity politics in relation to non-normative sexuality. The underlying danger of doing this is that many important nuances and alternative expressions of sexuality may be overlooked. This danger, moreover, renders the use of *tongzhi* as a political term that is potentially counter-productive, for example, it might risk reiterating sexual alternatives as deviating from the norm, instead of allowing multiplicity, as in traversing identity boundaries and exposing the arbitrary nature of these identities. One consequence of this could be further social discrimination (for example, *tongzhi* being associated with AIDS and drugs) as well as burdening the realm of sexuality with the unfinished political business between China and Taiwan.

In fact, *tongzhi* has already started to show a tendency of being reclaimed due to negative mainstream media representations. While *tongzhi* is still widely employed as a political term in Taiwan, the public also finds it closely associated with controversial issues such as promiscuity and drug use - as if *tongzhi* has been duped and corrupted by the West and by global sexual imperialism. This tendency toward social disciplines, along with emergent concerns about Western corruption, bespeaks the strong affinity between agency and globalisation. Globalisation and Western discourse empower local sexual dissidents but also put these subjects in difficult situations because of their non-Western locations.

Another parallel development of sexual terminology in Taiwan occurred when 'queer' was introduced as *ku'er* in 1994. Different from *tongzhi*, *ku'er* is a transliteration, literally meaning 'cool kid'. It was coined as a transliteration of queer by Tawei Chi in 1994, who was then a postgraduate student in the English Department of the National Taiwan University, and it was published in the previously mentioned special queer issue of *Isle's Margin*. *Ku'er*, in my opinion, represents the academic version of queer and is imbued with a much more Western academic and intellectual genealogy; thus, although in a problematic way, *ku'er* received positive attention and

therefore seemed empowering in terms of representation: cool well-educated and elitist, it did not represent queer in its original meaning, that is, of a slur. Rather than finding the equivalent of ‘freak’, ‘pervert’, or ‘abnormal’ in traditional Chinese, *ku’er* as a term does not develop a strategy of pre-emptively transforming a historically stained denigration into one of empowerment.<sup>98</sup> Instead, based on the literal meaning of ‘cool kid’, *ku’er* asserts that to be queer is to be ‘cool and young’.<sup>99</sup> ‘Cool kid’ implies a popular image that was perhaps easier to embrace in terms of sexual alternatives; this being despite the fact that the implication subsequently lost its edge from the original idea of assuming queer as a sexual identity.

While it seems rather strange that Taiwanese scholars would translate queer into *ku’er* which its conflation with the mainstream values of youth and cool, there should also be some recognition of the fact that Taiwan did not have the slur history of queer before such translation occurred. As queer came to Taiwan almost at the same time as in the West, it was impossible for society to formulate discussions and create similar argumentative momentums for a study or field that was not there to begin with. For one, Taiwan had not had many years of groundwork in social movements: for example, fighting for women’s liberation and LGBT people’s rights. Also, the repression of women and LGBT people is still rooted in the Taiwan’s patrilineal structure. This narrows down the possibility of a pre-emptive attempt to proudly assume an identity such as queer in the West. In order to make queer survive in Taiwan, *ku’er* simply has to be something else, something quite different from what Western academia understands as queer. The meaning-making/negotiating in this case must involve travelling along a lengthy path where selection, adaptation,

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<sup>98</sup> Antonia Yenning Chao (2005) points out that queer was also translated a, *guaita*’ (freak) by Hsiaohung Chang and *ku’er*’ by Tawei Chi (2005: 85). However, *ku’er* has had a higher exposure than *guaita*, because *ku’er* has been more extensively discussed and theorized by scholars such as Chu, and Kaweipo. and I thus choose to omit the less popular translation by Chang.

<sup>99</sup> This implication of being ‘cool and young’ by identifying with queer/*ku’er* also shows that it is fashionable (or even ‘hip’) to assume this identity.

domestication and reinvention ceaselessly occur.

Perhaps this is why Antonia Yenning Chao (2001b) has suggested that there is a tendency of cleansing and classifying in contemporary *tongzhi* culture. Chao takes the example of studies by Jiaxin Jian (1997: 68):

Lamda Nütongzhi Club in National Taiwan University publishes this following book: *We are female homosexuals* (Women shi nütongxinglian). This book is a coming-out manifesto for Y Generation students and new human race of *tongzhi*. We neither self-pity nor feel sad. We study hard and make love hard. After Kellogg's breakfast cereal and milk that makes us feel good at the start of the day, we take this book to Daddy and Mummy and tell them that we played tennis and won yesterday, received first prize in class this semester, and realised that we were lesbians last month. Then nobody makes a fuss about it.<sup>100</sup>

In this paragraph, Chao observes that in being proudly gay, a strong sense of being cleansed and classified enables this pride (1997: 246). It is as if lesbian pride comes from conforming to a society's mainstream value system: as being smart, healthy, and physically apt. Such a manifesto, like the term, *tongzhi*, erases and illegitimises other ways of being gay: the gay person who makes mistakes, who is stupid or simply non-extraordinary,<sup>101</sup> or who breaks the law. They are not represented and discussed in this term of this manifesto for *nütongzhi*. Instead of widening the possibilities, this manifesto can therefore be seen to further narrow down diversity and suppress the non-conformists within lesbian (and gay) populations.

I argue *ku'er* is also such a product. *Ku'er* was perhaps best re-imagined and re-defined in the playful tone of *Ku'er qishilu: Taiwan Dangdai Queer Lunshu Duben*

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<sup>100</sup> The original text in complex Chinese is as follows: 台大女同志社團「λ」的出版書《我們是女同性戀》，無異是 Y 世代校園、新人種同志的出櫃宣言：既不自憐也不感傷，就是用功唸書牢牢做愛，早餐喝完牛奶泡家樂式玉米片的頭好壯壯時刻，拿這個書來告訴爹地媽咪昨天打贏了網球這學期得一個書卷獎，還有上個月，我發現我們是女同性戀。於是沒有人好意思為此大驚小怪。

<sup>101</sup> Here the 'non-extraordinary', which may be actually substituted by 'ordinary' means that a gay person may choose not to excel or be successful, not because s/he conforms to mainstream social standards, but because s/he does not want to be considered excellent according to social standards, standards which in the end makes him/her quite ordinary.

[Queer Archipelago: A Reader of the Queer Discourse in Taiwan] edited by Tawei Chi. *Chi's Ku'er qishilu* is a collection of creative, polemical and scholarly essays. These essays are written in a way that shows *ku'er* as light, resourceful and ironic. While the collection constitutes an enjoyable reading experience and makes one feel optimistic about the future for *ku'er* people in Taiwan, it also testifies to their privilege as well educated, urban citizens with a good command of English. In short, this book reads like one for and by people who are at the social centre, rather than in the Taiwanese margins. This implies that *ku'er* as an identity is stratified and can be quite unavailable to those who are not familiar with the manipulation of knowledge. This, I believe, is one important aspect of the critiques of *ku'er* culture and identity in Taiwan.

Inasmuch as it is less accessible, *ku'er* remains largely unheard of by the general public in Taiwan and subsequently as something strange. This was especially so when a new drink called 'Qoo' was introduced to the Taiwanese market by the Japanese Coca Cola company in 1999. *Ku'er* became a term much more likely to be related to the cute and blue cartoon-like character as a mascot that sells the drink and whose name in complex Chinese is also 'ku'er', using exactly the same Chinese characters.<sup>102</sup> In this respect, how *ku'er* can be effectively re-introduced and perhaps metaphorically re-created so as to be made available for the LGBTQ community in Taiwan becomes an immediate issue.<sup>103</sup>

In comparison with *tongzhi* and queer/*ku'er*, *tongxinglian* has stayed as a neutral term in that it does not contain either political or activist connotations and neither

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<sup>102</sup> Qoo as a blue-faced, cute-looking character has been quite popular in TV commercials in Taiwan and in other East-Asian countries. Websites to be consulted are <http://www.qoo.com.hk/> and <http://www.qoo.com.sg/>.

<sup>103</sup> However for the scheme of re-localising queer, I think it is imperative to note that queer theory presupposes a universally coherent queer subjectivity across all cultures and that this must be critiqued and challenged in localising queer in Taiwan. Queers around the world do not experience the same kind of oppression, while their means and ways of resistance are also far from the same.

does it stress elitism. While it may still emit a sense of pathology in its daily use, the term *tongxinglian* is deemed by Spiteful Tots participants to be more ‘realistic’ and ‘neutral’ in describing same-sex practices and relationships; this will be discussed further in the Chapter 6. ,Therefore, *tongxinglian* has become more of a private term used to refer to gays and lesbians themselves, while *tongzhi* and *ku’er* readily belong to more public arenas, such as newspapers and TV. In addition, *tongxinglian* is also a relatively older terms that connotes some feelings of nostalgia, while *tongzhi* and *ku’er* seem rather modern and progressive.

On this note of clarification, I will draw this chapter to a close. I have delineated the three main areas relevant to my study of the Spiteful Tots community and the kind of socio-cultural context they are situated in. The areas under discussion have been identified as ethnicity, international status, and developments of politics and discourse of sexuality. How Taiwan is positioned both internationally and nationally has influenced the way ‘the political’ is understood and formulated, and issues of sexuality are also seen to be conditioning the way ‘the political’ is dealt with and made useful. In the next chapter I will go deeper into the interplay between the political and the private or the everyday, especially illuminating where this interplay intersects with power dynamics of East and West.

## Chapter Three | Literatures Review and Theoretical Formulation

*Queerness provides a positionality from which differences, such as class, race, gender and sexual style, can be further theorized and reevaluated [ . . . ] I see some hope in the healthy tensions and contradictions of a lesbian and gay intellectual endeavour: namely the possibility of reopening a wider discussion on gender, sexuality, class, race, and other differences in the context of queer experience [ . . . ] “Queer” like “woman” or “subaltern” is a pragmatically generic and diffuse category, outlining an area for legitimate condensation and contestation.*

(Zita, 1994: 258, 268)

In the Introduction, I argued that coming out is far from a universal paradigm.<sup>104</sup> At the point where I incorporate Pellegrini’s account (1994), I express the idea that coming out can easily attract other people’s impositions of a static sexual identity onto the coming out subject. Over fifteen years ago, Pellegrini noted the paradox of seeing the coming-out subject as an individual case while also taking this subject as representative of every other gay or lesbian person. I argue that this paradox is still quite familiar to LGBT people in contemporary Taiwan. Also, I highlight the idea that such a paradox may create complications which exist beyond the daily scope of the coming out subject, particularly in the sense that the consequences often simultaneously impact upon the subjects’ familial, professional and interpersonal relationships. In this chapter, I revisit this paradoxical phenomenon and specifically frame it in a discourse of visibility. I offer this chapter as a way to review literatures which work towards formulating a theoretical proposition that help push queer projects and gay and lesbian activism onto a different plane in Taiwan, a plane where

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<sup>104</sup> While this argument may be taken to imply that coming out is a Western way of self-affirming non-normative sexuality, I do not think ‘not coming out’ is simply a non-Western way of enacting gender and sexuality. Nor do I think that ‘not coming out’ is a reactive move to the modernist idea of ‘an identity that needs to come out’. Rather, by refusing to think of coming out as a paradigm, I recognise that there are diversified ways of affirming one’s own sexuality, and emphasise that different ways or options should be explored as well as validated. Coming out should not be the only choice for sexual minorities.

‘the political’ is no longer equivalent to ‘coming out’ or ‘pure visibility’. In doing so, I address the idea of how coming out has been treated as the very first step in assuming a gay or queer identity that allows one - anyone - to finally speak for the sexual minority group to which they belong and to fight for their equal rights. This entitlement, along with the act of taking up a gay identity, presents a mismatch with Taiwanese society. Many previous studies have discussed the problems induced by coming out in Taiwanese society (for example, Martin, 2003; Sang, 2003; Lin, 1997; Chu, 2000). Based on these premises, I briefly revisit the related concepts and discourses of coming out, such as the closet and representation. While the tropes of coming out and the closet are well studied (for instance, Herdt, 1992, Herrell, 1992, Sedgwick, 1990, Gross, 1993), my focus is on how such tropes are imposed by the media as the most convenient ways to understand and associate with homosexuality in Taiwan. I move on to re-examine the notion of ‘the closet’, which I eventually challenge and instead argue for notions of both ‘the private’ and ‘the ordinary/everydayness’. I not only try to draw a picture of sexuality framed within the emphasis of the private and the everyday, I also interrogate whether such an emphasis would risk the reiteration of the naturalisation of gender and sexuality. By means of these discussions, I hope to formulate an alternative sexual theoretical strategy; that is, a new queer whose arguments are based on relevant writings and publications in Taiwan. I conclude with the idea that, for the Spiteful Tots, ‘the political’ in Taiwan has taken a certain direction as well as been formulated in a certain way, which does not leave much room for those who do not follow the coming out route or who do not want to be highly visible as a queer subject. I argue that queer visibility does not only improve sexual rights, but also helps develop hatred and misunderstanding about non-normative sexuality. In the light of this argument, I suggest that if the political is ever to be useful, people like the Spiteful Tots participants, should assert the freedom



of expressing themselves differently, including being free from expected values or patterns of coming out. The Spiteful Tots' maintenance of a private and everyday community, in my eyes, articulates their wish to be as involved (as those who have come out) in the political and social power relations of sexuality. However,, by means of internet technology, they are still able to choose what to disclose and where to draw the line in the face of any kind of exposure; this is due to the community's preference towards a strong sense of privacy and everydayness.

### **The Problematics of Queer Visibility**

As John D'Emilio (2007) suggests:

Peruse the contents of homophile publications like *ONE*, *The Ladder*, and *Mattachine Review* in the 1950s and you will encounter, over and over, activists decrying what they called a conspiracy of silence. Ending the silence and shedding invisibility have been goals from the beginning of an organized movement; pre-Stonewall activists used progress in these directions as their measuring rods for success or failure. (p. 25)

According to D'Emilio, this concern about broadening queer representation by means of visibility has persisted both throughout the past (from pre-Stonewall to the 1970s and 80s) and into the contemporary era (from 1990s to the present time) (2009: 25). Of course, the goal of shedding invisibility does not mean that any visibility of queers will do. Indeed, visibility framed in negative words such as 'perverts', 'abnormality' or 'deviance' is not exactly encouraging. However, this argument is not only about representing positive things about queers either (though positive representations are indeed relevant). D'Emilio (2007) does not clearly express the link between queers' demand for something beyond just 'any visibility', or simply 'positive representation', with the kind of queer visibility that is consequently deemed beneficial or meaningful for the improvement of sexual equality. I do however, have a preliminary idea about

the kind of visibility that some queers might find significant. From my understanding and observations of the Spiteful Tots community, I think cultural representation that affirms queer existence and sexuality without deliberately desexualising or sexualising queer actors, would be considered significant and much needed . That is to say, a representation that deliberately keeps images benign, or simply does the reverse - showing exotic or eroticised images of queers and making everything about them sexualised, would be quite distasteful for the Spiteful Tots as well as for other sexual minority.

Why do I think a cultural representation of queer people that does not stress either their difference or sameness from the heteronormative would be useful? In short, this is because I argue for queer visibility as so complex and problematic. I found the following research helpful in enabling me to clarify my arguments: in *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) describes the impossible contradictions that occur when coming out with a queer identity. In one of her examples, Sedgwick recounts how an eighth-grade teacher in Maryland lost his job after revealing his gay sexuality. The court verdict was that this teacher acted improperly because he had failed to disclose his sexuality in his application for the post. Upon appeal, the Fourth Circuit Court reprocessed the case, but in each ruling it became clear that it was really his visibility (due to him speaking to the media and relating how he lost his job), rather than his sexuality, that was the problem. Sedgwick therefore comments that the ‘management of information’ of gay identity becomes so delicate ‘that the space for simply existing as a gay person who is a teacher is in fact bayoneted through and through, from both sides, by the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden’ (1990: 70). Although Sedgwick noted this quandary more

than a decade ago, and sexuality is now perhaps rarely made an explicit issue<sup>105</sup> for hiring or dismissing staff in the US as well as in other places in most of the European countries, yet this situation still addresses a paradox where queerness is widely treated as something at once innate and acquired. Because queerness is considered innate, the justices in the first verdict of the gay teacher argued that the teacher should have brought notice to his sexuality when he applied for the post. On the flip side, because of the prejudice held against queers generally, the idea that queerness is acquired may result in the media and the public being unsure of the fact that somebody who could acquire queerness is at the same time suitable for the post of a junior high school teacher.

Similar paradoxes can be found in other legal scenarios; for example, in court debates in twentieth-century America (Halperin, 1995) and parliamentary debates in twentieth-century Britain (Woo, 2007). Both works disclose the difficulty of endowing civil rights to homosexuals, as rational arguments cannot settle the impossible binds from which non-normative sexuality seems unable to escape. Sometimes, queer visibility yields a just analysis, and therefore encourages a positive reception, or even tolerance and sympathy. But sometimes, too, queer visibility can attract more obdurate opposition and contraction that allows little room for resolution. As Halperin (1995) puts it, ‘if homosexuality *is* an immutable characteristic, we lose our civil rights, and if homosexuality is *not* an immutable characteristic, we lose our civil rights’ (1995:34; original emphasis). Under such circumstances, there is perhaps

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<sup>105</sup> I must add that, according to Lee Ronald, who holds a PhD in the Centre for Women’s Studies, where I study in University of York, however has quite different experiences. She has first-hand experience in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Nebraska and Utah, in USA, where non-normative sexuality is made explicitly an issue for job employment. Therefore, I must add that this is simply based on common impression from reading news articles and TV watching, not based on reliable, tested and detailed research. I can only hope that the situation is becoming better than the time when Sedgwick published *The Epistemology of the Closet* in 1990, while admitting that discrimination on sexuality may be highly relevant to regional differences and perhaps even to differences from one kind of business to another.

no way out for the conflation of homosexuality and civil rights, as it cannot be validated through rationality.

In ‘Visibility as Paradox: representation and simultaneous contrast’, Barnhurst (2007) argues that queer visibility is of a deeply complicated and contradictory nature (2007: 1-22). Therefore, navigating and moving beyond its paradoxes and contradiction requires that “Queers must find different ways of *not* saying such things as these: organizing our stories around the closet, ministering professionally to our invisibility, celebrating our popularity, and hoping for a technological, queer utopia” (pp. 18-19; my emphasis). Such interesting and rather paradoxical propositions reveal complexities about unprecedented queer visibility via the mass media. Such proposals are, however, based on a statement made by Michel Foucault (1987), at a time when communication technologies were in their infancy. This is to say that “‘There is no binary division’ that permeates discourse’ (Foucault 1987: 27 cited in Barnhurst 2007: 18) is considered significantly useful for resolving the paradoxical effects of queer visibility because, by trying not to say or do any of the things listed above (organizing our stories around the closet, ministering professionally to our invisibility, celebrating our popularity, and hoping for a technological, queer utopia), ‘it [becomes] possible to avoid a given paradox’ (Barnhurst, 2007: 18). In doing so, what Barnhurst (2007) has in mind is something that actually relates to post-structuralism:

That acknowledgement is also the first step toward knowing what to do about queer visibility. The necessary action is to reject the question of visibility, to set it aside, and to choose something other than focusing on queer difference. This path is something like *différance* in post-structuralism (Derrida 1982), a call to defer, delay and temporize rather than engage in the available stories about difference. (p. 18)

Barnhurst’s (2007) argument deserves serious consideration. These counterintuitive

strategies of *not* ‘organizing our stories around the closet’ and *not* ‘celebrating our popularity’ may, on the one hand, reduce visibility to the point of, as Barnhurst suggests, helping create more freedom and less exclusion for gay and queer people. On the other hand, such strategies also help to unlock queer visibility and representation from the aforementioned paradox; as such queer representations do not stress difference from, or even sameness with, other non-queers; representations are there simply to affirm non-normative sexuality. This kind of affirmation is given without necessarily supplying the public with the material of coming out stories or celebrative accounts of being queer. It presents queers without a particular form of rhetorical representation and therefore can be seen as composed of a careful mixture of both the visibility and invisibility of queer subjects. In this case, some of the more personal or private data is intentionally omitted (hence rendering this part invisible), while the more human-rights-based rationales and arguments about sexuality remain (hence still making queer subjectivity visible). Representations as such defer and delay the comparison between sexual preferences on a personal level, as well as suspend the judgment made due to such differences.

To exclude one’s personal sexual details is also another way of putting the action of coming out on hold. One can be visible as a queer at his/her will, but, at the same time, this person does not have to come out, or have a coming out story. Noting a significant difference between the two enables a queer person to stay queer without necessarily following a certain set path and pattern of self-liberation. Arguably, whether coming out is (re)enacted in the media or in daily life, it becomes an integral part of the issue of queer visibility. However, ‘coming out’ as a trope tends to be associated with hopeful ideas of liberation and open gayness, while the phrase ‘queer visibility’ is more neutral in the sense that it does not automatically connect to such positive and progressive ideas. Since coming out is related to specific connotations of

liberation and openness, it can be inferred that for anyone who does not quite follow the organised path of coming out, s/he may be suspected of not being liberated, not open to people and possibly not even open to him/herself; s/he may also be suspected of not being close enough to anyone in his or her life, so that coming out to others seems not to really matter. In other words, queers who do not come out, have to explain to others why such a liberating gesture, one that ostensibly allows one to more comfortably interact with other people, need not be the only option. For someone like Studs Terkel (2007), who stays queer but has never come out, his short essay about his life offers an example whereby coming out can be separated from being self-liberated. Terkel, as a queer citizen and activist, has lived his life without producing a coming out story about his queerness, and, throughout the 2009 text in which he describes his experiences, he neither reveals his life story, nor explains why he has not come out. Although from his essay it can be learned that queerness has been a significant part of his life, coming out does not seem to be of relevance— it is simply not related.

Barnhurst (2007: 5) explains well about this ‘reject[ion of] coming out’:

Some queers live without regard to *out* or *in*. They don’t buy into the dramatic emplotment that coming out provides. For them, the coming out story defines things not from inside their lives but from the outside. Viewed without reference to coming out, they instead appear to lead ordinary lives, confronting a range of challenges and obstacles not unlike what others face. (2007: 5-6; original emphases)

In response to Barnhurst’s strategy and based on the ambivalence towards coming out that I have observed in the Spiteful Tots community, I strongly endorse keeping away from the paradox solicited from queer visibility by having second thoughts about the comfort we feel regarding the coming out narrative. If we agree that there is something at stake when subjects of queer sexuality are exposed on media and

communication platforms, then it is worth finding out what injustices may be produced in the way queer visibility and representation is produced and received. While I do not negate the fact that queer visibility shows possible improvement of social acceptance, I cannot but wonder what will happen if we continue to believe in the power of visibility without carefully examining the repercussions of queer visibility? On the other hand, if we adopt Barnhurst's strategies of 'not saying such things as these: organizing our stories around the closet, ministering professionally to our invisibility, celebrating our popularity, and hoping for a technological, queer utopia' (Barnhurst 2007: 18-19), what may still be left for us to do? For the next stage of queer projects and LGBT activist works, is it possible for us to stop supplying the narratives of coming out and instead focus more readily on things which are not readily under the heteronormative spotlight? If we are to find our niche in this strategy of defer and delay, then what may be the best starting point? And what will become the new focus when we choose (for now) not to see or highlight difference?

### **The Paradigm of the Closet**

An ambivalent relationship to 'coming out' is, as I argue throughout this thesis, one of the most significant aspects of the Spiteful Tots community, and one which also deserves detailed attention. To conduct a thorough discussion of 'coming out' and its opposite, 'going in' (the closet), I begin with the positive effects of coming out, which lie in making society and the world become acquainted with queer subjectivity:

Through coming out, representations of the [LGBT] community move from the marginal to the mainstream. [. . .] In the larger polity, coming out stories move the nation and globe from ignorance (not knowing queer exist) to enlightenment (tolerance or even acceptance). In the face of these acts in human contexts, all institutional and legal barriers crumble. Coming out stories are like religious conversion narratives, with all the attendant emotions associated with epiphany, along with structural change in society.

[. . .] The media play a central role in coming out. The history of coming out in the media documents the typical shift, [. . .] in which the queer community moves from closeted object to *out* subject, a process that begins with experts and moral judges talking *about* queers and ends with queers allowed to talk for themselves (Barnhurst, 2007: 3; original emphases)

Despite and because of the fact that queer subjects are now out and known, there is the paradox of rhetorically representing coming out as ‘acceptance’, ‘honesty’, and ‘closeness’ (Barnhurst, 2007: 3). Rhetorically, any queer subject should come out to those closest to them in order to illustrate their hope of acceptance from the people whom they want to fully trust – this is usually family members, in this case. But in reality, this openness may be just be too difficult for those who are unprepared for a different form of sexual being, to accept (Tongzhi Hotline, 1998; 2007). Also, for those who have not considered themselves queer at the start of their adult lives, coming out may simply not apply. For example, Laura Stempel (1998: 1) writes: ‘I hate coming out stories [. . .] No matter how I try to squash this collection of conflicting, disjunctive, contradictory [sic] experiences into a single clear-cut narrative, they just won’t fit’.

Stempel’s frustration with this process shows how much coming out is expected as part of every queer’s journey towards self-liberation. The action of coming out of the closet is set against the assumption that any skeletons inside it are to be cast away. However, there might not necessarily be skeletons in there in the first place. For those who self-identify as queer in the later part of their lives, Barnhurst (2001) suggests that they stop ‘revising away’ their pasts by denying their ‘period of heterosexual life’ (2001: 57). In the Spiteful Tots community, there are some people who once lived as straight and were friends with some of the participants, later falling for a same-sex person, or who discovered their lesbian desires at university, but later ended up marrying a man. In the Spiteful Tots community, the life trajectories of those involved



do not require a linear and consistent account; participants are not compelled to emerge from a closet if they have never felt to have been constrained within one. Although the Spiteful Tots community seems rather liberal about its participants' fluid positioning of sexuality, yet this may be relatively insignificant if we consider what Barnhurst (2007) notes in contemporary times:

Living from day to day without the closet as reference is unusual, these days, because families, office-mates, and others expect the closet to be the main thread of the narrative one tells about queer life. In other words, the closet is now a story that straight folks have learned to expect. The closet narrative has become commercially convenient and so comfortable in the mainstream. It is a script that a non-queer perspective makes available, and queer folks play their part in growing numbers [. . .] The closet has turned into a heteronormative plot device. (p. 6)

Despite the 'living' Barnhurst has in mind is in the contemporary USA, I do think that similar expectations and understandings of the closet are also at work in today's Taiwan. This is due to the effects of globalisation on the way discourses of sexuality have been formulated in Taiwan. As suggested in the passages by Silvio (1999) and Rofel (1999), there is a strong implication of Western models and paradigms in the discourse and theories of sexuality. Silvio (1999) writes:

Taiwanese lesbian bar culture, academia, and *koa-a-hi*<sup>106</sup> are all worlds that mediate between concepts of the body that come with Western media products and discourses and concepts of the body that have been constructed in religious practice, agricultural and factory labor, and modes of fashion and gesture that reflect the specific history of Taiwan. (p. 601)

Rofel also argues:

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<sup>106</sup> Describing *koa-a-hi*, Silvio explains that it is 'usually translated as "Taiwanese opera", women play all of the leading roles, and the women who play the male roles are the focus of a complex, nearly all-female fan culture' (1999: 585).

...the emergence of gay identities in China occurs in a complex cultural field representing neither a wholly global culture nor simply a radical difference from the West. Rather, Chinese gay identities materialize in the articulation of transcultural practices with intense desires for cultural belonging, or cultural citizenship, in China. (p. 453)

I think that the two cultural theorists' observations and arguments about non-Western lesbian and gay identity are rooted in the same idea – that is, that these people's point of entry into culture is already Westernised. This is what Rey Chow (1991) has also suggested: 'We live in an era in which the critique of the West has become not only possible but mandatory. Where does this critique leave those ethnic peoples whose entry into culture is, precisely because of the history of Western imperialism, already "Westernized"? (p. xi)'. This leading question indicates to me that many cultural phenomena and practices are actually hybridised. The task before front me, is thus no longer to find narratives of difference that maintain the dividing line, but rather to acknowledge and emphasise the 'complexity of cultural production in the interactions of the West and non-West' (Rofel, 1999: 436).

Under such circumstances, references to the closet and coming out tropes are products with a strong global tendency in the way that they frame how queer subjects in Taiwan experience sexual identification. The closet is not merely similar to what Barnhurst (2007: 6) has described for us as a 'heteronormative plot device', but it also becomes hegemonic, in the sense that mobilising references of the closet facilitates attention and resources which may otherwise be difficult to receive. As Raymond Wei-cheng Chu (2004), a Taiwanese scholar, has pointed out:

whether the impact of globalization is homogenizing—in its spread of a certain kind of (sub)cultural formations and identity politics that model on the metropolitan l/g/q existence—or in effect 'glocalizing'—in that any

global trends, hegemonic as they are, inevitably hybridize as they become localized and indigenized. [. . .] what is disturbing about this polemical framework is its conspicuous *tangentiality* to the various local subject cultures [. . .] local l/g/q cultures basically favour globalization because its hegemony offers facilitating resources that are hard to come by domestically. (2004: 195-96)

While it may sound strange to say that coming out is a form of hegemony, coming out tropes are, however, easily recognisable and even, according to Barnhurst (2007), produce what both queers and non-queers expect from a person identifying with a sexual minority. In the context of Taiwan, according to Chu (2004), LGBT activists and communities favour Western models, this is since the globalised discourses of sexuality gives access to societal resources as well as weight to issues of non-normative sexuality, which would be hard to come by if they did not use such models and discourses as a source of hegemony.

Of course, even with the tradeoffs, coming out tropes are still problematic and the problematics of coming out in a contemporary Taiwanese context is further complicated, because coming out there is also related to the reliance of local LGBT communities upon hegemony, as a way to gain resources. In addition, Fran Martin (2009) further reminds us that Western models and discourses may be seen as ‘one such tactical tool used [. . .] not as a material extension of actual Euro-American sexual cultures, but instead as an imaginative resource used to address the kinds of specific local problems [. . .]: isolation, family and other social pressures, and in some areas, stigmatization by locally dominant pathologizing models of homosexuality as illness’ (2009: 299). Martin (2009) does not think that globalisation of sexuality is necessarily a manifestation of the hegemonic, as local LGBT subjects may as well use global models on a different level and for a different purpose. I, however, argue that the implication of hegemony is perhaps both necessary and unavoidable, as, for

example, mainstream society has learned about the dominant tropes of coming out and references to the closet, and associations with these terms have become to contemporary society around the world. Whether or not LGBT communities utilise such ready-made discourses and models of sexuality for the purpose of political resources or for emotional comfort, the power implication within such an utilisation remains inherent.

My thesis can thus be said to contribute to the corpus of postcolonial literature with a case study that highlights the intersection of globalising technology and the globalised discourses of sexuality. The project both contextualises the Spiteful Tots within these technologies and discourses and also goes beyond the community. By utilising the example of the Spiteful Tots community I am attempting to understand not just how this community, but also how other ‘cosmopolitan cultural forms’, can be used to subvert existing powers and structures of sexual politics (Appadurai, 1996:195). Besides assessing the technology itself, I am also interested in appraising how the internet is utilised in a specific locale and time so as to discover the kind of possibilities the internet offers and facilitates. In other words, in my interpretation and observation of the Spiteful Tots community, I recognise a growing sense of dissatisfaction around the way sexuality has been organised to facilitate certain expressions more than others, such as coming out and taking up sexual identity rather than keeping sexuality/sexual identity private. Related to this, I think there is also a lack of recognition of sexuality as intertwined with technology, in a way that mobilises the option to take up a non-normative sexual identity without sacrificing one’s private life.

Of course I am not alone in making this point. For instance, Esperanza Miyake and Adi Kuntsman (2008) are acutely aware of the lack of conversation between topics such as sexuality and race. They have tried to fill the gap by drawing attention

to this particular silence, but their work is only a starting point and the issue requires further engagement.<sup>107</sup> Han N. Lee (2007), in addition, has particularly contended that the scholarship of sexuality studies is being placed in a way that shows its insufficiency in dealing with race in cyberspace. He argues:

A grand narrative of race in separation from sexuality or across all sexualities needs scrutinizing for its underlying assumptions. Race happens with sexuality, but scholarship has separated out race and sexuality and examined them in isolation. In general, lesbian and gay studies has had a tendency to subordinate questions of race to analyses of sexuality. Separating categories of gender, race, and sexuality preoccupied the scholars establishing the field of lesbian and gay studies. Much scholarship on race has minimized the role of sexuality, in particularly homosexuality. (p. 244)

In this regard, I wish to raise awareness that how sexuality has been approached and understood across different racial/ethnic, national and cultural conditions remains still very vague and calls for much more work to be followed through. For example, sexuality in the lives of ordinary peoples in Taiwan remains understood as a ‘personal choice’. For ‘the traditional and conservative Chinese people’,<sup>108</sup> the argument is that although homosexuality may not yet be mainstream and ‘normal’, it may be given the respect and space that it deserves as long as it is well contained within society. Such perspectives are represented by the book *Zhongguoren de Tongxinglian* (Chinese People’s Homosexuality).

### **Chinese Culture and Sexuality**

Published in 1991, this book puts serious emphasis on the research and challenges unearthed by Dr. Kinsey (1948, 1953), especially the idea of equating homosexuality

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<sup>107</sup> One of the examples may be *Out of Place: Interrogating Silences in Queerness/Raciality* as both an international two-day workshop and a publication from Raw Nerve Books (<http://www.rawnervebooks.co.uk/outofplace.html>).

<sup>108</sup> This primarily refers to people who are of Mainlander descent, but also to other ethnic groups, such as *Hoklo* and *Hakka*, who might agree that they are Chinese by race.

with disease, although at a lesser level. Although published more than two decades ago, the ideological frameworks posited by Kinsey still ring bells today. The book *Chinese People's Homosexuality* assumes its readership as purely heterosexual, and presents 'tragic' individual life stories of a variety of homosexual people. In this way, the book attempts to appeal to the wider Chinese society through the sufferings experienced by homosexuals due to the lack of understanding exhibited by society. The author praises the supposedly universal value of love and tries to arouse sympathy from readers. Such writing strategies function to attract attention and stir up sympathy, but at the same time seem to block the further potential development of sexuality as a form of subversion and a political movement. While this is changing and more and more possibilities are being created for political activism and solidarity, there still seems to be some long-lasting popularity for this kind of 'harmless' presentation and simple understanding of homosexuality.

As mentioned in previous chapters, activist or activism-related actions based on appeals for dissident sexuality did not occur until the mid 1990s. Alongside the major social movement of feminism and women's rights, sexuality-related awareness, events and activities only appear as a recent phenomenon. The increasingly heightened attention towards sexuality over the past two decades has produced a number of politically committed groups and human rights associations, such as the 'Tongzhi Hotline' which, since 1998, has been taking phone calls from anyone with queries about *tongzhi*, or the 'Gender/Sexuality Rights Association' which, since 1999, has allied with the Hotline to voice LGBT concerns at various public occasions. Such timing has been significantly concomitant with the rise of internet technology, generating a particular mode of contemporary Taiwanese sexuality, one conditioned and facilitated by a wide use of the internet. However, my worry is that thoughts and ideas that are written to appeal to a sense of the sympathetic, as in *Zhongguoren de*

*Tongxinglian*, may be the major source of qualification and legitimacy for drawing public attention to sexuality. In other words, the radical is likely to be greatly softened, while homosexuality is almost rendered as an essence that cannot be changed and which arouses people's sympathy. This way of approaching and representing homosexuality, I think, may have much to do with a local, internalised culture, influenced by Confucian thought where a focus is put on a 'middle way', its adherents keen not to appear militant or radical and instead try to maintain a peaceful atmosphere.

On the one hand, strategies used in *Zhongguoren de Tongxinglian* do have their limits and problems in keeping issues of sexuality on the individual level, instead of lifting them to the public sphere; yet on the other, there remain further elements of interest that are useful to study. For example, the book positions the sexual minority as some kind of mysterious group which cannot but live their life in a way that, despite its difference, is only enacted in order to bring happiness. By arousing the sympathy of readers, such a discourse encourages a better environment for homosexuals, where the sexual minority who have done 'nothing wrong and do not deserve bad treatment' can live more freely and openly, relieved of burdens about their same-sex relationships. The rationale behind this is that 'they' are just like 'the rest of us' (whoever this 'they' and 'us' may be), requiring care, respect and recognition. Of course, the danger of further developing such a humanistic discourse is that homosexuals are measured against norms in what is fundamentally a straight culture, so as to be categorised as 'either good or bad citizens', something which in many ways allows them privilege and status leading to many more benefits, or simply operates in reverse— taking away their opportunities of upward mobility. This discourse, in turn, may also become oppressive to those who do not work well with heteronormative norms in the way they form relationships, lead their lives and carry

out sex-related behaviours.

### **Norms and the Everyday**

Michael Warner (1999), the author of *The Trouble with Normal*, has taken the example of gay marriage in an attempt to examine the idea of 'normal'. He concludes:

Marriages, in short, would make for good gays—the kind who would not challenge the norms of straight culture, who would not flaunt sexuality, and who would not insist on living differently from ordinary folk. These behavioristic arguments for gay marriage are mostly aimed at modifying the sexual culture of gay men. Left and right, advocates of gay marriage assume that marriage as a social institution is, in the words of Bishop John Shelby Spong, “marked by integrity and caring and . . . filled with grace and beauty”; that it will modify “behavior”; and that a culture of “gay bars, pornography, and one-night stands” is desperately in need of virtue. This idealization of marriage is typical of those who are excluded from it: priests, gays, adolescents. It shows an extraordinarily wilful blindness. As one observer notes: “to presume that morality follows on marriage is to ignore centuries of evidence that each is very much possible without the other.” (1999: 113)

According to Warner's analysis, once gay marriage is sanctioned, those who choose to live outside of it would then suffer from condemnation, as the sex industry, or any sex outside of the home for that matter, would become even more unacceptable to society. While all of these 'good gay' images are problematically set to act as alternatives to the 'bad queer', there lies also an underlying dichotomy of 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary'. On the one hand, Warner suggests that marriage makes people filled with an 'extraordinarily wilful blindness'; on the other, he regards gays and lesbians who have casual sex in public as out of the league of the so-called 'ordinary folk'. With regard to these oppositions, it is worth asking whether there are any bad queers who are also part of the 'ordinary folk'? Or if there are any good and ordinary gay people who would also sometimes be the bad queers indulging in public sex, or who would rather stay in a non-exclusive relationship? Wouldn't it be quite unrealistic to



have only two categories for all people of non-normative sexuality?

To answer the questions above, one of the possibilities is going back to the field of the Spiteful Tots community.<sup>109</sup> By means of concrete fieldwork observations, data and facts may be plausible responses to the questions that may be constituted.

Analytically discussing the good gay and bad queer without using such a dichotomy, I propose that we recognise both ends of the spectrum as featuring ordinary people situated in their everyday lives, who tend to be doing all manner of good, bad, normative or non-normative things. The benefit of falling back onto such an ordinary and featureless conceptual framework is that we researchers will need to pay more careful attention to the contexts these homosexual subjects, in this case, the Spiteful Tots participants are in, and to the values and attitudes they hold towards every social and political situation. Instead of looking at the static identities of good gays or bad queers, the everyday dimension that can be found within every subject reminds us of the importance of contextualisation.

I do note how local conditions change how sexuality is promoted and perceived, for example, in this study I am inclined to make a point about the Spiteful Tots community, (in response to the above questions) that even within the everyday, ordinary discourse of every one of participant's life, I have taken notice that there is always an element of the global and international. This is manifested, for instance, in their struggling with a gay or *tongzhi* identity, as well as in their participation in LGBT Pride in Taipei when thinking up a theme for the group in the parade. In their engagements as such, there is a concept that is far from what is generally considered

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<sup>109</sup> Going back to the field is *not* the only option here. To answer the questions above, I agree that it may well be more beneficial, or rewarding, to read extensively about pertinent academic texts and works current on this issue. Behind such recognition is a view of qualitative research as more or less partial, situated and bound to a researcher's interpretations. Therefore, reading across cultures may indeed compensate the insufficiencies that ensue due to the small scale of qualitative studies. Here, however, I purposefully choose to return to the field to make a connection with how the Spiteful Tots participants deal with the issue of normativity within the context of their online community.

as banal and mundane. Globalisation makes concrete differences and changes in the here and now, resulting in Spiteful Tots people being physically and/or virtually relocated or reassociated, and these reassociations can be rendered more prominent in some occasion than others. Although much of this can be smiled at and easily passed on as simply ‘a facet of daily life’, it still poses challenges to what we are used to viewing as ordinary and everyday. Is whatever repeats itself on a daily basis, everyday? Or should we categorise routine that has been reiterated to such an extent over a long period as the everyday, and that which is more of a recent phenomenon as the non-everyday? Can the international and global be included in the realm of the everyday? These questions, again, require the research subject to an answer that is most meaningful for the subject, based on his or her actions and the material consequences that result from his/her actions. But whatever the answers may be, I argue that there should be no presumptions made about the everyday. More discussion on this issue will be made at greater length in Chapter 6.

In mentioning that the everyday may not merely be formed by banal and mundane content, I would like to further connect this to the notion of how so-called ordinary people’s lives (including that of LGBT) can simultaneously be ordinary and extraordinary. As ‘queer’ is set against the heteronormative, the notion of queer is usually conceptualised as something non-normative, non-ordinary, and thus similar to what may be termed as ‘extraordinary’. Ning Ying-bin (1998), for instance, has theorised as queer any act, discourse or notion set in relation to non-normative sexuality of any kind. Ning’s theorisation has made it possible for many controversial issues, for example, extramarital affairs, sex purchases or casual sex, to emerge. Their emergence facilitates and promotes a series of academic attempts to wrestle away that which may have been previously considered as scandalous, due to moral judgements and traditional beliefs (for example, Ning, 2007, 2008, 2009; Ning and Ho, 2008).

Ever since queer discourse was introduced to Taiwan in the 1990s, an underlying theme about a queer sexuality which focuses on ‘the good gay and bad queer binarism’, or even on the dimorphic of ‘good straight and bad polyamory has been emerging’. Instead of condemning these acts as immoral, Taiwanese queer scholars based at the Centre for Studies of Sexualities, for example, Josephine Ho, Ning Ying-bin, Amie Parry and Naifei Ding, see non-normative sexuality (of both hetero and homosexual desire) as highly relevant to the liberation of sex and sexuality from the shackles of morality and tradition. While I can see that this endeavours to broaden the scope of queer by recruiting in new blood to promote sexual rights, I am however also aware of the potential development of this ‘queer turn’ of sexuality, where seemingly ordinary gay and lesbian people may be theoretically undermined due to their ordinariness. Therefore, I want to further argue that of paramount importance in this case is that both the good gay and bad queer are simply roles which can be played by the same subject. Instead of creating more divisions, I argue that there is no room for making foes rather than friends.<sup>110</sup> On this note, I would like to quote from *Yangqi Caihong Qi* (Raising the Rainbow Flag). This is a passage written by Xiaoxiong (2002):

Who will look at us? We have been here all the time! Our faces are not covered by makeup. Our life is simple. Our clothes do not smell of perfume. And we seldom have the mood to play drag. Our life is dispersed in every different scene and on every corner. Maybe we’re not brave and we wear masks in life. But sometimes we also choose to be frank to our intimate friends. More importantly, we recognise that we come from heterosexual families. We love our families and friends. We have never thought of resorting to fierce resistance and thunderous roars in order to break the history of our existence, so as to show our *tongzhi* faces. [. . .] Urban experiences are not just about sex, sex and sex, but vividly composed of our

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<sup>110</sup> This has also been argued by Chang Chuanfen (2001) in her book *Lesbians Like This and Like That*.

people's living conditions. What surrounds a different sexual orientation and society's stigmatisation is sagas of our melancholy or courageous life course—the life history that belongs to us. (2002: 207-208)

In this passage, Xiaoxiong (2002) voices the kind of isolation or non-belongingness of people who are 'ordinary': no make-up, no drag, and no forceful opposition to heterosexuality or heteronormativity. This is due to the fact that people like these are not easily cast as allies to the political feminist, gay and queer movements. It is commonly assumed that people like them are not daring enough, are not as aware of the predicament of a *tongzhi*, or are simply too afraid. While Xiaoxiong presents a world somewhat different from that occupied by the Spiteful Tots (as they indeed do drag, both textually and corporeally<sup>111</sup>), his words do point out the fact that he, along with other ordinary queers, feel excluded from the dominant representation of LGBT and queer subjects in Taiwan.

This passage quoted above is from an article that describes the journey of creating an electronic magazine devoted to those *tongzhi* people who do not identify so much with the most prominent and well-known *tongzhi* stereotype shown in the press, media and academic discourse. Xiaoxiong and three other like-minded people constructed the first *tongzhi* electronic magazine in Taiwan. Xiaoxiong started the magazine in 1997 in Taitung, one of the less developed Chinese cities, when he was only twenty years old. In the following five years *Tongweisu* (Isotope), gained 52,000 subscribers. *Tongweisu* is also widely regarded as one of the most influential electronic readers in Taiwan: 32% of subscribers are self-identified heterosexuals (Xiaoxiong, 2002: 210). The goal of this magazine, other than to foster a climate of mutual respect between *tongzhi* and heterosexuals, has been to function as a vehicle

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<sup>111</sup> In the introduction I have briefly mentioned their textual drag, and in Chapter 5 I will dwell on the bodily drag which they assume for Pride parades. However, some of them also do drag for other occasions, such as parties, music recitals, or even on the street when celebrating New Year.

for ordinary people who do not recognise themselves in the popular representation of radical queer, drag queens or kings. Despite its humanistic appeals and mild manner when dealing with homosexuality, *Tongweisu* can be said to have been successful in communicating to the public that *tongzhi* people are of many different kinds, and that they are with many different ideas about how to actually be a *tongzhi*.

However, I must clarify that, though a much more ordinary and much less threatening gay image is indeed part of the iconography of contemporary *tongzhi* in Taiwan, such a representation still has its own variations. For instance, in the previously quoted passage, Xiaoxiong delineates the kind of *tongzhi* who do not dress up in drag, but, the way I see it, this does not necessarily suggest that all *tongzhi* people who self-identify as ordinary would not go for drag, either. Here Xiaoxiong seem to set up oppositions (perhaps unwittingly) between those who do put on drag and are often represented as dangerous and intimidating, and those who avoid outfits that challenge their biological sex and are thus represented as benign and harmless. My view is otherwise. In the Spiteful Tots community, for instance, it is very common for people to speak in a ‘sissy’ tone or address each other as ‘aunt’ and ‘sister’ despite the addressed being biologically male. Also, offline, some of the Spiteful Tots participants are keen to dress in drag (I know this from both their online postings and some participants’ online photo albums). While the Spiteful Tots participants are, as will be discussed later, in many ways not the kind of *tongzhi* who would easily lean towards radicalism, I do urge that we carefully examine where we position those who should be partners in the same camp in the long haul of enabling LGBT movements, without focusing upon the condemnation that may occur due to them not sharing many of the pains, desires, or pursuits that mainstream activists might more usually value.

On a different and yet related note, it nevertheless remains critical to challenge why the bad queer image is related to gender/sex subversion. Why is drag such a well-known practice for this sexual minority? In 1997, Lin Hsien-shou wrote a book called *Kanjian Tongxinglian* (Watching Homosexuality): Despite the age of this text, I still find it helpful and enlightening, especially as he argues that the:

*Tongxinglian* phenomenon is therefore something that can be ‘seen through’ or ‘read into’, and its ‘mysterious veil’ can be ‘lifted’. The public greedily imagines for more life detail about homosexuals. Other than satisfying the lewd imagination of ‘So doing that is also sexually pleasurable?’ and giving out a self-comforting sigh of ‘Luckily I am not [one of them]!’, there still entails a strategy that is full of after-effects— that is defending the authority of explaining homosexuality by non-homosexuals. [. . .] *Tongxinglian* along with other sexual dissidents afford the great expectations (of the society), and it is as if they could only complete their responsibility as a citizen until they have told absolutely everything about their life. A homosexual who cannot disclose everything about him/herself is not gratifying the novelty-seeking mind of the society. (1997: 46-47)

In Lin’s objection to society’s eagerness to explore ideas of *tongxinglian*/homosexuals, is the awareness of being expected to cater to society’s expectations of the homosexual subject. As part of society, a homosexual subject soon becomes aware of the need to satisfy novelty-seekers. For example, the homosexual subject is encouraged to reveal whatever is appalling and unheard of. This makes it possible for, the whole society along with some so-called experts in service of heteronormativity to do more research on them, or be able to explain homosexuality based on such kinds of ‘facts’. In this light, what constitutes the general impression of *tongxinglian* should be noted as a manipulated result, far from a generally fair representation. In many ways, such a sensationally inclined representation of *tongxinglian* can be a kind of trap that leads the receiver, the audience— including people of all sexualities— to believe that

this represents *tongxinglian* per se. What's more, any subject who is represented as such may also be urged to reveal more and more of his/her secrets and mysteries in front of journalists and camera lenses. I thus find the following statement quite politically situated, that is, in the sense of giving 'what is expected' in the public exposure of *tongxinglian*. Lin (1997) writes:

While Lin Hsien-shou is indeed some homosexual who writes about issues of homosexuality, *I* am also a Taiwanese who likes to take a stroll, watch *wuxia* films, eat rice cakes, read books and chat. Homosexuality has opened up another window for me to observe humanity, but my existence is not merely definable by homosexuality. (1997: 47)

What Lin here discloses is the banality of his life— taking strolls and eating rice cakes, things that anyone of any sexuality might do. The point is certainly not so much about revealing what his everydayness is composed of, but to expose the fact that we never see the everydayness of *tongzhi* people in any form of representation, not even in academic research or discussion. In other words, it is worth asking whether the LGBT movement has been politicised to the point of neglecting the ordinary and everyday aspects of this sexual minority.

### **Performativity and Naturalisation**

Since I have suggested that the Spiteful Tots may be viewed as a new kind of queer practitioners who do not entirely believe in the strength of endless transgression, I figure that it may be helpful for me add a further discussion on the perceived relationship between performativity, that which subverts norms of gender and sexuality, and ordinariness/everydayness, that which may be taken as an example of naturalisation. Performativity, a crucial notion in Judith Butler's (1993) theorisation of gender and sexuality, represents the idea that any act of discourse, or any action taken in a cultural context, is a form of performance. Butler (1999: 94) clarifies:

In the first instance, then, the performativity of gender revolves around this metalepsis, the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Secondly, performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as culturally sustained temporal duration.

Instead of being an independent act, all deeds and practices are ritualized production: ‘a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production’ (1993: 95). This notion, however, has its limitations, as perhaps is best explained and elaborated upon by David L. Wallace (2002):

If speaking subjects are always the products of cultural and historical forces, then how do they assume political agency to resist those forces? In queer theory, the most basic answer to this question requires an understanding of discourse, indeed of any action, as performative - as exercising agency within the conditions set by a person’s current and historical contexts. The problem for many people who have no experience in speaking/reading/acting as “others” is that the performative nature of discourse is not readily visible. Because their experiences with discourse have not consistently placed them in positions in which they needed to speak back to cultural values that defined them in problematic ways, they have difficulty understanding why others must do so. Thus, for many people, the ideologies of culture and discourse appear neutral and their sense of agency as relatively unencumbered. (2002: 53)

According to Wallace (2002), performative subversion intended to denaturalise gender or sexuality may however risk being misinterpreted and misunderstood. It may be assumed, reversely, that Wallace has may have encountered moments of being misrecognised or unrecognised, which thefore enabled him to gain such an insight



into performativity. At any rate, the argument here presents a concrete problem with queer theories and practices, performativity in particular, because it requires something similar to 'inside knowledge' for any actions of queering or performative moments, to be really seen and validated. In this case, performativity is not a self-evident fact, but that which needs to be both learned and acquired.

What is rendered at stake in this situation is clearly that performativity, though theorised as an effective means to dismantle, or at least expose, the underlying ideology of dominant culture, may however not work as effectively as expected. Although all discourses and social practices can be argued as being performative, Wallace also admits that, 'no one can go through life exposing the performative nature of every aspect of culture' (2002: 54). The core question is not to go on with a life that deconstructs everything to the extent of no longer being able to lead a life, but asking how far performativity can go in terms of reaching out to people who only know of normativity and nothing else? How much can the subversive notion and practices of performativity really help us defy expected values and modes of heteronormativity, and prepare people for changes?

However, to question whether performativity can be a useful means of subversion is neither to negate such attempts or practices, nor to dismiss its value. My intention is to insert performativity back into the scene of action, and reveal a situation where it may not be as well received as hoped. In the end, when performativity itself is exposed as more of the preoccupation of insider, we seem to return to the normativity within us, which the function of most of the (media) - receiver/audience. I am wondering if the viable option here is an everyday life that is both performative *and* normative, conflated with the existing concepts and theories of gender and sexuality. Gamson (2000) has argued for the following, which may be read as highly relevant to this point:

[. . .] we have gone from unreflective confidence in the existence of sexual subjects- who only needed to be found and documented- to a boom in lesbian and gay studies filled with subjects speaking and writing about their own lives, to a suspicion that sexual subjects do not exactly exist to be studied, an ongoing deconstruction of sexual subjectivity. (2000: 348)

In other words, queers are not as concerned with sexual identity politics; rather, they are more in line with postmodern and poststructural inquiries into the realm of gender and sexuality. In this ‘ongoing deconstruction of sexual subjectivity’, queers may then not come out as a sexual identity. Queers may, instead, be more interested in playing—experiencing, carrying out and living— the paradox of queerness as innate/acquired in a fragmentary, deconstructive and/or celebratory way, alongside the people who already understand its underlying presumptions. For example, as mentioned before, the Spiteful Tots community has a tendency of subverting their gender roles when they interact with one another online, and this deconstruction of gender is also manifest in their themed postings, featuring various types of women: *shaonii*, *nüwong* (queen), *obasan*, Cinderella, or slut (*langnüi*; women who are sexually unrestrained). In these postings, stereotypes of women are utilised to express both their disagreement/ridicule of such representations, and their paradoxical identification with such female roles. Due to my focus on privacy and the everyday in this thesis, I will not be able to dwell upon the role of subversion and deconstruction. But I would like to add in this very rudimentary theoretical exploration to explain that series of performative actions do not necessarily always lead to successful disclosure of the imposed norm, and that performativity alone may not suffice for a grounded understanding of queers in today’s world and what constitutes or informs their everyday contexts, experiences and actions. For a situated and more wholesome picture, we also need to recognise that normativity has long been an inseparable part

of their lives, and will continue to play an indispensable role, too.

### **To Be or Not to Be an Activist**

There is still yet another dimension to this underrepresentation of *tongxinglian*'s everyday, which is the privacy of sexual minorities. In Lin's contention (1997), although concerns about privacy are not completely spelled out, they are clearly suggested. While issues of privacy has certainly been much discussed in relation to the complicated issue of coming out in Taiwan (Chu, 2000; Qitan Xiaoshen et al. 1997), privacy has not yet been theorised as enabling, or existing, as a way of life for *tongxinglian*. I however do see the potential of a discourse of privacy for *tongxinglian* people in Taiwan.<sup>112</sup> Privacy (alongside other possibilities) would help greatly with 'not organizing our stories around the closet', and 'not celebrating our popularity' (Barnhurst, 2007: 19). If privacy is championed, then it would follow that gays and queers would not need to tell stories about their coming out, whilst simultaneously seeing their popularity as something to be happy about and proud of.

This idea especially was inspired by a recent encounter with an electronic text describing the situation of someone who hopes to preserve her/his privacy so as to retain their agency as a fully functioning individual. This is from a post message on a BBS site called PTT2. I think this post is extremely enlightening for understanding that people of same-sex sexuality sometimes feel that they need to protect their own privacy as a way of expressing agency. They may at times be compelled by radical discourses which suggest one need become an extraordinary activist in order to show serious commitment to a sexual identity. In this set up, it is not about who wants the right to marry, to do drag, or whether that desire to marry or do drag is in itself beneficial to the promotion of sexual rights. Rather, it is about whether anyone who

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<sup>112</sup> In this case, I think privacy might only be a useful concept for gay and lesbians, because the situation for bisexuals or transgender people is slightly different.

identifies with same-sex desires should always be brave and visible for ‘the betterment’ of the movement’s future. As will be shown in the long post that follows on this page, there is also an underlying concept of seeing a life with limited activism as the life of ordinary folk, whilst living as an activist instead offers a different and more extraordinary image.

On the PTT2 BBS site<sup>113</sup>, a public discussion board that belongs to a lesbian couple records the following which is type-written by one of the board masters, Ruhile, nicknamed Xiaosen (Little Forest).<sup>114</sup> I am including here the long post in which she details her thoughts. I suggest that her ideas may provide the reader with the most relevant contextual knowledge for understanding the contemporary situation the Spiteful Tots participants are living with:

Author Ruhile (森)

Board: waisetsu

Title [Serious] Praxis of *Tongzhi* Movement

Time Thu Apr 3 00:47:56 2008

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Recently I have been questioned if I am part of the *tongzhi* activism.

[Before answering,]<sup>115</sup> I want to address an issue that this question is premised upon, which is whether this is an offensive question.

Unfortunately, I must add: Yes, it is an offensive question. At least to me, it is.

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<sup>113</sup> PTT2 is the branch BBS site of PTT, a popular, non-profit BBS site run by National Taiwan University. Due to the overflowing online users on the original site, PTT, PTT2 was created on April 21<sup>st</sup> 2000 to help with the heavy load and traffic. PTT2 can be accessed at [telnet://ptt2.cc](http://telnet://ptt2.cc).

<sup>114</sup> According to the email Ruhile sent me on May 1<sup>st</sup> 2009, Ruhile, nicknamed Xiaosen, felt willing to let me translate and use her real screen name, her actual board name and all her postings on this particular discussion thread for my PhD thesis. The consent form was in fact drafted by Ruhile herself after she read my email request to use her post in this chapter. As she is professionally involved in legal affairs, she must have figured that she may as well draft and sign the consent form to ensure everything would go according to plan. While this chapter will certainly be read by her before I can finalise drafting it, I must confess that this experience of being offered a professional consent form by a researched human subject is quite unusual for me. Over the past six years that I have been dealing with the Spiteful Tots community as a researcher, the participants have basically agreed to my research without ever straightforwardly giving me any official consent. This is elucidated upon in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>115</sup> I am adding in phrases and words to make the meaning flow more easily, but this has been done in a way that does not change the meaning of Ruhile’s (Xiaosen’s) post message. I have also sent the translation along with the analyses to Ruhile/Xiaosen to make sure that I have not misunderstood or misrepresent anything in the post.

To begin with, I think that the first level this question deals with [an assumption that] ‘I ought to be part of the *tongzhi* activism’. But why must I participate in *tongzhi* movement? I am a woman, a *tongzhi*, a Taiwanese, and a legal professional. Why aren’t I equally requested to be involved in women’s movement, Taiwan diplomacy, human right movement, but in *tongzhi* activism?

Having been asked if she is part of *tongzhi* activism, Xiaosen, rather than giving an answer immediately, throws the question back to the unknown questioner. She contends that this question, asking whether she considers herself a part of the *tongzhi* movement, or if she has made an effort in order to join in with this movement, is in itself offensive. By paralleling this question with other dimensions of her identity, Xiansen exposes the underlying assumptions about her being a *tongzhi* as *the* most important facet of her identity, one that calls for her participation in the corresponding social movement. Questioning this assumption of *tongzhi* as an almost overriding facet of her many other identities, she goes on to pose another question, asking whether *tongzhi* activism has to be limited to realms of legislation or NGO organisations:

[...]Well, but if the praxis of *tongzhi* activism can be broadly defined, I do think that I am making an effort. Although what I do is perhaps not as keen as what is carried out by people who are involved in legislation or in NGOs like the Hotline, yet we built this board, and I write things here. I embrace my identity as a *nütongzhi* [lesbian] (if using terminology then it’s that ‘I am charmingly proud’<sup>116</sup>). I think this is part of my contribution to the *tongzhi* activism. Even writing *tongzhi* thesis [or] *tongzhi* novels, I believe, can be counted as a kind of *tongzhi*-activism-related praxis.

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<sup>116</sup> The terminology in its original written Mandarin form is ‘嬌傲’ (being proud), which involves a deliberate choice of using the wrong complex Chinese character of ‘嬌’ (charming, delicate and/or pretty), where the correct character should be ‘驕’ (pride or arrogance). The replacement of the Chinese character for ‘pride’ with the character for ‘charming’ is meant to emphasise the kind of pride felt by a lesbian whose feminine traits may be associated with her being actively charming, delicate and/or pretty.

Xiaosen affirms the value of conducting small-scale, much less traditionally activist activities or behaviours for the sake of *tongzhi* representation, for example, thesis or novel writing. In her view, one does not need to specifically be engaged in *tongzhi* activism that involves public presence or coming out to be counted as a contributor to activist activities. She further goes on to address the second issue that this question raises, as this is bothering her:

Next, the second level embedded in the question is that ‘I am not willing to exert myself to *tongzhi* activism’. This is a serious accusation, and I must point out that this questioning is posited with a deep-seated sense of heterosexual hegemony. The kind of price a woman has to pay for striving for improvement of women’s equal rights is totally different from what a *tongzhi* has to pay for [if she should join] in the *tongzhi* movement. *Tongzhi* are more of a minority than women, and are much more stigmatised, too. Relatively speaking, the price a person has to pay due to admitting she is a *tongzhi* is much higher than that due to admitting her female identity.

Moreover, *tongzhi* activism runs the risk of stemming in a failure [despite the endeavours]. For example, if we hastily come out of the closet [*chugui*] in order to fight against the judicial interpretation of same-sex marriage, it may turn out that the Judges will simply interpret in such a way that same-sex marriage shall never again be possible, and that we are faced with a call that indicates a checkmate. Instead of making progress, *tongzhi* activism and movement under such a circumstance will encounter a backlash. But the price of coming out of the closet is already paid, and we will simply be the cannon fodder.

First, there are strategies for movement and activism. Self sacrifice and forging ahead no matter what comes in the way does not at all guarantee good results. Second, there is more than one way to change the world; movements in the form of political activism are just one of the alternatives. Coming out will however cost one’s future life, occupation and family. Its influence is irreversible, and yet this problem is non-existent in women’s movement. When a question like this [is posed, you know that it] ignores the

prices *tongzhi* people have to pay to participate in *tongzhi* movement, it embodies a kind of heterosexual arrogance of ‘I can, so why can’t you?’ This foregrounds the fact that the inquirer [conveniently] neglects the oppression *tongzhi* people have to confront [on a daily basis].

In these three paragraphs, Xiaosen argues that it costs much more for a *nütongzhi* to come out and participate in the *tongzhi* movement than a woman would if she came out as a feminist activist, fighting for equality. Therefore a questioning of Xiaosen’s dedication to the *tongzhi* movement actually reveals an ignorance of *tongzhi* people’s feelings about exclusion within heteronormative culture. In this way, challenging Xiaosen as an inactive participant of the *tongzhi* movement can be understood as problematically founded upon a refusal to really look at and learn from the kind of predicaments *tongzhi* subjects are likely to encounter. The consequences of coming out as a *tongzhi* entail a long chain of qualms and pains that is fraught with the specificities of a gay identity and various gay situations in modern society. The last issue regarding this and which, according to Xiaosen, may be analysed from this point of view, hinges upon the invisibility that results from not coming out:

The third level [of understanding this question] is ‘no one [Xiaosen’s friends] sees my [i.e., Xiaosen’s] efforts’.<sup>117</sup> This makes me feel rather helpless. At a minimum level, I don’t think that I need to stress that I am a *nütongzhi* everywhere I go, or that, before anyone says anything discriminating, I need to give them vaccine shots so as to pre-emptively make them be aware that they should show some respect to *nütongzhi*. *Tongzhi* activism or this social movement is indeed not everything in my life. For some activists, I may be counted as one of the people who do little activism. But it is unfair to recognise me as the same as those who deny their

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<sup>117</sup> This post, as it stands on its own, is actually a result of a certain friend’s question for Xiaosen. This particular friend is, according to Xiaosen, was a self-identified heterosexual woman at the time, with the belief that ‘love distinguishes no gender’ and devoted to the *tongzhi* movement. This friend thus found it unacceptable (or even scandalous?) that Xiaosen might not show up in at activist event or on occasions she herself would attend. Therefore, while Xiaosen is dealing with the overall mindset behind her friend’s questioning of her, she (Xiaosen) chose to compose this post specifically in response to the friend and the resulting situation.

homosexuality by being unwilling to strive for equal rights. In reality, I admit to the fact that there is much more *nütongzhi* who are without a strong *tongzhi* identity than the *nütongzhi* who consciously identify as *nütongzhi*. There are definitely more *tongzhi*, too, who spend their life in silence than those who are loud in *tongzhi* movement. But this is like much more women are content with things as they are, and fewer of them join in the women's movement. Every woman has her own value system and philosophy of life. I don't deny the hard work and valuable service the feminist activists have provided, and I don't think that women who do not take part in women's movement are necessarily those who are self-depreciating.

Xiaosen values the kind of privacy she is able to keep for herself by not coming out as a lesbian, and it seems to me that it is due to this preference that she is able to find less activist or movement-based ways to carry out the praxis of activism. The fact that she may still be suspected of contributing nothing to activism or the *tongzhi* movement (by some friends who knows her), despite the amount of work she might have done, discourages her and makes her feel 'helpless'. But at the same time, Xiaosen is still sure of the path she has chosen, which is to 'spend her life in silence' whilst opposing heterosexual hegemony in her own way and space. She is perfectly aware of the seeming passivity, or even complacency, she presents to the people around her who may self-identify as *tongzhi* activists, or activists working for *tongzhi*. However, she is not afraid of being misconstrued, or more precisely, she states her point of departure in regard to these issues without wavering between becoming a keen activist and staying as a private lesbian. It is this clarity of stance in response to such an intimidating interrogation that interests and inspires me to associate Xiaosen's post with the Spiteful Tots' rejection of the *tongzhi* label. Indeed, they would simply rather stay known as the 'Spiteful Tots' and not the sexual identity such as '*tongzhi*'. However, discussions on this point will emerge at a later point in the thesis.



### **Concluding remarks**

In an attempt to protect one's privacy, a person's decision to stay silent or cast her/himself as invisible may become the resulting practice. From the above discussion, I propose to look at silence and invisibility due to one's valuing of privacy as a gesture that actually provides an important sense of delay or deferment. Despite seeming inactive or even disempowering, silence or invisibility can resolve the paradox problem outlined previously, which stems from queer visibility. Privacy is notably not the same as escaping from acknowledging one's sexuality, but rather enables one to have a choice. This reservation of choice pertains to the building of LGBT people's agency, and their resistance to being stigmatised and oppressed. This clinging to 'having a choice' should not be mistaken for being deprived of voice or agency, but precisely the reverse. Privacy endows people with more room for contemplation, for settling down and thinking through. Instead of falling back on a knee-jerk, instant reaction, taking the stance of maintaining one's privacy demonstrates a kind of poise, of allowing oneself the space to feel and ponder.

Valuing the right to privacy may also be a way to maintain a sense of suspense, and this relates to the other two ideas Barnhurst (2007) proffers: not ministering professionally to our invisibility and not hoping for a technological, queer utopia (19). Keeping sexuality as a private matter means that one does not reveal his or her sexuality without discretion, and that he or she does not try to play it straight either. The key is simply to insist upon the private nature of sexuality when it is within the range of the personal and to not be afraid of speaking up when it involves dealing with the political. Speaking up does not always mean that one must automatically come out as a gay or lesbian subject, but that one can, like Xiaosen, perhaps write things that show his/her support and recognition of sexual rights. By so doing, the supporter leaves people not knowing whether they are LGBT or just liberal minded

people. Without sacrificing their own agency, the supporter can both send out the message and help people understand that ‘LGBT people are neither invisible nor visible; they just are’. This recognition of LGBT people’s existence is powerful in itself, without falling into the paradox of queer visibility— as quoted and discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

## Chapter Four | Methodologies and Methods

*Ethical reasoning requires a different form of intellectual engagement than that of scientific analysis. This kind of engagement—what Aristotle called phronesis, or the art of practical judgment—is not one that is easily described.*

(McKee and Porter, 2009: 26)

*The heart of moral experience does not lie in a mastery of general rules and theoretical principles, however sound and well reasoned those principles may appear. It is located, rather, in the wisdom that comes from seeing how the ideas behind these rules work out in the course of people's lives: in particular, seeing more exactly what is involved in insisting on (or waiving) this or that rule in one or another set of circumstances. Only expertise of this kind will give individual agents the practical priorities that they need in weighing moral considerations of different kinds and resolving conflicts between those different considerations.*

(Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988: 314)

I divide this chapter into four parts: the first explores the internet research ethics relevant to this project; the second gives an autobiographical note of how I become part of the Spiteful Tots community; the third explains the situation of BBS in Taiwan and compares and contrasts the Spiteful Tots community to other internet/BBS sites, whilst the fourth addresses a host of significant issues surrounding 'method', that is, how I actually conducted this research. The first part of the chapter, starts with the issue of ethics because, when conducting internet research, ethical issues are highly relevant although still very much in the developmental stage, as ICTs evolve and as research focussed on online sites becomes increasingly complex. I consult, among other works, the most recent publications by McKee and Porter (2009) and argue that, with the help of diagrams from both the latter and Sveningsson (2004), ethical considerations and decisions in conducting internet research have become able to be better formulated. The second part tells a story of my own engagement with BBS and the Spiteful Tots community before and after it was initiated on KKcity. The third part

of this chapter situates the Spiteful Tots community within the contemporary digital expression of sexuality. I present this section as part of the ‘methodology’ as the online origins and location of the community have given rise to complex methodological issues. I detail where the Spiteful Tots community is based, how the community started, what kind of community it is and in what ways it differs from others, as well as how its characteristics influenced the way I conducted the research. The third section focuses on the way my research was conducted, intersecting key conceptual concerns such as research boundaries and the internet as an extension of the everyday, thus enabling ethnography-inspired approaches for this study. I also dwell upon issues of public and private and gender and sexuality, showing that they are akin to those posts that will be selected as sources of data in this study, and exploring how and why I have analysed the community and its textuality as I do in the following chapters.

### **Researching an online community**

Since 2003, I have been studying and negotiating research ethics for the case of the Spiteful Tots community. Ethical concerns have turned out to be much more significant than simply the idea of ‘do no harm’ and they form an aspect of my research that has been in the foreground for a long period of time.

I start this section with a story. Back in 2006, when I was exploring the possible directions which this thesis could take, I was asked to do an interview with Heidi McKee and James Porter at the Annual Conference of Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) in Brisbane, Australia. I agreed, and offered the best I could at the time of meeting. Three years later, after my research has been shaped up in a quite different way, McKee and Porter’s (2009) book *The Ethics of Internet Research: a rhetorical, case-based process* was published. In it I read about how they contemplated internet research ethics, how other internet researchers conduct their

work and what kinds of problem they encountered. This book has collected valuable experiences and thoughts from contemporary internet researchers and, based on 30 interviews with researchers from 11 countries, argues for the implementation of ‘heuristic, procedural and adaptable frameworks’ (2009: xxi). The fact that many of those interviewed share the feeling of being a ‘path-breaker’, that is, in the type of internet research that they/we do (2009: xx), shows that the arrival of this book, and its subsequent potential impact on the forward momentum of decision making and the research process, is a timely one. As McKee and Porter (2009) have correctly commented, ‘many method books [. . . cordon] off ethical concerns in a separate chapter, [. . .] a strategy that has the unintended consequence of treating ethics as one of many topical concerns, or as a single stage in a process, rather than as ongoing questions that suffuse all modes of research and all stages of the research process’ (2009: xix). In other words, McKee and Porter believe that ‘ethical considerations are inseparable from methodological considerations, [. . .] particularly when negotiating the complex and ever-changing world of Internet research’ (2009: xix). This book of McKee and Porter’s has centralised internet ethics within the bigger picture of internet research so that researchers may be stimulated to consider it more carefully.

What has been true for me too is that ethical dimension of this study is very important. Throughout the past years of researching the Spiteful Tots community, I have indeed come to realise that the ethical dimensions of this study have evolved as much more complex and crucial than I had originally expected. While this is in part due to the context the internet occupies and the experience it offers, it certainly also has much to do with the Spiteful Tots community taking up a position as a ‘private club’. To understand what an online ‘private club’ might mean requires a long process of participation in, observation of and interaction with this loosely based group of Spiteful Tots. With these materials and understandings from long-term participation

and observation, I find helpful reading the McKee and Porter's book, especially in terms of 'developing appropriate, fair and just behavior for researchers' (McKee and Porter, 2009: xvii). I as a researcher can benefit from both dealing with ethical questions throughout the research process, as well as reading about other researchers' '[exploring] problematic issues, [examining] borderline cases, and [. . . conducting] its own empirical research on ethical matters' (McKee and Porter, 2009: xvii).

If there was one ethical concern that I think might be of paramount importance in the case of the Spiteful Tots community, it would be the issue of 'informed consent'. What needs to be considered when we researchers determine whether our studies require us to obtain informed consent? How should it be obtained? And who should give consent? These are not simple questions, and I now wish to discuss in more detail how such questions impacted on some vital methodological facets of my research. Many of these facets relate to the nature and purpose of online communities, especially in the sense of how online communication is perceived by the participants *and* by the researcher. At the same time, the way I articulate a community and the kind of communication that takes place in it are closely related to how I, as a researcher, conduct this study: whether I position myself as a participant-observer, a reader, or as a researcher. Delving into these issues of informed consent helps in clarifying research methodology: why I set particular research boundaries, what can be perceived as data, where and how I collected data, and why ethnographic methodology has inspired me in doing this research. This is to say, the negotiation with internet research ethics has formulated my methodology; providing extensive discussions and the integration of internet research as a whole for this study on the Spiteful Tots community.

### **Internet research ethics**

Prior to my experiences researching this thesis, there were several studies focusing on

the topic of internet research ethics (to name just a few: Ess, 2007, 2009; Thoese, 2003; Walther, 2002; Buchanan, 2004; Kitchin, 2007). Also, since 2008, a scholarly journal specifically devoted to studies of internet research ethics, the *International Journal of Internet Research Ethics*,<sup>118</sup> has been published. Needless to say, along with the rising importance of internet research and internet research methodology, ethics have drawn attention to the kind of environment that the internet formulates, compelling different sets of considerations when researchers try to conduct ethical research. Many of these works devoted to internet research ethics also revolve around the issue of informed consent, as almost all research based on or related to human subjects today has to defend itself at some point as to whether or not the researcher seeks informed consent. In addition to this, due to the way internet communication works, many of the ethical concerns are also related to the fact that the researcher may function as a lurker, an invisible and silent reader, who could, without going through the process of making contacts and obtaining consent, copy and paste postings, treat them as data and interpret, analyse, or use the material in contexts which might actually do harm to the person who posted the text.<sup>119</sup> In this kind of research situation, what is especially problematic is the internet's blending, or resetting, of the public and private. Boundaries of the public and private are blurred because more and more texts are available via a simple online search, or a click of the mouse in an online chatroom. Problematically, the participants of the chatrooms, or the posters of the typed texts, may be not so aware of the public nature of their texts.

McKee and Porter (2009), for instance, distinguish between what is legal and what is ethical. When they read that Amy Bruckman (2002) has received a reply from

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<sup>118</sup> <http://ijire.net/index.html>

<sup>119</sup> See for example, the report of a workshop on the Ethical and Legal Aspects of Human Subjects Research in Cyberspace. Written by Frankel and Siang on June, 11 1999, the report was included in the American Association for the Advancement of Science workshop, Washington, DC. The report can be retrieved on <http://www.aaas.org/spp/sfirl/projects/intres/main.htm> (retrieved date November 05 2009).

‘officials at the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) in the U.S. to ask them how the NEH determine whether a project should receive IRB [Institution Review Board] approval, the officials told her that “the NEH has always interpreted the human subjects regulations as not applying to them”’ (McKee and Porter, 2009: 79). McKee and Porter (2009) comment: ‘This is a dangerously facile dismissal of human subjects ethics, we feel—and one that all fails to acknowledge the distinctive nature of the online digital dynamic. Not all posts to the Internet should be treated like books in a library’ (2009:79). According to McKee and Porter, then, there is a critical difference between what is legally doable and what is ethically acceptable. In Taiwan, IRBs are usually used for clinically and medically based research, and there is little discussion on internet research ethics. However, I faced issues of ethical concern in my research, and avidly read whatever I could about internet ethics, although, as I argue above, most of them isolate ethics from actual research, whereas I was only too aware of the embedding of ethical concerns in my day-to-day research. I find McKee and Porter’s defence quite valid and important for developing an ethical consideration in dealing with online posts and texts, especially in my own research about the Spiteful Tots community, where they stress a strong sense of privacy in terms of online place.

In James Hudson and Amy Bruckman’s (2004) research on chatrooms, for example, they empirically investigated whether participants in IRC chatrooms on the ICQ network would be willing to be quoted and studied by internet researchers. They divided chatrooms according to four conditions: the first three conditions were those where Hudson and Bruckman either posted a message about doing research on the chatrooms, or where they asked participants to opt into the study and have their chats recorded. The last condition was set as a control, where nothing is actually said about the research but where they simply joined in, recording and studying the chatroom



information. They wrote:

We recorded and analyzed how subjects responded to being studied. Results of a regression analysis indicate significantly more hostility in the three conditions where we said something than in the control condition. We were kicked out of 63.3% of the chatrooms we entered in the three message conditions compared with 29% of the chatrooms in the control condition. There were no significant differences between any of these three conditions. Notably, when given a chance to opt in, only 4 of 766 potential subjects chose to do so. (2004: 127)

In the conclusion, then, Hudson and Bruckman think that since ‘obtaining consent is impracticable’, a waiver of consent, therefore, should be made possible. In a follow-up study in 2005, they further elaborated on this argument for a waiver of consent based on the fact that chatrooms are accessible for all, and also that, since people’s reaction to research was quite negative, it would then only be disruptive to seek consent in this situation. The kind of controversy presented in Hudson and Bruckman’s studies (2004, 2005) is that while conversations in chatrooms are in essence taking place in a public context, the chatroom participants are still insistent upon their right to privacy, asserting the idea that they do not want their real-time conversations to be recorded and studied. This presents and corresponds to what Christine Hine (2005) has portrayed for us, ‘[. . .] a situation in which uncertainties about what participants in online settings expect, coupled with an apparent expansion in the data that researchers can collect, creates the potential for researchers to overstep accepted ethical boundaries’ (2005: 5). Barbara Shaft (1999) has also pointed out: ‘Such [online] data collection is doable and ostensibly legal, yet flies in the face of what thousands, maybe millions, of Internet group members feel is permissible and ethical’ (1999: 252). In this case of Hudson and Bruckman (2004, 2005), they see the chatroom texts/conversations as ‘published’ because they are posted to the public,

thus arguably sit ready to be quoted by anyone who comes across them. However, the chatroom participants regard the conversations as private in the sense that they are not directed towards just anyone, but towards the other participants present in the chatroom at the time they are connected. This is to say, despite the public nature or quality of chatrooms on ICQ networks, the chatlogs should not be considered as public in the same way as published newspaper articles or academic essays, instead they are deemed private by the chatroom users.

### ***Public and private***

When posts or conversations are intended for a wider circulation or can be easily accessed (without being password protected, for example), it is usually expected that the posts/conversations may be treated as published. However, the notion of ‘published’ on the internet is highly problematic (McKee and Porter, 2009). Within the same space of a single chatroom, as shown above for instance, there may be differing expectations and norms of how the texts may be used by others who can read, copy and paste what has been typed. Patricia Lange (2007), therefore, argues that notions of public and private are rather ‘fractalised’, meaning that distinctions between public and private differ on very small, minute levels. According to Lange (2007), Youtube online video clips are both publicly private and privately public, depending on the situation of use. For publicly private use, people who upload a video, while having the file publicly open on the website, tag the clip in such a way that only friends and families will be able to find it. For privately public, Youtube users share with just about anyone (i.e., practically strangers) personal and private information, such as sexuality, by coming out on the video or reveal details about their sexual preference – although this does take place without exposing other details about themselves (such as their name, affiliation or place of residence). In either of the situations, I find it quite clear that at least two factors should become part of the

considerations in dealing with ethical dimensions of research: firstly, how technology-savvy user/participants are and whether they are able to manipulate the technology in skilful ways, and, secondly, whether they are fully aware of the consequences of their practices.

With this understanding, then, Hudson and Bruckman's research (2004) into chatrooms on ICQ networks should have been redesigned. In my view, they should have considered whether the chatroom participants were familiar with chatroom interfaces and functions. This is something that might change the way participants view conversations held in public chatrooms. The participants' levels of expertise with the internet constitute an important factor in determining whether it is ethical or not to quote the chatroom participants in research. In the situation of being unfamiliar with computer-mediated communication, for example, it would be problematic to view the participants as the authors and the participants' texts as published. Writings published online, in essence, are not the same as printed and published texts in offline settings, and nor should the posters or the person who typed the texts be immediately positioned as the author. Hudson and Bruckman's research (2004) treats online texts as published writings at the risk of neglecting the important consideration of online computer-mediated dynamics.

Such dynamics makes much writing online tilt towards being 'person-based', instead of simply being 'text-based' (McKee and Porter, 2009). McKee and Porter have in fact argued this point with the following example:

If we want to use ideas from Lawrence Lessig editorial published in the Wired online magazine [. . .] nobody would have any trouble viewing that editorial as a formal publication [. . .] We do not have to secure Lessig's informed consent [. . .or] IRB approval for using that article, even though Lessig is alive and clearly a living and breathing person. It is simply not an issue for human subjects consideration, because in this context Lessig is

clearly an author of an article published in an online magazine. Here, in this paradigm example, the print analogy holds. [ . . . ] However, let us imagine a different kind of publication venue. If Larry Lessig posts on a blog about, say, abuse he experienced as a child or if he is a participant in an online chat support group for people who have family members with cancer, then, in effect, he becomes a different ‘Lawrence Lessig’. He is writing personally, not in his professional role as a legal scholar—and in such a situation, human subjects concerns may pertain, we would argue. (2009: 79-80)

Despite this person-based interpretation of online texts, McKee and Porter quickly add to their argument that ‘there is no “person only” designation for material posted on the Internet’ (2009: 81). They further note that:

The author/person binary is actually itself an inaccuracy, or at least it is if our object of study is people’s online textual, audio, and video posts. In terms of most Internet studies, there is no such thing as ‘person’. The continuum should instead develop along the distinction of author-person versus person-author. (2009:81).

So what is at stake here is not quite whether the object of study necessarily rests upon either end of the spectrum between person and text, but how much of the texts posted online are mediated by the person-author who posted it? To what extent should we researchers take into consideration the person factor in our study of online texts?

### ***Person-based vs. Text-based***

For resolving this problem of elusiveness between person and text, McKee and Porter (2009) have been influenced by a diagram by Malin Sveningsson (2004: 56; Fig 1), and posit a way of helping researchers determine which area of Sveningsson’s diagram their own study might fall into. The more private and sensitive the information is, the more likely that it should be treated as a person-based text. To illustrate, I first offer Sveningsson’s grid, where public/private and sensitive/non-sensitive information is placed at two ends of the lines to create four

different zones. McKee and Porter (2008, 2009) further complicate the grid by creating additional zones and areas in the diagram, in the hope of helping researchers formulate a more detailed and careful evaluation of the object of study. Below, I reproduce a diagram from a journal article that McKee and Porter (2008: 732; Fig 2) published in *College Composition and Communication*. This diagram is almost the same as that used in *The Ethics of Internet Research* (2009; Fig 4), only with a slight difference, which will be explained later.<sup>120</sup>

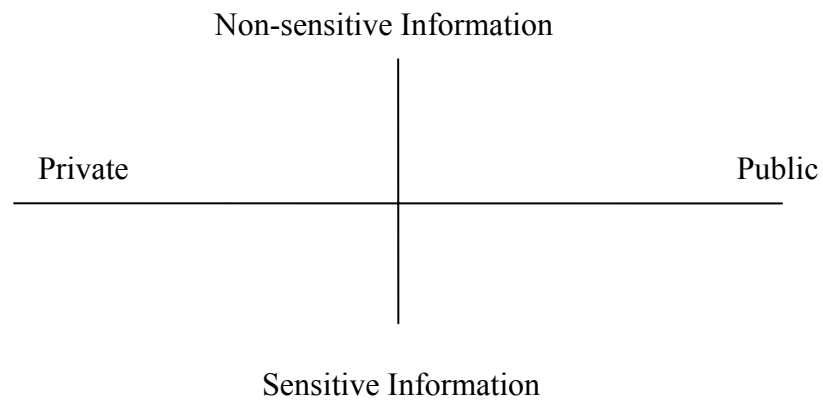


Figure 1 adapted from Sveningsson, 2004: 56

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<sup>120</sup> The two diagrams are basically the same, only with a slight difference—which will be discussed below—in terms of how they interpret where the examples (passages of smaller fonts) should go.

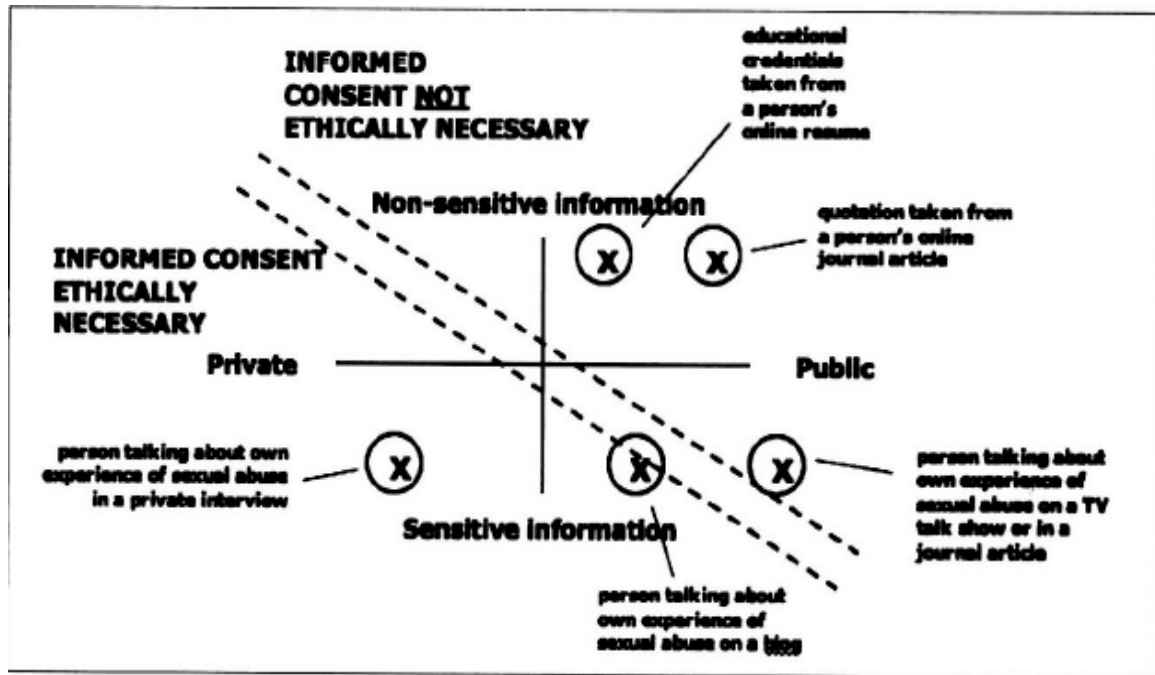


Figure 2 reproduced from McKee and Porter, 2008: 732

The reproduction gives us a diagram whose resolution is far from satisfactory,<sup>121</sup> I thus felt the need to add some numbers as indicators, so that the reader may better understand what the passages of smaller fonts indicate. From my reproduction of the texts below, the addition of the numbered boxes near each passage is used to help clarify what is written in the passages (Fig 3).

<sup>121</sup> I copied and pasted the diagram from the pdf file of the journal article which was downloaded from the online site of *College Composition and Communication*.

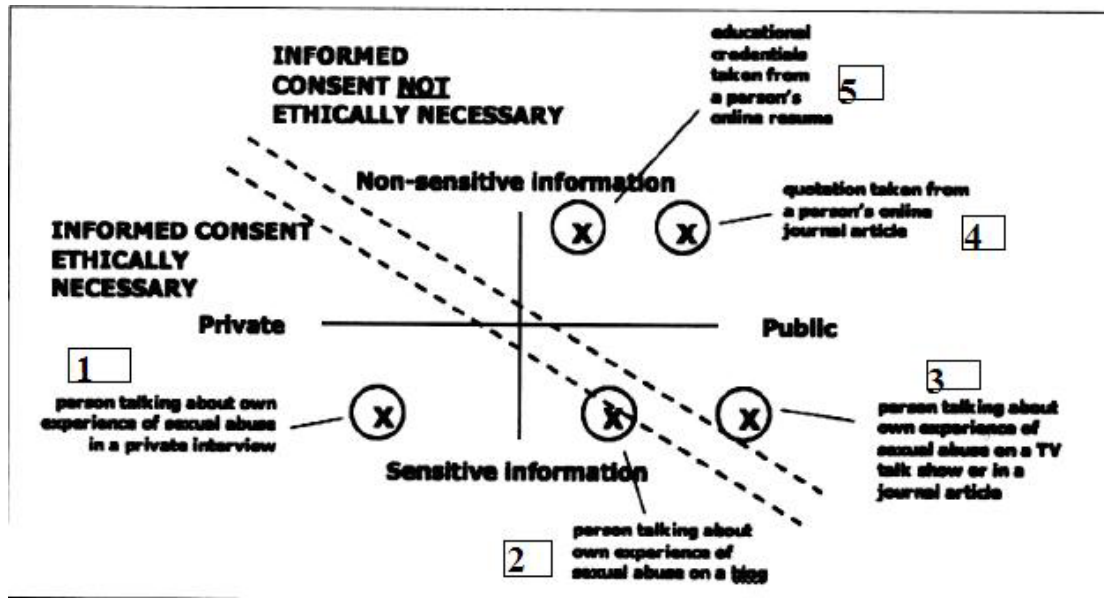


Figure 3 my addition of the numbered boxes,  
based on McKee and Porter’s adaptation of Sveningsson

In Fig 3, box 1 McKee and Porter give an example of a ‘person talking about sexual abuse in a private interview’, in an attempt to show a topic that may be deemed as highly private and sensitive. Box 2 suggests how sensitive information can be viewed when it is disclosed in a public or semi-public context: for example, with a ‘person talking about own experience of sexual abuse on a blog’.<sup>122</sup> Box 3 explains that a ‘person talking about own experience of sexual abuse on a TV talk show or in a journal article’ belongs to the category of sensitive information that can be revealed in an even more public situation. Box number 4 reads ‘quotation taken from a person’s online journal article’, which does not deal with what the quotation is about,<sup>123</sup> but

<sup>122</sup> In a later version of this diagram (Fig 4), McKee and Porter made some revisions, specifying instead that it is about a ‘person writing about sexual abuse on a public blog’. However the position of this example in the diagram is slightly tilted towards the ‘sensitive’ end than is Fig 3. There seems an interesting shift in McKee and Porter’s attitude towards what is private and sensitive. The example shown in Fig 3 is obviously more entitled to be considered ‘sensitive’, as it is a ‘person talking about own experience of sexual abuse on a blog’, rather than (in Fig 4) simply a person writing about sexual abuse in general (not necessarily from one’s own experience). However, the slightly less sensitive information about sexual abuse on a public blog is moved towards the ‘sensitive’ end of the diagram, suggesting a more prudent and careful position held by McKee and Porter just one year later.

<sup>123</sup> In comparison, in their latest book, McKee and Porter revised this example and instead use ‘person writing about interface design in a journal article’ to replace the unclear example that states ‘quotation

focuses on the idea that an online journal article may be regarded as obviously public and thus the information found on that platform may be more likely less sensitive. And lastly, box number 5 says ‘educational credentials taken from a person’s online resume’, which, in the context of the diagram, is treated as non-sensitive and public information. The five short passages indicate five examples of what may correspond to the different parts and areas of the diagram. In their adaptation, McKee and Porter (2008; Fig 2) problematise Sveningsson’s grid by introducing the consideration of informed consent: if it is both private and sensitive, then informed consent is quite necessary. If not, then informed consent may not be needed. They also add diagonally positioned dotted lines that further show that the division between public and private realms does not need to be horizontal, but can be slightly diagonal.

In the diagram that appeared in their 2008 article, ‘educational credentials from a person’s online resume’ are regarded as non-sensitive, public data that does not necessarily require informed consent. However in the photograph of their latest version of the diagram in the book (2009: 21; Fig 4) below, there is some change to this interpretation. This change indicates that even if the online resume can be counted as nearly published, it is however still related to a specific person, or it simply represents the person who produced this resume. Therefore, just when an online resume seems to hold a better possibility of being viewed as an example of published text, and therefore more text-based, it is in the end still considered slightly more person-based by McKee and Porter (2009).

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taken from a person’s online journal article’. Therefore, it can be discerned that the subject of a published journal article still matter in terms of making a judgment of how sensitive the information is.



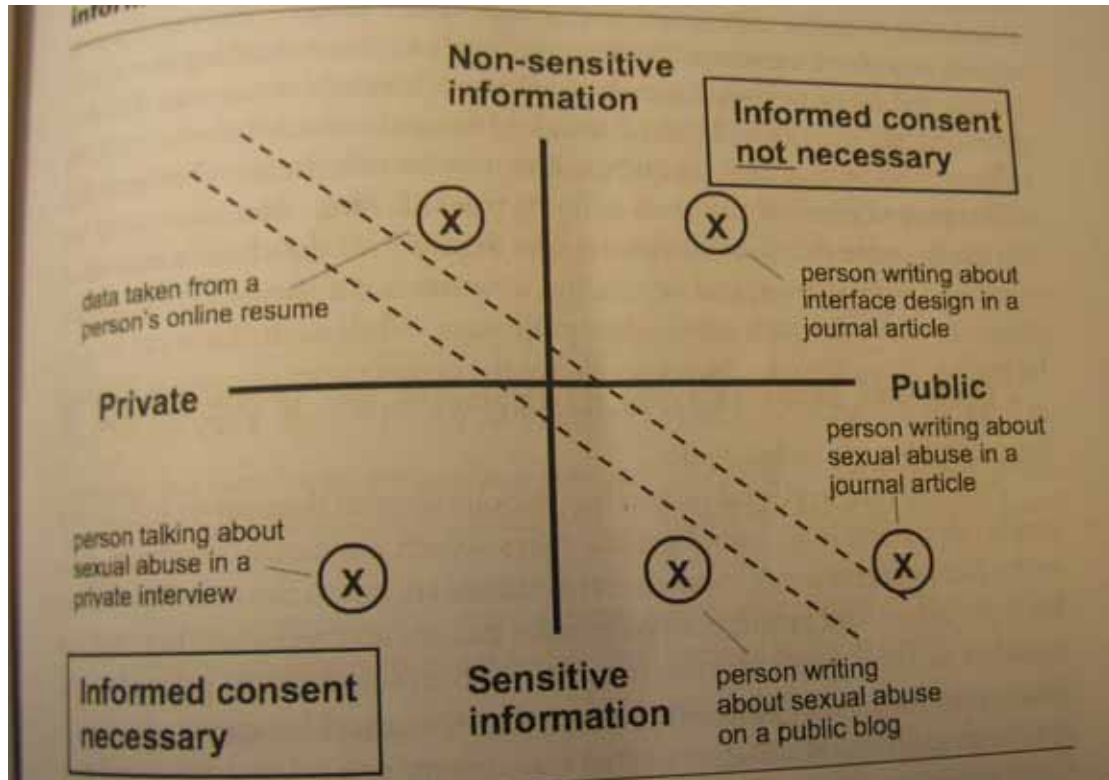


Figure 4 photo taken from McKee and Porter, 2009: 21

From the picture above, we can see that the diagram has been altered a little. The ‘data taken from a person’s online resume’ is added in Fig 4, resulting in ‘educational credentials from a person’s online resume’ (in Fig 2 and 3) being removed. Moreover, ‘data taken from a person’s online resume’ is now resituated in the upper-left zone, indicating that while such data is non-sensitive, it is still personal information, hence the shift. This shift from public to private is particularly interesting. McKee and Porter’s perception of the information provided in the online resume shows that the distinction of public and private is not self evident. Rather, it is dependent upon the context as well as the participant’s perception (in this case the person who produced the resume). The distinction between public and private is also relevant to how the researcher defines public and private, or what exactly is considered public and private in an online context by the researcher. I find this change of idea about online resumes tellingly reveals the difficulty of distinguishing between public and private.

According to the above visualisations, the researcher has to cope with both continua simultaneously—sensitive and non-sensitive, and public and private—so that a more nuanced and careful positioning of the object of study may be recognised, that is, in the hope of conducting ethical research on the internet. Based on help from visual mappings, I think that the more sensitive the topic of discussion is, the more privacy the online texts are entitled to. However, even if the data collected is of a non-sensitive nature, the researcher should still consider if the information is personal, and whether it is thus still to some degree private. While there may well be the juxtaposition of sensitive information and public media (such as writing about personal experience of sexual abuse in a public blog), the researcher should nevertheless show some respect for the private nature of the subject, despite the publicness of the online interface (say of a blog). Under such circumstances, this particular blog entry may be slanted for a person-based research methodology, allowing a more nuanced and considerate interpretation of the typed texts to manifest in the research. In this case, whether to seek informed consent or not, the researcher, in an effort of undertaking an ethical analysis of the blog texts, should evaluate if the study would expose the person who wrote the blog entry to any rhetorical, technological or even material vulnerability (see also Halvarson and Lillienge, 2003). What the researcher is dealing with after all is not just texts, but texts which relate to the person who composed them. If this attention to the person-author can ensure that the research will have a better chance of avoiding harm to the human subjects involved in this research, then it is of course shaping the way the research is going to be conducted.

### ***Informed Consent***

However, whether the researcher should seek informed consent or not remains another issue to be discussed. While pursuing the benefits of research is important, the

research should, as previously contended, still be done without skipping the step of protecting the subjects. Protecting the subjects seems to suggest that informed consent offers a kind of protection, as the subjects are then informed of the research, and will also have thought about the consequences before giving his/her consent. However, I argue that obtaining informed consent does not always ensure sufficient consideration about the human subjects; nor does it necessarily imply protection. This is because, sometimes, informed consent may risk causing irreversible harm to the subjects, and that, under such a circumstance, informed consent may not be a completely appropriate idea. Yukari Seko (2006, 2007), for instance, decided not to seek informed consent from bloggers whose blog entries she read and studied for her Master's dissertation. For her MA project, Seko (2007) chose to focus on communicating in blogs in relation to suicidal and self-destructive desires.<sup>124</sup> One of the bloggers who Seko calls Perry, self-identifies as 17 years old and presented a particularly difficult situation. In this situation, a researcher seeking informed consent might further complicate Perry's already tense relationship with her parents. Perry, according to Seko in her interview with McKee and Porter (2009), reveals in her blog entries that she does not have a good relationship with her parents. Perry's posting on the blog, or owning of such a public blog, is also not part of her parents' awareness (McKee and Porter, 2009: 97). However, if Seko seeks informed consent, Seko will need to seek Perry's parents' consent. According to Canadian laws, minors cannot give informed consent but their legal guardians can. If, however, Perry's parents were to find out about the blog, they may well disapprove of her practice of writing about her desire to cut herself, or showing the photos of her cuts (McKee and Porter, 2009: 97). Based on McKee and Porter's (2009) interview with Seko in 2006, then, they comment that 'seeking consent from the parents would cause Perry greater harm than her simply

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<sup>124</sup> This is also the topic of her ongoing PhD research at York University in Canada.

being a lurking, observing researcher because it potentially could cause Perry to stop posting and to stop using the online space to write and communicate with a community that is clearly important to her' (2009: 97). Seko's study presents a difficult case in which seeking consent may do more harm than good to the human subject. While this certainly does not mean that informed consent should automatically be omitted whenever the researcher comes across a similar case, Seko's initial exploration into the field of internet research ethics does show the complexity and difficulty of trying to conduct ethical research. This difficulty and complexity is particularly related to what 'ethical' ultimately means to the different parties involved—the blogger, the researcher and the reader/commentator of the blog.

Juxtaposed with the previous observation of how McKee and Porter (2008) changed their opinion of whether an online resume is public or private data, I wonder if trying to act as a responsible researcher automatically results in the revision of some ideas. It seems a very likely situation when the researcher has to revise his or her thoughts or details of arguments during the process of investigation and reflection. As online resumes contains personal information and represent something from the realm of the private, McKee and Porter (2009) changed their way of positioning data collected from online resume in the diagram (Fig 4). Seko, too, was faced with the dilemma of whether to follow the research protocol and seek informed consent, or to be considerate towards the blogger subject and actually think and act in her (Perry's) best interest. It certainly remains a difficult question: the minor blogger, Perry, who finds online writing important (especially for expressing her suicidal or self-destructive tendencies) may however be deprived of that precious space if Seko seeks consent from the young woman's parents. In this case, not seeking informed consent may be a way of actually protecting the subject.

### **The Spiteful Tots BBS site**

So far I have undertaken a rudimentary exploration<sup>125</sup> of some of the issues that relate to informed consent. Although I have pointed out several dimensions to consider when deciding whether informed consent is necessary, I have not yet discussed in-depth how I think of ethics in relation to the Spiteful Tots community. To begin to formulate an ethical research design, I propose that we first consider the fact that we are looking at an online community that requires login names and passwords. No matter how easily one can create a new account and be part of a password-protected community, there is still a distinction between password-protected and non-password-protected online communities. For example, password-protected texts are less likely to appear on the result lists of search engines and are thus more restricted in terms of access. Therefore, non-password-protected texts are necessarily considered more public than those that can only be accessed with a password. However, the fact that the Spiteful Tots community is based on BBS, not WWW, renders this difference non-existent. Unless the BBS is integrated with some WWW-based functions or features, any BBS-based texts are unlikely to appear as results through keywords entered in search engines. This is due to the different interface BBS communities are based upon.

Despite this, the password-protected online environment of the Spiteful Tots community should still be rightly viewed as a private rather than public space.

Although BBS communities cannot be used as the determining standard of whether

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<sup>125</sup> In McKee and Porter's (2009) book, there are more graphs and diagrams for reference than what has been quoted and reproduced here. While these excluded diagrams would certainly help researchers decide whether an informed consent is necessary, I however choose to stop at this point and refrain from doing more elaborations on ethical issues of internet research, in the hope of resulting in a balanced chapter. For example, Figure 4-3 on page 97 of their book describes variables influencing informed consent. This mapping might be a highly pertinent one to include in this chapter here, as it considers not only just public/private qualities and topic sensitivity, but also degree of interaction in the online site and the participant/subject vulnerability. In this diagram, for example, 'Sapfo', the lesbian and bisexual online community in Norway, which is the focus of Bromseth's (2006) PhD thesis, presents a similar case with the Spiteful Tots community; both Bromseth's study and mine reached the idea that informed consent is necessary.

texts can be easily searched or not, the Spiteful Tots community does however, as suggested before, deem itself a private club. However, I think that this mobilisation of ‘private’ is really due to the sensitive nature of sexuality being included as a main topic of discussion in the community. In the context of contemporary Taiwan, discussions of sexuality in general are still considered very sensitive. Since the Spiteful Tots community solicits discussions in relation to non-normative sexuality, it certainly contains sensitive information that cannot bear too much public exposure. Therefore, it seems a simple task to determine that the Spiteful Tots community is part of a private zone, and that it contains sensitive information according to Sveningsson’s grid.

### **The researcher in the community**

However, if I want to apply the McKee and Porter’s diagram, and work out where to locate the Spiteful Tots community in their mapping (Fig 4), I probably need to consult with the past years of experiences, observations and participation in the community, rather than just base everything on what the Tots claim the community to be. In order to facilitate the following discussion, I start by offering the picture below to indicate where I would like to locate it—somewhere that shows it contains sensitive information, and yet is situated between the axis that distinguishes public and private.

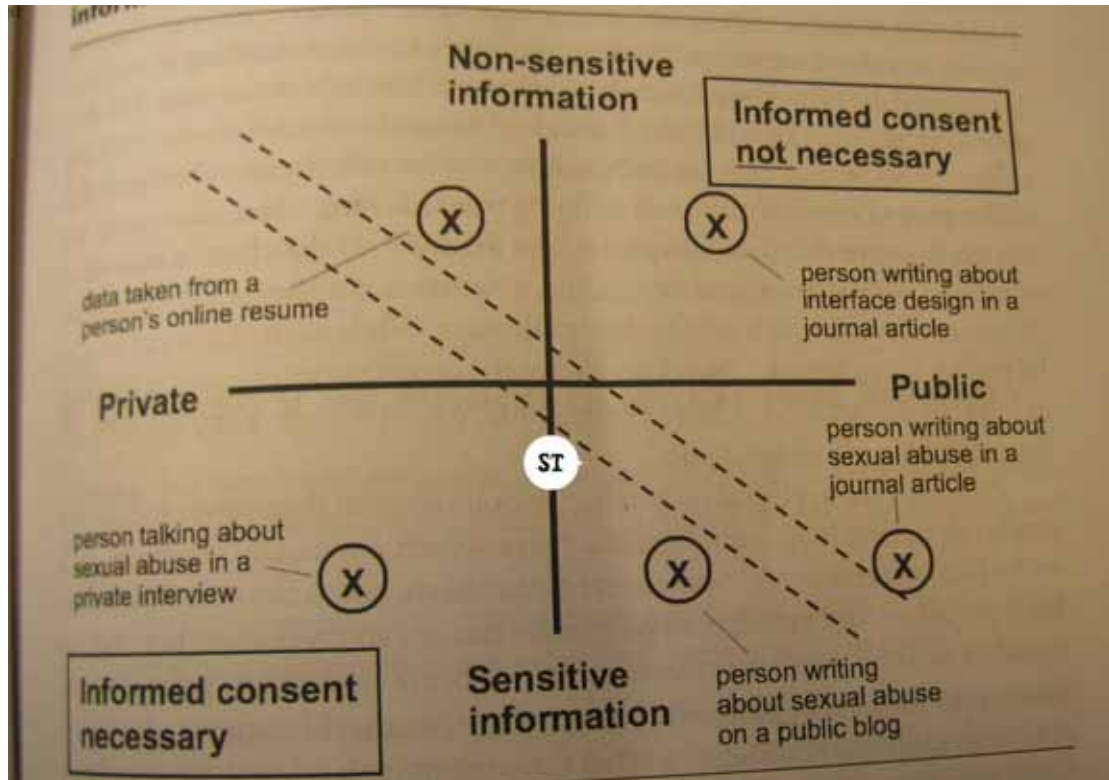


Figure 5 my addition of Spiteful Tots to Fig 4

In my positioning, the Spiteful Tots community rests exactly on the axis that divides private from public. I place the community there in this diagram because they have intentionally built the community in two related parts, one being that where discussion boards are open to the public (meaning anyone with a viable account on the main server, KKcity), and the other, the personal boards, which can be both private (by invitation only) and public (open to all KKcity participants), depending on each Board Master's personal decision and arrangement. In this kind of division, I observe that people carefully maintain the number of discussion boards slightly higher than that of the personal boards, so that the community will always be slightly more about relatively public interactions, rather than about the private discussions that emit from the closed circles in the personal boards. For the purpose of my research, I only quote from public discussion boards. The fact that there have been 39 public boards from 2000 to 2009 in the Spiteful Tots community (including the ones currently in use

and the ones that have ceased functioning) provides me with an abundance of data. In this light, while the Spiteful Tots community has emphasised that it is a 'private club', it has nevertheless experienced a healthy division of public and private boards since its inception. The participants are fully aware of this arrangement, and have also agreed to this kind of conscious managing of public space in the community.

Therefore, the community cannot be totally defined as a private place; rather, it is more like a private club but with plenty of facilities that are open to the public. Over time, I feel this structural organisation has influenced the way the Spiteful Tots community has developed. Although participants have never been more than 30 in number, there are constantly new discussion threads appearing. Given all these observations and ideas, I have attempted to express this interesting situation by positioning the community on an axis of public and private.

Despite the fact that I have just mentioned that any password-protected site can reasonably be thought of as private, I also need to clarify that KKcity,<sup>126</sup> the main BBS server that holds 700 sites and communities under its auspices, is regularly logged into by more than 200,000 people per day. In this sense, the Spiteful Tots community, which is nested in a popular BBS main server, cannot, practically, be assured of its privacy. At best, it is one of those sites where the 'publicly private', in Lange's (2007) words, may be achieved by manipulating computer-mediated communication towards the community's maintenance of privacy within the open and the public realms.

### ***Participants***

Different from the other sexuality-related boards on popular BBS sites, the Spiteful Tots community is a place where participants either knew other participants as offline

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<sup>126</sup> More about how this main BBS site looks, as well as for information in complex Chinese, please visit: <http://www.kkcity.com.tw/city.htm>



friends/acquaintances before the coming together of the community, or they have ‘known’ the others’ screen names for more than a few years and can therefore count on them as friends/acquaintances. At its onset, as both small-scale and intimate, the community was not ready to be as open and public as larger and less intimate feeling LGBT-related groups and forums. In fact, in the first year of the Spiteful Tots community (2000), the community was indeed a closed one. Only people who were invited could see and access it; the rest of the registered BBS users on KKcity were simply unaware of its existence. However, after a year, the community had to go public according to KKcity’s regulations.<sup>127</sup> The community then declared its position of viewing itself as a private club. Even before the community opened its gates, however, the Spiteful Tots had already organised the community as it is today—as both public (a board for general discussions) and private (with personal boards for the masters of the boards). I therefore believe that the Spiteful Tots community has conceptualised itself as a community that contains both the public and the private, hoping to attract interesting new supporters and contributors whilst to retain a sense of privacy.

Perhaps owing to its initial private or ever secretive status in KKcity, which might have created a stronger sense of identification within the group itself, I find that participants in the Spiteful Tots community seem to be here to stay. During the past 9 years, I have certainly seen some of the participants who were once active, fall silent in the community. Yet just when I wondered if they had stopped visiting the community, I would come across a post from them. From time to time, they posted or replied, and from these postings, I could tell that they had not been away; they clearly knew the current situation in the community. It could be inferred that they had been

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<sup>127</sup> New communities operating under KKcity can be closed to their own members for a year. After one year of ‘test running’, if the community is still in operation and the number of its participants growing, then the community must open to all registered users operating on KKcity.

quietly reading, lurking and observing the community all along. This kind of realisation occurred to me several times and about different participants. I started to think that people in this community seem to continuously care about this place, whether they actively contributed posts or not. While some of the participants may not always have things to say or time to share thoughts with others, they appear to show up and visit whenever they can. In this sense, the community can be looked upon as a place that maintains interpersonal relationships among the participants, as well as a kind of ‘hometown’<sup>128</sup> that the participants feel is meaningful to occasionally revisit.

### ***A BBS user’s note***

My entry point into the BBS and the Spiteful Tots community needs to be explained and to do this I use an autobiographical description of how I came to know these people in the late 1990s and later, became a part of the Spiteful Tots community when it still was in the first-year probation of ‘by invitation only’ with its BBS portal site KKcity.<sup>129</sup> On contemplating these relationships, I feel the need to offer an autobiographical account of before and after I entered and stayed in the Spiteful Tots community. As BBS presents a highly contextual site, I suggest it would be useful to offer an autobiographical account of my research trajectory by detailing the process of

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<sup>128</sup> I use ‘hometown’ as a comparison because of being inspired by a conversation between myself and the current SYSOP of an old lesbian BBS site called ‘Bad Daughters’ (壞女兒). Somewhere in our dialogue, the SYSOP of this BBS site told me that many young lesbians came to Bad Daughters not exactly to post, chat or meet people, but to feel connected to a ‘historical’ site that had been meaningful to lesbian women since 1996. I think this sentiment of trying to feel ‘connected’ to a history that the younger lesbians did not have the chance to be part of, may offer something similar to the way some of the participants visit the Spiteful Tots community. While the Spiteful Tots community is certainly not as old or as famous, the participants may have some significant memories about this place and find it irreplaceable no matter how much other forms of social media - blogs, twitter, plukr or Youtube sites - have become popularised within the mainstream.

<sup>129</sup> During the first 5 years of its establishment, KKcity spared no effort in recruiting members. Many sexual dissidents, or people interested in sexuality in general, went there to initiate discussions and find communities on wide-ranging topics relating to sexuality. In 2006, however, KKcity declared that they would no longer process requests for communities based on sexuality, but that other requests to join non-sexuality-based communities were still welcomed. This decision irritated many existing communities; the Spiteful Tots community and many others all stood up and objected to this policy. This policy however continued, with KKcity being more discreet and strict in monitoring online posts and their web links.

being a participant of BBS sites and the Spiteful Tots community. My first encounter with the internet was in 1990. From then onwards, I made use of the computers at the school library to connect to BBS sites<sup>130</sup> for chatting as well as for information updates on both general and particular issues. When I was admitted to university in 1997, I was given a second-hand computer and started to form the habit of going online every day. For several hours, I would spend time lurking, reading, participating and chatting on various university BBS sites. I visited at least 10 BBS sites each day, sometimes up to 15 when I was on a search of information. Back then I could memorise every BBS site's IP address<sup>131</sup> or domain name, depending on which one was easier. I could also use the basic telnet function to connect myself to BBS sites, without the help of BBS software, which contains a list of domain names and IP addresses of all BBS sites. This ability to learn BBS sites' addresses by heart, combined with a Taiwan Academic Net (TANet) optical-fibre cable connection, made my use of the BBS satisfyingly fast-paced. Owing to the speed, I felt I was *not* using a tool at all, but rather my thoughts and actions were completely merged with and extended to the BBS world.

When I was an exchange student in Auckland, New Zealand in 1998, BBS sites meant something more than just having fun or keeping informed, but became where I identify with a sense of homesickness. At the time I knew enough to set up an internet connection there, using my complex Chinese laptop with a dial-up account borrowed from a friend. However, I was frequently frustrated by the slow connection due to the non-existent bandwidth of the times. Even with this hindrance, however, I managed to log onto BBS in Taiwan at least once a day during term time, which I found was very important to me. Although the BBS sites I visited were not anywhere close to where I

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<sup>130</sup> I went to the BBS sites of Taipei Jingmei Girls' Senior High School and the National Taiwan University (Coconut Tree).

<sup>131</sup> An IP address is an identifier for a computer or device in the vast sea of internet networks.

had lived in Taiwan, and many of them were also not related to where I studied and spent most of my time in Taiwan, it was only on those BBS sites that I found myself understood and ‘accompanied’ in a profound sense. I started to type and produce many posts on a BBS site called SideWorld, which was a small, privately run and not for profit site. SideWorld had no affiliation with universities, and so provided a perfect place for me to compose any kind of posting, without ever worrying about it being read by people who were or had been, around me.

During the 1990s, private and non-profit BBS sites like SideWorld were built from personal interests, usually by someone highly informed about (not necessarily skilful) in computer science. These private BBS sites were of a much smaller size than the academic/university ones, and much less well-known. So they shared a much more intimate and friendly atmosphere than the larger, more comprehensive university-based ones. Since they were non-profit, it was thus not surprising that these private BBS sites would come and go; indeed, they could stop functioning at any time due to problems with hardware, software or internet connection. There was, for example, a BBS site called ‘Forever’ created by a PhD student in National Chiao Tung University in 1998, but it suddenly went offline in 2006 after 8 years of operation. Due to lack of funds to replace the old and worn out hardware, the entire BBS site’s data on the computer’s hard disk broke down without giving any previous sign or indication. This malfunction caused the BBS site to completely disappear and I, as one of the regulars, lost hundreds of thousands of posts, messages, dialogues and journals collected and stored on my private board there.

First launched in 2000 on KKcity, the Spiteful Tots community was founded by a group of online users who had their individual personal boards on another BBS site, which was the aforementioned ‘SideWorld’. SideWorld became, similar to what happened in Forever, quite unstable in July 2000 and was eventually inaccessible for

all of August (but was then miraculously resurrected in September that year and is in fact still functioning today). During August, these people, worried that they might lose everything in SideWorld, decided to start afresh on another BBS site along with the other new people they had met and befriended on SideWorld, including me. In that year, KKcity was a newcomer in terms of popular BBS sites, with its BBS Unite System promising to keep as many as one million online communities together. Such a promise may seem hyperbolic, but since it is a commercial site, one million communities are indeed possible, that is, as long as there are that many paying customers who use this BBS site. In this sense, KKcity appeared like a space that was waiting for people to arrive manage their boards and community there without having to gain any authority or to pay for use (payment on the site is about other things). Therefore, the former users of SideWorld, who still wanted a space where they could express and exchange ideas and feelings, decided to try their luck with KKcity. They soon learned that if they wanted a space for a high number of personal boards to be listed and located in the same place, they had to issue an application for a BBS community. So they did this, initiating a community of their own, although this was something actually quite unplanned. Since about 8 participants on SideWorld lost their own boards and the posts on them, they felt compelled to make sure this could not happen again. However, with this entire blank BBS site ready to start new boards and a whole community that was completely for themselves, the SideWorld people were now called on to name the site, so the system operators (SYSOPs) of KKcity could file and then list it on the ‘BBS transmission doorway’ menu (BBS 傳送門 in its Complex Chinese). They decided to go by the name of ‘Spiteful Tots’ and the SideWorld participants who had lost their boards were now considered as ‘Spiteful Tots’ members who would automatically be given a personal board for their own private talks and writings in the Spiteful Tots community. In a positive and exciting

way, these SideWorld participants' restart with KKcity turned into something much bigger and more holistic than they had in mind before moving.

When, through a couple of participants on SideWorld, I learned that some of the participants have gotten a new space on KKcity, I asked a Spiteful Tots SYSOP to send me an invitation. According to KKcity regulations, the founder/applicant can choose to make their community invisible during the first year of setting up.<sup>132</sup>

Therefore, I needed to be invited to join, and the SYSOP subsequently complied. It was very easy for me to gain admittance and equally easy for me to blend in because of my previous connection with members from SideWorld, although I admit that I did not, at the time, count myself as an insider of the new community. It seemed obvious to me that several of the SideWorld participants were from the same department at a Taiwanese university and that they constantly met and conversed with each another. I understood that they were more insiders of the community than I was. However, during the first year of establishment, despite the actual numbers being secret, the participants in the community appeared to be increasing. The 'core group' of the community (participated in by people based in a certain university department) was not satisfied with having only their own people in the community and therefore made contact with others on BBS sites and asked them to join in. It was not until then that I realised the increasing number of participants were mostly gay men or lesbians (with a handful of heterosexual/bisexual women with an interest in feminism and gender and sexuality discourses).<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> This rule is no longer valid, but at that time it was an option. Rules for opening new spaces for boards and communities are somewhat stricter now, but back in 2000 when KKcity just began to emerge on the BBS map, it was much more loose and easy.

<sup>133</sup> I do remember a couple of self-identified bisexual men joining the community. Different from the heterosexual or bisexual women, these bisexual men were not invited, but instead came in as interested visitors who wished to stay on.. However, I think one of them had a series of verbal fights with a SYSOPs, and then left (or was partly expelled from) the community. After that incident, no other self-identified bisexual men joined the community.

### *From a participant to a participant-researcher*

In the SideWorld era, I had the idea that many of the posted messages on these participants' personal boards were related to gay sex or sexuality. But I did not think that this would mean the Spiteful Tots community would necessarily be participated in only by gay men. To clarify, although I did not expect this to happen, I was in no way scared or appalled by it, either. I find the internet to be an inclusive space and it is this need to negotiate with this inclusiveness that makes it so fascinating to me. Therefore when the community became increasingly tilted towards the gay male participants, I just began to wonder why this was the case.<sup>134</sup> Part of the reason may have been that the core group were gay male university students, and the kind of people they befriended were of the same social position. Another part of it, I suspect, may have been that the community reached for conversations and participants that recognised its presence. At the online/offline intersection, the Spiteful Tots community is essentially produced through the participants' own knowledge, memory and everyday habits—based on how these people move through Taiwanese society as gendered, sexed, classed and socialised bodies. Their multi-dimensional understanding of their everyday experiences in society informs how this community interact with other participants and visitors. Thus while the online interface allows a recoding of the participants' name, personal information and self representation, the Spiteful Tots community still comes from an interplay of online and offline behaviours of meaning-making that is rooted in the participants' embodied, material everyday practices. In the end, the community is most easily supported and most quickly recognised by those who think and live in a more or less similar way; i.e., homosexual

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<sup>134</sup> One of the site regulations for the Spiteful Tots community was that 'the Spiteful Tots community aims to be a private club. Although they do welcome new comers, they have no intention to be run as a comprehensive site for a large community of participants'. There are several posts discussing whom to call or contact and inform of such a place, with the aim of incorporating them into the community while also keeping the number of participants low.

subjects whose social statuses or positions are more or less similar to one another.

Are there exceptions to this ‘birds of a feather flock together’ theory? Obviously, the Spiteful Tots community has accepted me as myself from 2000 without questioning that I have a different gender and sexuality from the majority of the participants. It has certainly made me open up to an awareness of issues that were previously invisible to me. The more and the deeper I interact with the community, the more I feel that my research has to be based on ethical decisions that are made towards the needs, expectations, and wishes of the people who have formed this community. I have been inspired by how Janne Bromseth (2003) has distinguished between outside and inside: ‘Defining a space from the ‘outside’, based on access, and from the ‘inside’, based on participants’ experience of the social activity taking place are, therefore, two different positions that do not necessarily correspond’ (2003: 72). I position myself as an insider, and therefore I view myself more as a participant-researcher than a participant or a researcher. However, I have found myself thinking and looking differently at the community from the way a researcher-participant usually would, especially in the sense that I am aware that the texts I am reading come from a relatively stable group of people who have been associating with each other over a long period of time, operating with their own identifiable name, and communicating via typed texts.

In this process of shifting from being a participant to a participant-researcher, I was never treated differently by any of the Spiteful Tots participants. Other than the fact that, after I started my research in 2003, I began to see myself differently and therefore consciously act differently in order to establish a more appropriate research persona to facilitate interactions, there was not really much to change the way I interacted along with the community or the participants there. This was both a blessing and a surprise to me, for I had expected and prepared for a worst case



scenario when I decided to make an academic study of this community. I would not have been surprised if they had rejected my plan to undertake such research and expel me. This was because I felt this was a community that greatly values its sense of privacy and that conducting research with the possibility of publication, might be regarded as going against the spirit of the community, which is intended to be public but also to afford varying levels of privacy to its participants.<sup>135</sup> For them, the meaning of connecting to BBS was to develop relationships and get to know people. I understood that and did not want to jeopardise this as a space for socialising. However, I found many of the discussions so apt and interesting, and their perspectives discerning, whilst also underrepresented. Consequently I still hoped to try and see how they would react to my proposal, whilst admitting that this idea might nevertheless get me thrown out of the community.

The way I declared my research intention to the community in 2003 was to post a message on the BM (Board Master) board, a place only accessible to Board Masters in the Spiteful Tots community. I was Board Master for a public discussion board I had proposed in 2000, and thus I had the required access. I only chose to reveal my intention here because the Spiteful Tots community was already an open space. I felt that disclosing the fact that I was about to conduct academic research on the board would highlight the community as seemingly unusual to those who were not yet community regulars, thereby arousing curiosity in an undesirable way. In commonsensical wisdom, people may assume that only the unusual and unique can be the subject of study, whilst what is banal and commonplace, on the contrary, rarely solicit research interest. I understood how the Spiteful Tots community prefer to be viewed as a relaxed place where people can hang out and discuss their everyday lives,

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<sup>135</sup> I choose my words carefully here, and I do mean privacy, not anonymity. As will be discussed later, the Spiteful Tots community does not do so well with anonymity, although they do insist upon privacy.

rather than a community that is unusual due to non-normative sexuality. If I unwittingly created such an impression as a result of my proposal, it would have countered what they actually wanted. The idea of ‘private’ in the ‘private club’ sense, at this level, deals with both the sensitive nature of the topic of sexuality, and the personal, non-public dimension of everyday life in the community. Therefore I only utilised the BM board to seek informed consent.

I posted, but did not receive a reply. In fact, I waited for a week, and then a month, but still heard nothing. In the meantime, there was no sense that I was actually unwelcome in the community, but roughly 6 months later, I noticed the post in which I sought consent was marked with an ‘m’, which meant that the post would be kept permanently on the board and might also be included in the board’s ‘essence section’ The function of ‘essence section’ (精華區) is to copy and paste important or useful posted messages, so that they will not be deleted by the system when the post becomes too old, or when too many new posts override the board’s quota.<sup>136</sup> These were the only visible signs of recognition for my post, so whilst I felt that the community participants had not turned me down, they certainly had not given me consent either. Without being quite sure what was happening, I continued to visit the community every day. However, little by little I interfered less with the postings, whilst remaining as Board Master, enjoying some personal and private chats with a number of participants. For both my MA dissertation and this PhD thesis, I made use of knowledge gained from private chats, offline meetings and other previous online and offline encounters made with Spiteful Tots participants during the first three years of its operation under KKcity (that is, from 2000 to 2003). But I refrained from quoting them verbatim (although electronic archives and records can be retrieved in

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<sup>136</sup> Different BBS sites have different regulations about the number of posts a discussion board can hold. On KKcity boards, this is usually 1500 posts for each regular board. However, a participant may choose to pay for an upgrade of the board’s quota and so increase the number of possible posts allowed.

my mailbox or my access to the administrative boards), and was also careful not to reveal people's identity. Moreover, there is also an online interview that I did in 2003 for my MA dissertation with one of the participants, Nora, and I refer to it in footnotes throughout the thesis to confirm as well as support some of my ideas about of the Spiteful Tots community, especially in terms of more abstract thoughts, which can only be shown by providing substantial quotations or longevity with the community – that is, understanding the Spiteful Tots' typing styles and preferred way of speaking. In addition, in order to contextualise the participants' accounts or comments about their sexuality and daily experiences I consulted records, archives, discussions on contemporary *tongzhi*-related issues and events in the form of web site texts (such as newspapers and forums), TV broadcasting, and media exposure of Pride parades. Reversely I also use participants' posts and replies regarding their lives and experiences to make sense of the website texts, TV broadcasting and media exposure towards *tongzhi*. In fact, very often I have Spiteful Tots community posts containing WWW links and am thus directed to the outside of the community in order to be part of the inside discussion. So while I do routinely collect online and offline data and use this as complementary records of events unfolding within the same social world, I must also emphasise that I do not see a significant difference here between collecting online and offline data. The online and offline appear as so entwined in this study that I argue it scarcely makes more sense to set them as two separate sources of data. As will be further explained and illustrated, I base my methodological choices and decisions on the argument that the online and offline are not samples from two different social spheres, but rather, simply different mediated ways of conducting, behaving and making possible things happen. The focus of all the data used in this thesis are after the same thing, which is the human mediated sociality framed out in its own right as well as in relation to other contexts and/or realities.

## *Privacy*

As suggested, I was not excluded from the Spiteful Tots community. They simply did not react to my request and so after talking with some of the participants, I carried on with participating, observing, reading and posting<sup>137</sup> from a participant-researcher's perspective. Their non-reaction constituted in my eye an interesting phenomenon which will be explored in detail in the next chapter on privacy and visibility.

Experiencing their non-reaction, however, helped me significantly in achieving a better understanding of the way privacy is treated and valued in their community.

Privacy, I argue, does not merely mean making choices about what personal disclosures to make to readers, but also about not letting certain knowledge deconstruct that privacy. Privacy is almost an ethos of the Spiteful Tots community, something they must be aware of to be identified as a Spiteful Tots participant. Of course, this is not absolute, nor is it publicly declared. However, it can be inferred from the fact that there is no anonymity-related function enabled for postings in the Spiteful Tots community. KKcity offers this function to all boards and communities under it, but the SYSOPs in the Spiteful Tots community disabled this function from the start. In this case, I find anonymity to be quite different from pseudonymity.

Generally speaking, anonymity is enabled on the boards and communities that are dedicated to more sensitive topics, such as those relating to sexuality. For such boards or communities whose readers and participants are practically from everywhere in and out of Taiwan,<sup>138</sup> it is clear that no one can count on a privacy consensus, since privacy can only occur when everyone makes an effort to maintain it. Under such circumstances, it seems wise to enable anonymity in postings. When

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<sup>137</sup> However, once I saw myself more as a researcher, I no longer posted as much as before.

<sup>138</sup> KKcity can be accessed from all over the world as long as the local authorities do not set up firewalls to prevent such a connection and that complex Chinese can be rightly decoded on the computer.

people discuss sexuality related issues or issues that may simply be controversial, the participants have the option of hiding their ID names so that they are bit uneasily trackable through their IP addresses. But the reverse of this is that, irresponsible speech or even personal attacks may appear in this kind of anonymised posting. To prevent this from happening, either SYSOPs can still access the IP address database in each of the anonymised posts, or participants within the BBS have to mail their posts to SYSOPs and then they will post the message for them in an anonymous manner. Either way, SYSOPs can find out where the poster is geographically located, or at least know who the poster's screen name is. In either of these cases, anonymity is only effective for non-SYSOPs, i.e., for regular participants. For the SYSOPs, there is no anonymity (and perhaps even no pseudonymity). Anonymity is facilitated to allow a more devoted or friendly atmosphere on the board or community, so that discussions of that sensitive issues (such as sexuality) can proceed without participants worrying how others might think judge them. In the Spiteful Tots community, where everyone in the beginning was invited, anonymity was unnecessary. When the Spiteful Tots community was opened to the public in September 2001, anonymity was found to be disruptive to new comers. Since people had more or less developed relationships with one another during the first year of the community, participants reacted with distrust or suspicion to any post that did not reveal some knowledge about the community and yet came from an unknown poster. In this situation, the community would not further facilitate anonymity; if new comers posted anonymously, then the participants would never be given the chance of becoming familiarised with any of the new people.

Thus, I think the kind of privacy that is managed in the Spiteful Tots community is quite specific. Participants are still expected to possess a (screen) name, rather than just being completely anonymous. As well as being willing to self-identify with an alphabetical code, participants also need to show respect for other people's privacy,

and therefore respect the respect of the community as a whole. If a random Kcity user hopes to join in the Spiteful Tots community, s/he has to be a careful reader in picking up the community's tone (usually in the form of black humour). S/he must also willingly and patiently stay with the process of 'becoming/being identified as a Spiteful Tot' before s/he can rightly self-claim to be one. As a Spiteful Tot, s/he has to change the way s/he normally associates with others by becoming ultra-sensitive to the community's overall emphasis on the individual participant's right to privacy. For example, s/he should act prudently when asking other participants for personal information or affiliation, and always be ready to drop the topic if the other party does not want to reply. There is, so to speak, a sense of carefulness, or even trepidation, which needs, I argue, to be celebrated in the name of preserving online privacy in the community. This is thought of as a way (the only way?) to demonstrate the new comer's trust-worthiness in being taken in as a full or official participant, or indeed, as a Spiteful Tot. In an environment that is exceptionally non-physical, such text-based identification within digital space opens up new ways of conceptualising the boundary of interpersonal relationships, between the 'in' and 'out', Spiteful Tots and non-Spiteful Tots, between private and public.

### **Situating the Spiteful Tots community**

Conducting the study, I found myself considering that I should not limit the research scope only to the Spiteful Tots community. This is not something I could have known in advance but which emerged as appropriate for this project. This realisation was due to the community's easy transgression of the online and offline. The writing of the community has rightfully been reaching out to other kinds of digital platforms that are naturally included in the community's postings, such as hyperlinks to online newspapers, photos, blogs, sound recordings and TV broadcasting, cross-posted announcements, repostings of forwarded email from friends, or even a copied part of

a private chat log. I have observed that snippets and scraps of such electronic or computer-mediated sources are frequently added to the Spiteful Tots discussion boards in the hope of elucidating a situation, making a point, and proving credibility. These textual or audio-visual components from the outside of the community are thus effortlessly integrated into the community while simultaneously rendering the community with links that are both public and private (password-free web pages or web sites, password-protected personal email boxes, and private chat records and message archives). What is even more noteworthy in this situation is the fact that these contains links to the participants' own online albums on Flickr or blog-album-guestbook sites, such as that on Wretch.cc<sup>139</sup> or Pixnet.net<sup>140</sup>. The community-based BBS textuality<sup>141</sup> and individualistic WWW contents are like a symbiosis in this case, and travelling between BBS and WWW has become a daily routine for the Spiteful Tots participants.<sup>142</sup> This is to say, the Spiteful Tots community does not just dwell upon what is discussed and exchanged inside the community, or limit itself to what BBS sites can offer, but is always already framed by different outside contexts and communications. It is simultaneously about reach and depth— how the Spiteful Tots participants utilise almost everything digital in their daily lives to facilitate discussion and exchange in their own community. I find it

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<sup>139</sup> Wretch ([www.wretch.cc](http://www.wretch.cc)) was originally a National Chiao Yung University based BBS site combined with a blog service. The BBS site is individually run, different and separate from the all-in-one service offered on the WWW, which is the blog-album-guestbook package. In just a few years, Wretch has attracted far too many people, and has had to be privatised rather than take up academic resources for free. Just several years after it became a company, Yahoo bought and merged with Wretch. Wretch is mainly free, but does require payment for its upgraded gold and silver memberships.

<sup>140</sup> Pixnet ([www.pixnet.net](http://www.pixnet.net)) is another similar service provider that again gives free space for people to use for their own blog, album and guestbook. Costs occur when the space needs to be expanded and service packages thus seem more appealing.

<sup>141</sup> In this thesis, I use 'textuality' to mean the collectivity of texts, 'texts' being the various typed symbols, signs and characters, and 'words' referring to complex Chinese characters translated into English words.

<sup>142</sup> While the insertion of a hyperlink that takes one to images and videos may compensate for the lack of pictures and sounds on BBS sites, I argue that such a symbiosis of the two applications implies that WWW is also further complimented by BBS with textual modes that feature a quick information exchange.

appropriate to recognise the crucial idea that, for an online community that produces a strong sense of belonging for its participants, the Spiteful Tots community is not a closed one. The community naturally and easily connects to other spheres and dimensions of the digital while, at the same time, is also connected back and influenced by many other players who are not active or even present in the community.

### **WWW and BBS**

Regarding hypertextuality, more explanation and discussion is warranted: for example, whether the community's topics and activity is searchable online, what the relationship between WWW and BBS is, and what makes the Spiteful Tots community use BBS instead of WWW. In terms of searchability Tots, my answer is both yes and no, as it depends upon where a boundary is drawn. As mentioned, WWW cannot search whatever is on BBS. These are two separate systems of computing technology in operation here. The BBS site does however offer a search function: on a message board any online user can search according to keywords in the topic or the posters' ID names, although as far as I know, the function of a carpet search, or possibility of searching the entire BBS site with keywords, is not available. This is to say that to perform an efficient search, the BBS user still has to be fairly familiar with the layout and structure of boards on the BBS sites. This requires the user to devote a certain amount of time and energy to visiting every board if, for instance, s/he wants to find all the posts composed by a certain person. Or alternatively, if a particular topic of discussion is of interest, then the user needs to be knowledgeable about the existing categories and subcategories on the community site, making good use of the way posts are put together in the 'essence section' of a



discussion board.<sup>143</sup> In either case, it is obvious that BBS requires the online user to devote considerable time and energy to tracking down a certain screen name or finding useful information. It is a process of both cultivation and skill-building.<sup>144</sup>

Outside of the realm of a BBS site, a person cannot search on a topic or poster's ID using WWW search engines. Even if this is carried out with some quite large-scale BBS sites also on the WWW, such as one of the National Taiwan University's BBS sites, PTT<sup>145</sup>, search engines still do not work so well with PTT's WWW format. This is because some of the BBS functions are limited or absent on the WWW, and the underdevelopment of BBS functions on the WWW is a result of many online users being familiar and perhaps even content with BBS remaining on its own telnet-facilitated interface (usually in its improved form such as KKman or PacketSite),<sup>146</sup> and therefore are unable to see much significance in switching to the WWW. While further improvements regarding the integration of BBS and the WWW have been initiated, such integration has not been influential with WWW or BBS users.<sup>147</sup>

While the WWW enables powerful search engines and easy access to copy-and-paste, the BBS however presents a quite different possibility, which is also disguised as a limitation. To begin with, BBS certainly facilitates replication as does the WWW, but as previously stated, the search function that it provides, unlike the

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<sup>143</sup> The aforementioned essence section (精華區) usually collects together the most useful, informative, or important postings of the board and can be accessed by pressing the tab key.

<sup>144</sup> If there is a need to find a post composed around a certain date, then online users can do a search according to the date of the post as all messages can be arranged in an obverse or reverse time sequence.

<sup>145</sup> This academic BBS site can be found at <http://www.ptt.cc/> and has over 600,000 registered users, PTT BBS site is very big and public, and can be accessed by more than 70,000 online users at the same time. According to official statistics, PTT offers more than 6,800 boards, with the top 100 most popular bulletin boards being viewed by more than 1,000 people every day.

<sup>146</sup> KKman is downloadable on <http://star.gg/bbs-kkman-download> and PacketSite is on [http://toget.pchome.com.tw/intro/network\\_telnet/12331.html](http://toget.pchome.com.tw/intro/network_telnet/12331.html). Both are improved telnet-based software for a better connection experience to BBS sites.

<sup>147</sup> On the introduction page of PTT BBS, there is an explanation that despite the past efforts of combining BBS and WWW, or expanding BBS functions to match up with the WWW, 'there are still a lot of users who find pure texts more handy and swift' (<http://www.ptt.cc/index.bbs.html>).

WWW, is only valid within one message board for each search; it does not go beyond this to reach all the boards on a BBS site. Such a big difference between the architecture of the WWW and BBS certainly affects participants' practices and the way online communities form their own culture and sense of identity. One of the results of this is that, when people speak online (by typing), they can only be found by others who are also part of the same BBS site, and so their texts are less easily transported elsewhere. Given this, it is much more convenient to distinguish the original from the duplicate within the same site, as each post is automatically dated and timed when composed. Though there might still be cases of replication and plagiarism between two separate BBS sites, it is somewhat less likely in KKcity because it is a main BBS site containing many boards and communities. All registered users there are practically in different rooms and corners of the same place. Since all BBS posts automatically attach a record of the date and time, the original post on a BBS site should be easily determined. This makes the posts works of the person-author.<sup>148</sup> In comparison, the poster of an article on the WWW might not necessarily be the author, or sometimes the name of the author might be lost or unspecified. Thus the idea of authorship on the WWW is less straightforward, unless the texts were published on a prestigious website or is carefully noted in a hypertextual form of reproduction.<sup>149</sup> This demarcates between BBS and the WWW and crucially marks how a sense of belonging (to the posted messages and textual

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<sup>148</sup> As mentioned, McKee and Porter (2009) have noted and determined internet research as text-based or person-based. Similar differentiation was also proposed by Bakardjieva (2009) as medium centred or user centred.

<sup>149</sup> This observation can also be cross-referenced to the fact that many professional writers of popular fiction in Taiwan were once fiction-writers/typers on major BBS sites such as PTT or KKcity. They simply use their online ID to access BBS boards on which novel-writing is a common practice, and once their posts which contain parts of novels become popular, they will be noticed by publishers and be offered with the chance of publication. One of the writers who may serve as an example is Teng Jingshu (藤井樹) who started to produce fictional post messages on the BBS boards 'novels' on various different sites, and was later 'discovered' by Business Weekly Publications. He has now published 13 books, and is currently working in movie production and direction.

dialogues in a community) can (or cannot) be easily identified and validated.

If the above can be deemed reflective of the way BBS is used in comparison to the WWW, I argue that BBS texts are more significantly related to the person who posted them than a person who posted texts on the WWW would be. Texts on BBS sites may be more person-based than WWW texts due to the different settings of the two interfaces. In the given terrain of a BBS site, every random post appears under a screen name and remains traceable and findable within that site. Despite their pseudonymity, all posters (and readers too) are also registered users. The registration required before becoming a participant on a BBS site significantly differs from that of the WWW. For anyone who wishes to participate in a BBS site, it is mandatory to be a registered user. BBS registration usually includes one's given name, residential address, email address,<sup>150</sup> affiliation,<sup>151</sup> and sometimes— with older BBSs— even one's Identity Card number. However, it does not actually follow that BBS registration means very much to its users. This is because the reviewers of the registration, usually the SYSOPs of the BBS site, have no access to the demographic databases held by the government and therefore cannot check whether the information from a particular online user is truthful or not. They can only rely on their commonsensical opinion and regular judgment. In fact, BBS registration only becomes relevant in two kinds of situation: one is where the given details are too unlikely to be true and thus the SYSOPs reject the user's application; the other is when somebody distributes materials or information that can be deemed as harmful to

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<sup>150</sup> Because most of the BBS sites are academically based, the email address that the system recognises is therefore exclusively directed to university emails. However, I know for a fact that, due to the wonderfully wide range of updated information available on university BBS sites, many non-university-related people do borrow university email addresses from others in order to get involved.

<sup>151</sup> Since the BBS is based at a university, it is then assumed that the BBS user is a student of that university. So affiliation usually means the university the student goes to. However this does not always hold true, as many members may be teaching/administrative staff, alumni, students who are not part of that particular university, and people who are not related to Taiwanese universities at all.

the society (for example, advertisements about weapons or drugs). SYSOPs are then required to cooperate with the police by giving out the poster's registered personal details. As hinted at, though, it is quite possible that such details will be faked and so will not provide any useful information. However, this is still part of the procedure and SYSOPs are required to show respect for what is a standard operation on a BBS site.

In spite of this, BBS may still be considered more surveillance oriented or controlling than the WWW, since there is no such equivalence for WWW users (some websites may require logging on to be accessed, but this is not for all WWW sites; however, registration is applicable to all BBS sites).<sup>152</sup> Of course, there are social networking sites such as Facebook and Friendster which require real-name registration, or other similar means to put an album or blog entry under password protection. There are also IP-address locating devices to find out where visitors or commentators come from. But these are really more accessible for people who are skilled with computers, and not likely to be a wide spread phenomenon, as in the case of BBS registration. I therefore tend to argue that the WWW, compared with BBS, is more a media with a property of mediated sociality. It does not necessarily follow offline rules about how people can read, watch, observe and behave. For instance, when offline, most people have a good sense of who can hear or see them when navigating their everyday lives, but when online, no one hears or sees anyone despite

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<sup>152</sup> However I must add that I do not want to imply that on the WWW people do not have a sense of identity when they use a screen name or a nickname. In time, I am sure that a certain screen name or nickname for a person can become as meaningful and exclusive as her or his own given name. An example to support this idea may be how *Financier*, a business weekly magazine, TV Evening News broadcasting on China TV Channel and the *Liberty Times* all plagiarised parts of a blog entry composed by a blogger nicknamed 'Californian Roll' (酪梨壽司) without any proper citation. These incidents happened repeatedly during January 2008, February 2009 and March 2009, and in each case the reporter, writer and broadcaster confessed their ignorance by admitting that 'since it is from the internet, then it is written by an unknown 'net friend' who I cannot track and find out who it is'. Blog entries about these media plagiarisms can be further investigated on Californian Roll's blog (in complex Chinese): <http://www.cwyuni.tw/blog/post/13806623> and <http://www.cwyuni.tw/blog/post/23336465>.

being repeatedly observed, watched, read or reacted to. In this sense, BBS is relatively closer to one's offline life because it more or less narrows down the scope and range of people around you, though the platform of BBS sites is still quite disembodied, online and invisible. However, this invisible audience is constituted by people who have been cultivating their relationship within the BBS site. That is, that they are more located, not just wanderers who randomly connected to the site and immediately started to read what other people revealed about themselves in the postings.

### ***Compare and contrast with PTT***

Next, I will contend how I conceptualise the Spiteful Tots community on KKcity as being different from other gay and lesbian discussion boards on equally popular and high-traffic academic BBS sites. For this compare and contrast, I have in mind PTT, which is a large BBS site under the auspices of National Taiwan University (NTU). For people of non-normative sexuality, LGBT boards in KKcity and PTT are the must-go places online. In many ways, the two sites are actually comparable. Despite a good number of other boards set up to address university-related affairs, PTT is one of the most active and comprehensive BBS sites in Taiwan, participated in by both students and non-students from all over Taiwan. More importantly, PTT was also the backdrop against which many digital disputes and vibrant discussions on sexuality have taken place. To illustrate, I offer two particular incidents. The first involves a message posted on the discussion board 'Hate' in PTT. This post attracted 5000 messages overnight in response to this one single thread. The original post included a strong and aggressive accusation from a male PTT participant regarding his girlfriend's sexual disloyalty. The male author's hatred for his girlfriend was so well received that it produced a strong outpouring of empathy and similarly negative emotions from readers in the form of 5000 replies. Some PTT users, without knowing who the male and female protagonists were in the original post, managed to find out

their offline identities. Focusing on the immoral woman, the enthusiastic readers exposed the unfaithful girlfriend's online and offline identities (screen name and given name, along with university affiliation etc.) and her web album (where respondents commented on her figure).<sup>153</sup> The 5000 replies to this posting were all so absolute that it seemed as if the readers shared with the poster the same kind of hatred towards the same enemy: this woman perhaps represented all the other women who had dumped their boyfriends by sleeping with other men. Earning its name 'the new 228 incident', this incident caused a major sensation in Taiwan and was reported both in the printed press and on TV News on or after 28<sup>th</sup> February 2005. The other incident that I have in mind is more recent, taking place on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2008. On that day, some online PTT participants issued an application to open a new discussion board called AIR, the acronym of atypical intimate relationships (非典型親密關係). This board was basically set up to welcome discussions on polyamorous relationships and planned to be located alongside existing boards gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, feminism, sex, female sex ('feminine sex') and boy-meets-girl boards.<sup>154</sup> The applicants posted long messages on these existing boards to explain their intention of applying for such a board, and pleaded for support from other board users (they needed at least 50 more supporters than opponents to make the application successful). However, this mobilisation turned out to be anti-mobilisation, when some lesbian users, in their own explanation of what the board was about, referred to AIR as 'fucking buddy board' and alluded to a novel called *Atypical Love*.<sup>155</sup> This misinterpretation meant the application was seriously opposed by many users who

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<sup>153</sup> After this incident, publicising other participants' given names, online albums, private chat logs and personal emails became prohibited on many PTT discussion boards.. However, I do not think there is any law or regulation that can actually punish such behaviours.

<sup>154</sup> These boards can be seen in the screenshot below.

<sup>155</sup> The novel (非典型愛情) describes that for a group of 62 men, sex is treated as a form of casual recreation casually engaged in for fun, relaxation and human need as well as out of habit. For more information, see <http://www.books.com.tw/exep/prod/booksfile.php?item=0010400510>.

were regulars of these sexuality-related boards and the ‘against’ votes ended up to be more than the ‘for’ votes by 19. These two cases illustrate how PTT has also been shaped by the vibrant devotions and dynamics of (mis)understanding sexuality as through discussions about this topic. These sexuality-related incidents also demonstrate situations where we may better observe that, in between these two particular moments on PTT BBS, the issue of policing and regulating sexuality urges considerable attention.



Screenshot Image (i) PTT



Screenshot Image (ii) PTT sexuality boards

In both incidents on PTT, I discern that there is a sense of always attaching sex to love. For example, the ‘new 228 incident’, emphasises that the only kind of love that can be validated is defined through a stable and mutually recognised relationship. Any sexual relation(ship) occurring outside of this therefore deserves to be detested and opposed. While making such a deduction from the new 228 incident is by no means the same as issuing a statement about love and relationships in contemporary Taiwanese society, I do however want to make the point that when sexuality is discussed in an openly public place (such as on PTT), the pressure to oppress different forms of sexual rights (especially those unrelated to love) can be very great. On the one hand, I do believe that, due to the sensitive nature of sexual topics, PTT users certainly do enjoy some levels of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms (that is, one designated screen names for all anonymous posts composed by different people). On the other hand, I



also think the fact that PTT discussion boards are daily viewed by at least 1,000 people (and presumably even more at the time of the featured incidents) changes the dynamics of the discussion. In such situations, the focus is no longer on online participants' relationships with one another, since nobody really knows who is looking and lurking. Relationships are not soundly formed on such boards, and therefore do not take up such an important role in the context of PTT. Also, it is not so much about a community, either, as random and regular visits occur together and there is no way to distinguish one from another. People who tend to post less can be stirred up by posts full of hatred, and be forced to respond with reactionary replies.

The AIR board's premature death, moreover, is interesting for another reason. While stressing how sex must be exclusively based on a one-to-one pure love connection instead of its opposing alternative, sinful lust, this incident can actually be used to argue that stigmatisation happens perhaps more easily and more efficiently in a public context like PTT. In such a place, long explanations will not be carefully read, but instead the quick action of labelling, possibly in a biased way, becomes what is remembered. I think this is due to the fact that PTT is not a BBS site that centres so much on participants' relationships with one another, making it hard for people to really slow themselves down and read what others have to say in a sensibly thorough fashion. For the differences between the Spiteful Tots community and the Hate and lesbian board on PTT, I offer the following table to list their differences.

	<b>Spiteful Tots Community</b>	<b>PTT Hate, Sex and Lesbian Boards<sup>156</sup></b>
<b>Has its own IP address or domain name</b>	Yes. It is a community that can be treated as a BBS site.	No. It is just a discussion board on PTT BBS site.
<b>Allows posts under complete anonymity</b>	No	Yes (though in an indirect way). <sup>157</sup>
<b>Shows how many people have viewed the post</b>	No. (along with the function of giving short feedback being disabled)	No (enabled is the function of giving short positive or negative feedback, which means that it can be a way to learn how many people have viewed the post)
<b>Participants/Viewers</b>	About 20/unknown, but should not be huge in number	There is not much distinction between participant and viewer, as anyone can be either. These boards are popular and are usually viewed by more than 1000 people per day, and their posts usually increase by 60-100 per day.
<b>Limitation for new BBS users</b>	No programmed/systematic limitation. But Board Masters may delete <i>zuyinwen</i> posts. <sup>158</sup>	New comers are not allowed to post on Sex boards until they have been to PTT more than 100 times and have posted more than 10 messages there. On the gay and Hate boards there is no such limitation. On the lesbian board, it is advised that posts must not contain ads or <i>zuyinwen</i> , and that posters should not post message composed of fewer than 50 characters (excluding numbers, English, punctuations, emoticons, hyperlinks and song lyrics).

Table comparing and contrasting the Spiteful Tots community and PTT boards

<sup>156</sup> I am using the two boards on which the two incidents took place, along with the other board that discusses sex— usually understood to be sex between opposite sex, though sometimes there are random discussions about sex between same sex. These three are serving here as examples of the kind of popular and sexuality-related boards in PTT.

<sup>157</sup> Many board used to have the function of anonymity, but this option was annihilated in 2004 due to anonymous posts were considered too ‘exaggerated’ to be publicly read. Now anonymity is only possible in these boards if the poster send the post to the board masters and ask them to post with the anonymous ID name (such as ‘ShyLes’).

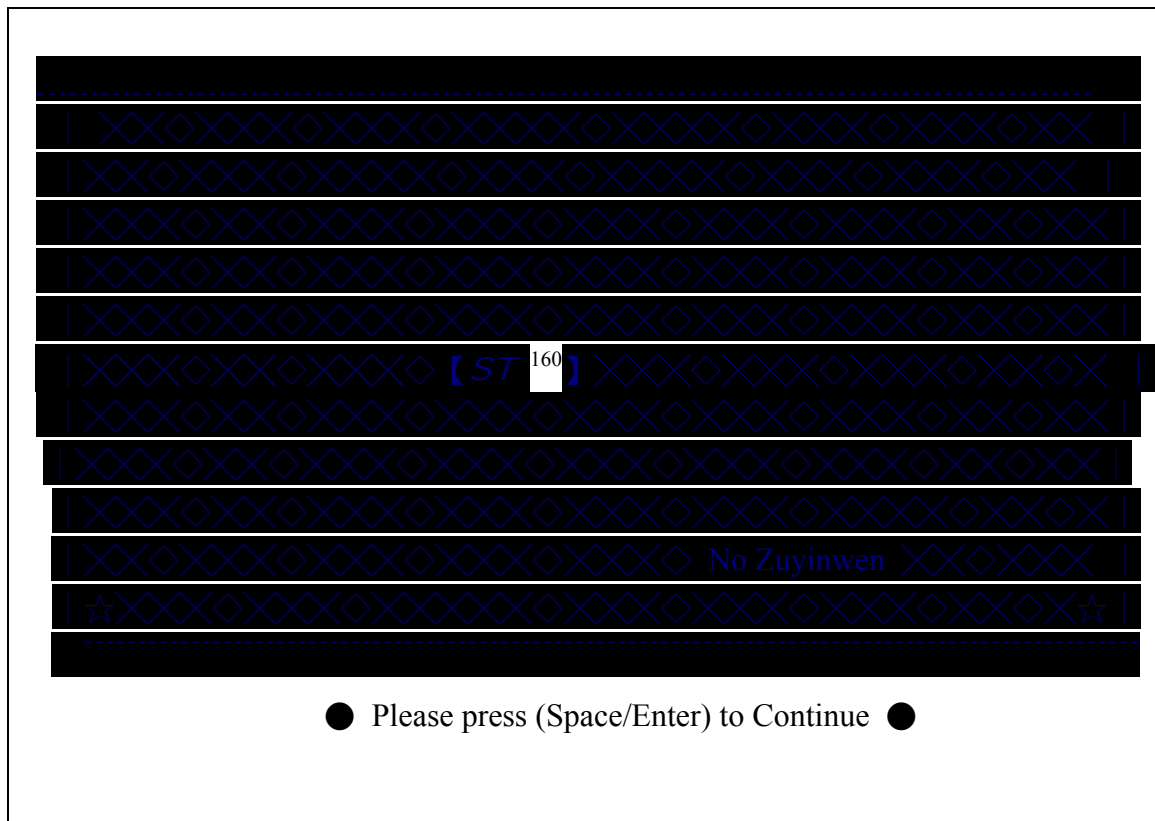
<sup>158</sup> The meaning of *zuyinwen* (注音文) will be detailed in the chapter 3. Here, it is perhaps sufficient to understand it as a language that can only be typed, as it mixes complex Chinese characters and phonetic symbols. Other academic research on *Zuyinwen* can be found in a research note that is accessible at [www.cc.ncu.edu.tw/~csa/journal/52/journal\\_park397.htm](http://www.cc.ncu.edu.tw/~csa/journal/52/journal_park397.htm) (in complex Chinese). Also helpful is a transcription of a public discussion forum peopled by academics, postgraduate students and online users and available at [hermes.hrc.ntu.edu.tw/csa/journal/42/journalforum32.htm](http://hermes.hrc.ntu.edu.tw/csa/journal/42/journalforum32.htm) (also in complex Chinese). So far I have not encountered other work on *zuyinwen*.

With such observations of PTT, it is reasonable to conduct further analysis as to what changes the Spiteful Tots community has experienced. The most obvious is that the Spiteful Tots community is a BBS site created by laymen— not university staff, computer geeks, or businessmen engineers. The way it is operated and maintained has been ‘at the participants’ pleasure’. Since the size of the Spiteful Tots community is far smaller than the whole of PTT,<sup>159</sup> it has been fairly easy for them to discuss and negotiate. Also, because the Spiteful Tots community was initially based on a group of friends and their friends, the sense of community and the importance of relationships may cause their confrontations with unfamiliar or often stigmatised forms of sexual behaviours and relationships to be much less negative. Even if the Spiteful Tots community are confronting something they strongly oppose, such as *zuyinwen*, they will act in a relatively subdued manner, in the hope of maintaining their relationships with each other. An instance that can provide some insight and evidence of this occurred in 2002 when some new visitors to the Spiteful Tots community wanted to open a *zuyinwen* board. This application was made by a member with a screen name that was barely known to regular participants. The Spiteful Tots community as a whole dislike *zuyinwen* so much that whenever they see a post containing *zuyin* (phonetic symbols), they directly delete it without warning or without communicating with the person who posted it. Both the welcome pages of the BBS site (as well as some of the discussion boards) have featured the sentence when the community started to operate: We do not welcome *zuyinwen*. However, *zuyinwen* was (and still is for some) a very popular way of digital writing. This moderately new online language around 1999, and became much more prominent the following year. These new visitors to the community liked the Spiteful Tots postings a lot and yet still felt the

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<sup>159</sup> Even at prime time, I would not think that the Spiteful Tots community has ever been a high-traffic BBS site, with more than 100 people online during the same hour.

need to use *zuyinwen* there.



Copied Image<sup>161</sup> Current Welcome Page of the Spiteful Tots community

However, the Spiteful Tots community did approve the new comers' proposal. The reason for this was that opening new boards in the Spiteful Tots community only requires one user who would be happy to act as Board Master.<sup>162</sup> Due to its small size, the community can rely on a volatile style of maintaining this community.<sup>163</sup> In addition, rejecting the new people's application for this board specifically would

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<sup>160</sup> ST represents Spiteful Tots.

<sup>161</sup> This image here has been translated and changed for confidentiality purposes.

<sup>162</sup> For instance, in 2000, I suggested that the community start a board devoted to discussions of things that people no longer are interested in and yet will not throw away due to the feeling that it would be wasteful. I volunteered to act as the Board Master at this point, a role I still hold.

<sup>163</sup> For example, a few quotes below, taken from a 2000 discussion thread on 'What are the rules for setting up new boards?' may indicate this idea:

We set up new discussion boards on whatever topics as long as there are proposals for them. If we cannot play along with these boards, then we will close them and start new ones. It's probably better for the person who proposes to be the board master, though. (posted on September 22nd 2000)

violate the general community principles of democracy.<sup>164</sup> From this example, it can be understood that the Spiteful Tots community organises itself in a different way from that does the PTT. In the Spiteful Tots community, there is a stronger division between ‘we’ and ‘they’, or ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, but this does not imply that ‘they’ cannot one day be part of ‘we’. This kind of division and the ensuing possibility of transgression have profound methodological significances as they consolidate a deeper sense of identity and embed a sense of community in their relationship with one another. By recognising this particular point about the community, it can be a logical step to expect that the community naturally allows and affords varying levels of privacy for both the ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups of the community.

### ***Sexuality and KKcity***

Among the BBS sites, KKcity is perhaps the only one that is as popular (and therefore large in size) and profit-making. Most of the popular BBS sites are university-based, facilitated by TANet. However, the birth of KKcity was also related to National Taiwan University (NTU). Its rise had much to do with NTU alumni<sup>165</sup> (who were then computer engineers at the SkySoft company) and who hoped that this BBS site would act as a refuge for the NTU Coconut Tree BBS site (台大椰林風情).<sup>166</sup> At the same time, many of the registered users on the NTU Coconut Tree BBS at that time were unhappy that their usernames and profile details had been rendered invisible by the site in 2000. It was a violent act undertaken by SYSOPs of Coconut Tree BBS, in the hope of stopping people from soliciting one night stands or compensated dating<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Since *Zuyinwen* has elicited such strong opinions from some people in the Spiteful Tots community, and people’s reaction to *zuyinwen* has been marked by feelings of antagonism, the coping strategy was to appoint one of the SYSOPs to act as Board Master, whilst assigning very strict posting rules were set for the board, making postings difficult and basically giving these new people who like using *zuyinwen* a hard time.

<sup>165</sup> This was publicly announced as the fifth posted message on the ‘0Announce’ board on New NTU Coconut Tree BBS (domain name: ntu.kkcity.com.tw) on KKcity.

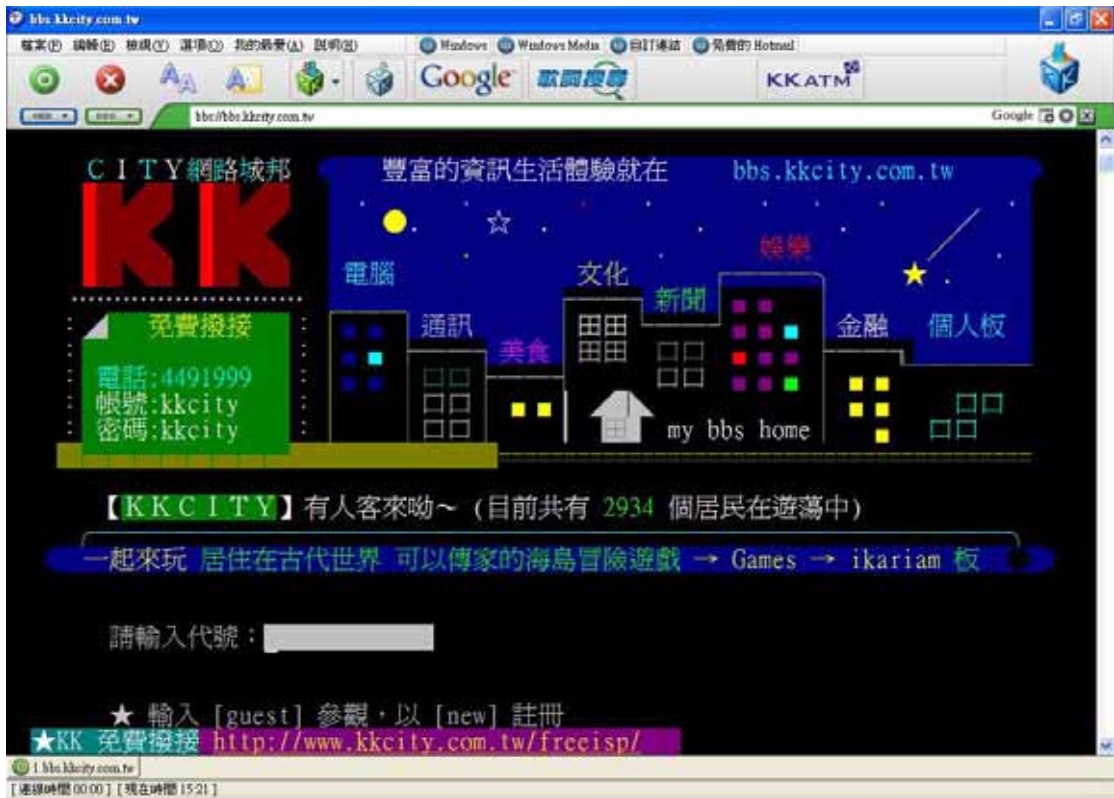
<sup>166</sup> This is also accounted for on the welcome page of new Coconut Tree BBS site on KKcity.

<sup>167</sup> Compensated dating basically means sex (with or without money being involved) solicited online or offline. It is a term that originates from the Japanese *enjō kousai* (also shortened as *en-kou* in

via requests in their profile details. In an endeavour to prevent the solicitation of casual sex, the SYSOPs deprived all online users of their right to freely compose their own profile details. When a person is online at the BBS, this person can only see that many ‘guests’—including him/herself—are also online. On the users’ list, all ID names are shown as guests, whilst users’ IDs and nicknames are not shown. In this way, no one can ever recognise who is who, nor can they chat with anyone else and reveal their desire for sexual encounters. This action of the ‘guestisation’ of every online user, while meaning to prevent sexual encounters facilitated by BBS, made many users incredibly angry, as their rights to engage in mediated socialising were deeply disrespected and violated. At this point, the newly developed KKcity opened up a space for an online community that was called the ‘new NTU Coconut Tree BBS site’ (新台大椰林).

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common usage), which in English is usually translated as compensated dating or assisted dating. At the beginning, the term was used particularly in the context of teenagers, most of the time female, who were going online and making contact with older men who would then exchange money for sex. But later on, compensated dating became more widely applied to people of all ages, sexualities and genders.



Screenshot image (iii) KKcity accessed via KKman



Screenshot image (iv) The Main Menu of KKcity<sup>168</sup>

<sup>168</sup> In this screenshot, it can be noticed that in the right hand corner there is an online advertisement for

In this new site that served as a mirror site,<sup>169</sup> most of the boards and messages in the original Coconut Tree BBS site were cross-posted or transferred. By so doing, the new Coconut Tree BBS site could then retain a similar atmosphere to the original, although the participants would not need be bothered with the process of meeting and making new online friends. However, this does not mean that KKcity is a truly liberal space where people's utilisation of BBS as a means to facilitate sexual encounters is completely allowed or even encouraged. The new sCoconut Tree BBS under KKcity solved the 'problem' by coming up with a policy of classifying its users/participants into three different modes: 'H' for homosexual, 'A' for adult and blank/unmarked for neither—which can be understood in this case as a 'normal mode'. When switching into H or A, the user needs to key in a valid ID Card Number to prove that s/he is over the age of 18 (though this can be faked too).<sup>170</sup> In addition, those in the unmarked normal mode cannot access any ID name holder, board or community which is labelled as H or A.<sup>171</sup> This is why the new Coconut Tree BBS site does not need worry about online sex flooding the 'normal' kinds of discussion and therefore disturbing 'normal' participants. Under such circumstances, the participants in the new Coconut Tree BBS site would not be 'accosted' by lustful homosexuals or heterosexuals (even though I suppose there are still lustful 'normal' people around them). In a post that explains this adult mode of being on KKcity, it is stated at the

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KKcitizen. KKcitizen is a name that is used by KKcity to refer to someone who has been with KKcity since 2006, has never violated any person, law or regulation, and manages a personal board on KKcity. The KKcitizens can then solicit their own business or service on their KK city personal profiles without breaking the site regulations. KKcitizens also can cooperate with KKcity by purchasing a space and time for putting up an online advertisement on the main site as an extra means to facilitate a product or service promotion.

<sup>169</sup> *Not* intended as a substitute, this new site is an alternative choice. More recently, the new Coconut Tree BBS has developed into a different BBS site of its own, though the two of them remain having many messages cross-posted. But as the old NTU Coconut Tree BBS site is still operating, the participants naturally have distinctions and the contents of the two sites have become distinguishable.

<sup>170</sup> ID Card Number Generator is widely available by putting these keywords into a WWW search. Such a generator provides faked ID Card numbers according to the same equation from which government-given ID Card numbers are produced.

<sup>171</sup> SYSOPs are however able to see *all* online users at the time of connection despite their modes.



beginning that:

New Coconut Tree is a faithful supporter of speech freedom. We believe that there is no dogmatic value or idea that is universally true. But we have to protect minors and be thoughtful for those who do not want to be harassed. Therefore, the new Coconut Tree provides the 'adult mode'.<sup>172</sup>

Despite this announcement being aimed at the new NTU Coconut Tree BBS site, this passage actually also sets the ground rule for the whole of KKcity in terms of its mode selection and function. The 'we' here can be inferred as the NTU alumni engineers of Skysoft, and their principle of 'protecting minors' is in the interest of the long operation of KKcity. While serving as an excuse to facilitate separating people into two online categories, 'protecting minors' is also a must for KKcity, making it therefore exempt from the possibility of being faced with charges and prosecutions. This is because sexual intervention into BBS in general has been considered a highly threatening situation and the government has consequently enacted some laws and regulations to control these internet-based spheres. The laws and regulations address internet advertisements and online personal profiles which may in any way imply the intention of sexual purchase or 'compensated dating'. Such texts are considered illegal and criminal with or without the actual act of two or more people having sex.

For example, a news report in 2008 focused on a 32-year-old tattooist who went online to post a want ad looking for a sexual partner.<sup>173</sup> Due to this 'evidence', this man was charged with the crime of 'spreading information that hints at sexual purchase', according to article 29 of the Anti-Sexual Business Provisions for Children and Teenagers. Becoming a punishable offence in 1999, compensated dating is regarded as evil and threatening to moral and social standards in Taiwan because it

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<sup>172</sup> This is in the second post on the board of '0Announce' in the New NTU Coconut Tree BBS Site.

<sup>173</sup> This news article can be found at <http://tw.news.yahoo.com/article/url/d/a/080811/78/xza.html> in complex Chinese.

was, at that time, quite unheard of for teenagers to willingly sell sex online. Later, in order to monitor as well as control the proliferating sex-selling business and sex-implicated texts and images online, the amendment of the Anti-Sexual Business Provisions for Children and Teenagers considered that any online texts containing the implication and solicitation of sexual intercourse with other people be accepted as the evidence of having committed a crime. This garbled understanding of online sexual implications has actually become an excuse for criminalising almost anyone, as in this logic, the actual action of having sex and paying for it never need happen before the occurrence of a conviction. As long as the police are allowed to go online and ‘catch’ people who are tricked into believing that the officer in question will be their ‘date’, fighting for online freedom of speech and the online right to socialisation remains a task still to be fulfilled.

It is critical to state that KKcity is supported by a commercial server provider that, while abiding by the laws, aims to make money from people whose privacy might need a higher level of protection. KKcity’s alliance with a capitalist entity renders it immensely different from almost all the other academic and privately run BBS sites, which are mostly dependent upon university servers and/or personal resources.<sup>174</sup> In comparison with them, commercial sites are not as morally responsible and are also independent from academic/educational expectations and regulations. From the outset, KKcity has simply, as noted before, welcomed everyone without discrimination or discretion. As a system of united BBS sites of a large size,<sup>175</sup> KKcity flourished quickly with discussions of controversial, socially taboo sex-related issues, for example, threesomes, sadomasochism, one night stands and so

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<sup>174</sup> The majority of BBS sites, despite their sources of funding, depend on TANet, the Taiwan Academic Network. As far as I know however, a very small number of BBS sites may be on a server that is outside Taiwan (usually somewhere in North America, supported and maintained by Taiwanese who live there for study or work).

<sup>175</sup> More than 200,000 people connect to KKcity every day according to the company’s website.

on.<sup>176</sup>

Due to the sensitive nature of discussion topics in a public setting, participants in H or A modes are potential customers of both enhanced privacy quality and priority VIP status in terms of connecting to KKcity during peak hours. KKcity has utilised the programming skills of its engineers to systematically enable the separation of paying customers as gold or silver VIP members from those who have paid nothing. To those who are attracted to visiting the site more than several times each day, the slow connection or sometimes even non-connection to KKcity, especially around midnight (which is usually the traffic peak hour), is hard to endure. Therefore, many are willing to spend money in improving the situation and be granted a fast connection to the BBS site. In addition, KKcity also earns from user-payment packages that allow a substantial amount of invisibility, which means that an online user can be invisible to others on the user list and on the board to which s/he has just posted (when one is reading messages on a particular board, her or his screen name is highlighted to show her or his presence). Sometimes the package also can be functional when this user is looked up by others, as the system will not show where this person is from by hiding their IP address. In this kind of situation, the online user can be quite difficult to trace by police fishing, unless they respond to the police by giving away more personal information, such as their mobile phone number or email address.<sup>177</sup> That is to say, KKcity, while aiming to be a profit making organisation, unwittingly facilitates the ability of its participants to escape surveillance, but at a price.

In this context, discussions on sex and sexuality increase in number every single

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<sup>176</sup> Although there are indeed spaces devoted to other topics which are unrelated to sex, the hottest and most read messages/communities on the 'billboard of the day' in KKcity have *always* been sex-related.

<sup>177</sup> While an email address may not help the police to track down anyone, it can be used to ask the person out on a sex date.

day, and serve as a manifestation of an everlasting interest in non-normative sexuality. A significant amount of the textuality on KKcity makes up for the lack, or insufficiency, of space for discussing non-normative sexuality that shapes the arenas of Taiwanese daily life. Owing to the fact that such a topic often causes social panic and moral crisis in public spheres,<sup>178</sup> it makes sense that such discussions therefore must be carried out on the internet, where they are often much less upfront. The presence of sensitive topics tends to be limited to those spheres that pertain to a kind of concrete interpersonal interaction while allowing some degree of fluidity and the disguise of identities. BBS groups and communities on KKcity, especially with their lack of academic affiliation,<sup>179</sup> may constitute ‘a land of freedom’ in this case.

With this understanding, the Spiteful Tots community could easily designate itself as one more player in the existing ‘H’ hub of communities and make use of the ‘good intentions’ of KKcity’s in their devising of the ‘H’ mode. As the NTU Coconut Tree BBS SYSOP puts it:

The design of homosexual mode is to avoid misunderstanding caused by people using ‘%’ to specify their homosexuality or the way their profile is composed. [The H mode] lets *tongzhi* people find sympathetic companions and prevent them from outsiders’ well-intended curiosity and ill-intended harassment.<sup>180</sup>

Had the community been switched into the ‘H’ mode, the Spiteful Tots participants

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<sup>178</sup> The best example, and also the most recent one, is the incident involving Edison Chen, which took place in January / February 2008. Chen, a popular singer and a movie star in Hong Kong, had thousands of lurid digital photos of past lovers (also famous entertainers) illegally stolen (copied) and publicised on the internet. Many people in Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Macau, as well as other nearby regions and countries downloaded them due to unlawful distribution from his laptop, which had been sent for repair. Chen’s explicitly sexual photographs constituted one of Asia’s biggest internet celebrity sex scandals. The way the media in Taiwan covered this scandal has involved reliance upon a patronising tone that assumes moral supremacy. The media condemned Chen and other entertainers’ polyamorous behaviour. However, as a result, Cantonese pop singer, Gillian Chung, decided to apologise in a news conference, for being ‘naive and very silly’ in her own youth. Following her tears and apology, however, she has not been as successful and popular as before.

<sup>179</sup> This time, for registration, non-university email addresses are accepted for KKcity.

<sup>180</sup> This was posted on the 《0Announce》 board as the sixth posted message.

would not (in theory) need be worried about being probed into by those outsiders who are either curious and mean no harm, or those bent on deliberately harassing the community until it ceases to function. But the Spiteful Tots community has never been an H-mode group, and it continues to endure some form of uncertainty as a result of choosing this unmarked normal mode. Why does the community choose not to be in the H mode and endure uncertainty as a result of the various sexual identities of the new comers in this situation?

### **Understanding the Spiteful Tots: Tools and Methods**

In 2004, I completed an MA dissertation investigating the Spiteful Tots community in Taiwan, in the Department of Technology and Social Change at Linköping University, Sweden. As I was then working with local expertise, the dissertation was written in relation to the department's specialisation of gender and technology. The dissertation was a pass with distinction, and I received positive comments from both my examiners—my supervisor Professor Ulf Mellström and Dr. Ingunn Moser based in Oslo, Norway— shortly before I finished and moved on to PhD study in York. All seemed to be successful, but the way I interpreted the Spiteful Tots community was somehow not very satisfactory to me.

In the 'land of freedom' that is KKcity, my findings about the Spiteful Tots community showed to me that the Spiteful Tots participants were however *not* so free, or freed. In my MA thesis, I treated the community as a case study to show that their not adopting a *tongzhi* position may suggest that the discrimination of *tongzhi* in Taiwan was too great for them to come out as homosexual, or as sexually non-normative. After having read it once again towards the end of 2004, I felt much of the interpretation and analysis was missing out on something. As hinted at, the major reason for not regarding the community as free was that the Spiteful Tots participants did not identify as homosexual or *tongzhi*, and did not 'live' as openly

gay in the online world. Although the participants never avoided mentioning their sexuality, they also did not think much of the idea of ‘coming out proudly’, either. They did not want to associate with the affirmative discourse of the subversion of heterosexuality, and were not keen to take on any academic theorisation of gay, lesbian or queer studies. I had the idea that the aforementioned categories were treated more as some kind of irrelevant fairy tale to them, and I did not know why. After research and writing during 2003 and 2004, I observed that the participants were more interested in settling down in society (as in that year many of them graduated from university and entered the job market) rather than be subversive and politically committed to gay activism. On the one hand I recognised these attitudes, thoughts and behaviours of the Spiteful Tots participants as more practical and less activist. On the other, I identified that, due to this ‘practicality’, the existence of the community was not exactly ideal in terms of helping promote sexual rights in contemporary Taiwan. I understood why they would think this way, and also would actually agreed with their emphasis on practicality by first making themselves feeling better and more securer about their own lives before everything else. But this was unuseful for the kind of theoretical proposition I set up in my MA project, which was to politically improve queer visibility, sexual freedom and human rights. Ultimately I expressed this anguish to Dr. Moser in our email correspondence during spring 2005. I told her that I found my research had started to become a different shape almost immediately after the finish of my MA, and many previous views and arguments held in the MA dissertation had now been discarded or were now appearing inappropriate. I was however tormented by this drastic difference in my research ideas, almost to the degree of wanting to disown my MA work and redo it in a totally different way. She replied with kindness that it was only natural for me to feel so, and encouraged me not to worry too much and instead try to have some confidence. Although I was reassured,

I also figured that I needed to explore my uneasiness in the chapter where I worked on theories and see what went wrong with my conceptual framework.

In other words, what really lies behind my decision of supporting gay activism and disapproval of the participants' practical attitude towards individual wellbeing? I do not think that there is anything absolutely right or wrong about such decisions, but view it as a matter of stance. Therefore, the community's insistence of not getting an 'H' word can be treated as the community's stance. What interests me is why the Spiteful Tots community has come to think this way and adopted a certain posture. What does it mean for them to adopt this stance? Their stance<sup>181</sup> on political issues is not so much about an overall expectation or norm that guides the participants, but is closely related to the relationship among the participants and how their relationships change the dynamics when some sensitive issues, such as those family-related or political ones, are discussed. I do not intend to imply that the Spiteful Tots participants are not thinking on their own two feet, or that they are very easily manipulated. Instead, I think this must, too, be part of the reason why they invited gay and lesbian people to join the community when it began: like-minded people come together as friends in the online and offline contexts, and when there is finally a space at their complete disposal, why not make sure that all the like-minded souls can gather together and share the fun? In so doing, part of the result has been that the relationship between participants has confirmed what they have always thought, yet did not have

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<sup>181</sup> By saying 'their stance', I seem to generalise the whole community as if the community is the collectivity of the Spiteful Tots participants. Obviously the community is only possible with all of its active and not-so-active participants, and it would be dogmatic to assume that everyone thinks alike just because they are in the same community. While in the past there have certainly been quarrels and verbal conflicts in the community, one of the ideas behind discussing the Spiteful Tots, as will further be discussed later in the everyday chapter, is how they remain friendly and primarily positive to the opinions expressed by the inner circle of the community. By inner circle I mean that which is constituted by people who are also offline friends, or friend's close friend(s). The SYSOPs at one point clearly addressed this intention of keeping a generally good atmosphere in the community, and they also self-mocked it as being hypocritical, or even cowardly and irresponsible. However, the work of managing a kind of harmony in the community has generally been regarded as important and carried out most of the time throughout the many years it has been operating.

the opportunity or courage to fully express before the birth of the community. The networked relationship facilitated by the community has helped them and their ideas become more concrete and visible. Although the participants may not want to be ‘out’ in their local communities, the Spiteful Tots community is a place where their identities and experiences are still recognised and validated.

### **Boundaries redrawn and redefined**

To draw the research boundary, I think it is reasonable to first work out why the Spiteful Tots community has been completely public. Understanding their choice of going public helps us properly formulate what it means to be private and everyday in a seemingly public community. As mentioned before, the boundary of this thesis is not the boundary of the Spiteful Tots community. Rather, following on the fact that the Tots naturally draw in material from the WWW as well as from other BBS sites in an attempt to aid discussion, I also appeal to various sources and forms of information in contextualising the many different contexts that the Spiteful Tots participants may find themselves simultaneously living in. It is in this sense that I find what Christine Hine (2009) has contended highly pertinent. She writes that ‘Social phenomena are not uniquely confined to online or offline sites, and it would be a mistake to allow these notions automatically to provide boundaries for our studies’ (2009: 18). I think, too, this argument is in keeping with the sensibilities refined by science and technology studies (STS). The tenor of STS, I would argue, is about questioning whether the boundaries of different technologies are as they appear. As many STS scholars have argued, technological innovations have long served to challenge the existing social orders in terms of their processes of negotiation and struggle, over both meanings and material shapes (see for example, Feenberg, 1991, 1995, 1999; Mumford, 1999; Grint and Woolgar, 1997). In this debate, STS researchers dispute how technology can be critically assessed. Alongside this task of assessment is how



technology can be inclusive and permeable in democratic terms, and how, in turn, technology can be ‘organized in such a way that its “purpose” is available as a reading to the user’ (Grint and Woolgar, 1997: 73). The central premise in this idea is that, as it involves a myriad of social actors and actants, all technology, including the internet, exhibits ‘interpretative flexibility’ (Pinch and Bijker, 1987: 27). This idea stresses that all technologies are constructed, and thus, their meaning, purpose and design are determined in an actually flexible and contingent process. In other words, individuals are still given the chance ‘to actualize ambivalent potentialities previously suppressed by the prevailing technological rationality’ (Feenberg, 1996: 45). Although the technical capacity remains as that through which an individual user may come to make choices that unwittingly reinforce the built-in dominance of ideology, this flexible possibility for interpretation is still the core reason for the mutual structuration between technology and social meaning.

Consequently, as much as technologies may be seen simply as a tool and nothing more, it is still the ability of human beings as producer, designer and consumer to keep on questioning the technological boundary that rationalises the possibility of interpreting technology that really makes STS important. Such ability to explore and interrogate serves as a significant subversive method that can make a difference for the existing power structure in contemporary society. Questioning the boundaries of technology makes possible the continuation of mutual structuration by embedding technologies in daily life and daily life in technologies. Therefore, while for the purpose of practicality I certainly need to draw boundaries for this thesis, I still argue that a responsible study of an online community should not stop at the boundary of the community, but has to reach out and resonate with contemporary issues. Even one single online community with a small number of participants, like the Spiteful Tots, can illuminate larger social structures and political issues. Therefore, the community

should always be contextualised in larger and different contexts, other than merely in terms of the community itself.

### ***Temporal and Relational boundaries***

Having established this idea of how the technological may be entwined with the social, I still cannot just move straight to the drawing of boundaries and understand exactly where I will start and stop for the sake of research. This is something I can only find out about later when I have carried out my research and analyses. Any predetermined research boundaries will only emerge as a repetition without looking into the object of study and what really matter for those involved. However, I do find other ways to talk about the boundary issues. Relevant to the way I have come to conduct this study on the Spiteful Tots community, is how Lori Kendall (2009) conceives the issue of research boundaries— temporal, spatial and relational. Along with spheres of influence, Kendall (2009) remarks that

I briefly consider three different kinds of boundaries and three different spheres of influence on boundary choices. I am calling the three types of boundaries spatial, temporal and relational and the three spheres of influence analytical, ethical and personal. Spatial boundaries refer to questions of where, who, and what to study. Temporal boundaries refer to questions of time spent and the issues of beginning and ending research. Relational boundaries refer primarily to relationships between researchers and the people they study (although other relationships are also present to research projects, such as relationships between researchers and their audience for written projects). The analytical sphere of influence refers to theoretical and analytical decisions regarding project boundaries. The ethical sphere of influence refers to boundary decisions made for ethical reasons, especially those made to protect participants. The personal sphere of influence refers to various aspects of the researcher's background that might influence the choice of project boundaries, such as personal proclivities, skills, or history. (2009: 22)

Having at hand this list of three types of boundaries and three spheres of influence, I

find it beneficial to go through each type of boundary by detailing how these can be applied in the study of the Spiteful Tots. Spatial boundaries are set to enable a clear focus on this community and its regular participants from 2000 to 2009, including those who post often and those who do not post so often but are still lurking. As to what to study in terms of spatial boundaries, I will dwell on the two themes of privacy and the everyday. The two themes illustrate what becomes interesting when we perceive the community in terms of its emphasis upon privacy when intersected with a seemingly contradictory insistence upon the unmarked non-*tongzhi* status of the community (because this insistence makes the community accessible to all registered users on KKcity). Temporal boundaries were set from the year I started research, which was in 2003 and continue until the present - 2009. The boundary issue starts with how I first approached and understood the community and ends with how I can draw on past incidents and current issues to facilitate an interpretation of the community which is more in line with the participants own interpretation. Despite the seemingly wide ranging time period (2003 to 2009), in following chapters, I do tend to use texts and compiled textuality<sup>182</sup> from earlier years, roughly from 2000 to 2003 or 2004. Based on the consideration of ethics and an attempt to protect the privacy of the Spiteful Tots, I also try my best to use posted materials from a more distant time so as to block any possible identification of the author. While I still do use a post from 2006, due to its appropriateness and relevancy to the theme of the everyday, I pay extra care to the details of the post, so as not to leave any clues or suggestions which may lead to the poster's identity.

Speaking of relational boundaries, ever since 2003, I have always been very careful in the way I maintain my relationship with participants: not getting too warm

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<sup>182</sup> 'Texts' here means individual posts. 'Compiled textuality' means the kind of medley I create by collecting all postings under the same discussion thread without necessarily keeping their original formats in the compilation.

and never becoming too cold. Before 2003, I was a regular participant of the Spiteful Tots community. Then, the Spiteful Tots community was simply one among many other communities and web interfaces. Despite this, I still read every single post and posted myself every now and then. I liked reading posts there because they seemed funny and congenial. I went to the community several times a day, and tried to arrange my schedule so that I could attend the offline gatherings held by the community. At a birthday party for one particular participant, for example, I met many of the Spiteful Tots participants and matched their faces with their screen names. Even face-to-face, we continued to relate to each other according to the screen names or the nicknames used online, since those names referred to that person for us. I think we had a good time and I remember that I was home well past midnight after that first offline meeting.

After I went abroad in 2003, for most of the time I stayed in contact with the people in the community via various electronic methods, including emails,<sup>183</sup> chats, postings, and other non-Spiteful-Tots-based facilities (such as Skype and MSN). Several of these methods were utilised to gather information and data, and others were more relevant to establishing a research persona while building the relationships with the participants which enabled this research. In 2008, I returned to Taiwan, although still staying in contact with participants via the community site as well as in other forms: on MSN, on blog, on plurk,<sup>184</sup> and other different BBS sites. Ever since assuming the role of participant-researcher, I have found myself basically doing the same things I used to do before assuming this role, including going out and meeting the Tots in person. The difference is that now I have begun to consciously try to be

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<sup>183</sup> The email messages mentioned here are both those based on the BBS Spiteful Tots community and Web-based, more personalised email exchanges.

<sup>184</sup> Plurk is a recently available online interface that is similar to twitter, but much more popular in Taiwan. It is accessible at [www.plurk.com](http://www.plurk.com)

more sensitive and pay more attention to what is said and done, instead of just letting these things pass me by. While enjoying our online exchange and interaction, I all the more value their trust in me, in terms of allowing me to carry out research. Therefore, I treat our relationship, or friendship, more seriously than before. This relationship between the Spiteful Tots and me has not only made my research possible, but also facilitated communication and organisation of both irregular offline gatherings and annual Pride parades. Although many of the textual materials or face-to-face exchanges that I encountered in the process of establishing relationships with the Tots will not be used directly in my research, I still counted heavily on these in the process of doing research, as the knowledge and experience gained in these interactions now form an integral part of the internet research methodology within this thesis: they have both framed the context and provided enough knowledge for me to conduct this study.

I combine our email and chat interactions to supplement that which I am unsure of from reading and posting in the community. Everything post-2003 was taken from a different perspective for prior to this, I was not a researcher. In the ongoing process of learning to think and act like a researcher, I started to become more careful and aware about negotiating my role, both as a researcher and a friend in the community, though the participants there might have never paid too much attention to the issue of research ethics and thus treated me in the same way as before. I consciously began to make choices which I thought would be appropriate. For example, I tried not to post too much, so that I did not lead a discussion according to my own thoughts or throw in radical ideas (though it is probably unlikely I would do this under usual circumstances anyway). I still read as much, visited as much, and lurked as much. I tried to read without being too comfortable with my own interpretations and always looked for alternative perspectives. In 2007 and 2008, I also extended my fieldwork to

include the annually held Pride event in Taipei: I physically visited the parade routes by joining *Tongzhi* parades with participants from the Spiteful Tots community.<sup>185</sup>

With some efforts, I continued to participate in the naturalistic surroundings that the Spiteful Tots participants inhabit daily. It is for this reason that I consider myself similar to an ethnographer who ‘[conducts a] naturalistic inquiry [. . . of] people’s actions and interactions in their natural online contexts to explore meanings, describe culture, and so forth’ (Sveningsson Elm 2009: 72). Whilst taking note of the community and its surroundings, I did not want in any way to send a message saying that I am only there to stay for the sake of receiving research credits. So it has seemed natural for me to continue cultivating ongoing relationships with the participants there as I did before. Yet, ever since the research began, I have strongly believed that a more lukewarm relationship would allow me to hold a more neutral point of view as well as a better mind space for achieving fuller understanding of the participants. This way, the personal dimension could potentially be less complicating for the qualitative research project.

Hine has pointed to the ‘autobiographical element’ (2009: 16) in doing qualitative internet research, and I certainly have also brought in that element in the autobiographical note. Despite this, I think that a researcher should still attempt to manage his/her relationship with the research participants in a way that is faithful to past interests or relationships, without influencing too much the choices made in starting and stopping projects, or what to let go of and what to pursue. In other words, I believe that researchers should be given as much freedom and trust as possible in order to carry out a research project as their own. Since for this study I have witnessed the birth and growth of a community before becoming a researcher there, I have

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<sup>185</sup> While the English title of Pride has always been LGBT Pride parade, the Mandarin phrasing however instead been *tongzhi* parade.

reason to believe that my knowledge and understanding of this particular research interface should give me enough understanding of where to look for interesting research materials and what may or may not be worth pursuing.

In November 2004, as a new PhD student, I made the effort of asking around and finding participants who would be happy to join real-time or email interviews. The reason for doing this was to explore what kind of research direction was available for me, so that I could be more informed when I was actually constructing a research design. At the time, I posted on the BM (board master) board the news that I had completed my MA dissertation and people were able to obtain an electronic copy from me if they so wished. In the same post I also mentioned the idea of conducting interviews with them, and in the light of appearing less intimidating, I offered to do an online version of the interview. I figured that the interview did not have to be face-to-face for three reasons: the participants were comfortable using the new media, I had met and known many of them in person before, which might give them a sense of security in talking to me via the net, and the interview material was mainly planned to be used for fact-checking. The post message I made on the board quickly attracted private emails specifically to me on the Spiteful Tots community. Three participants replied, one immediately said yes to the interview, the other two were more reluctant and only gave me the green light after I have pushed the interview somewhat. It was then that I was confirmed with my previous hunch about the community's dislike, or avoidance, of being interviewed for research. In this regard, the Spiteful Tots participants' disinterest in becoming interviewees for academic purposes also told me something about how I should go about developing this research.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Although I did try to find out what made them so unwilling to be interviewed, the two participants did not quite explain it. However, I suspected that this also showed that the rubrics of academic theories and political discourses on sexuality had little that would encourage or interest them to take part in a research project specifically designed for them.

### *Spatial boundaries*

The spatial boundaries set for this project, are, as briefly mentioned, anything that concerning the two themes of privacy and the everyday in the Spiteful Tots community. Issues of their textually mediated privacy and everydayness can be referred to in the elements that have been used by them in postings, such as newspaper hyperlinks, footages of TV news-related programs, and other kinds of web site texts and video clips. Browsing through such links that connect them with the outside community, I was enabled with a sense of what is available to them, based on the fact that I have read every single post in the community.<sup>187</sup> Also, since I am in the same age group and from a similar background, I can be considered as inside this socio-cultural atmosphere and phenomenon, sharing it with them.<sup>188</sup> Daily life contexts and experiences in contemporary Taiwan which are identified as helpful to my study of the Spiteful Tots community centre on ‘mediascapes’ (Appadurai 1996) of various kinds. These are really based on Rosenau’s (2003) idea of ‘distant proximities’— things that are close to each other, not in terms of their geographical distance, but owing to their experiential proximity.<sup>189</sup> So in this case study, the spatial boundaries may not be drawn in traditional spatial/geographical terms, but rather on experiential grounds where the Spiteful Tots participants can have immediate access. In this situation, various types of media and communication definitely form the research boundaries. However, in the following chapters where I quote from people’s BBS texts in order to make points or arguments, it is noticeable that I do not much use those texts which contain hyperlinks per se. While I might use texts that lucidly or even ambiguously refer to things outside of the community, I tend

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<sup>187</sup> Up till 25 June 2008, there were 149,026 post messages on the Spiteful Tots community, excluding cross-postings.

<sup>188</sup> This is, of course, in spite of the gender difference between the majority of the Spiteful Tots and me.

<sup>189</sup> This is especially true since I live in Kaohsiung (the southern part of Taiwan) and most of the Spiteful Tots currently live in Taipei, (northern Taiwan).



to find texts containing hyperlinks actually less relevant to what I wish to focus on. This is because, when screening out posts and replies, hyperlinks usually function as an indication of something external that is either informative or entertaining. Postings as such are really looking for an exchange of information or a good laugh, and thus the content is not substantial but rather directional—directing the readers’ attention to interesting tests, funny pictures, news, anecdotes, and the like.<sup>190</sup> But even though this is the case, I still find the accumulation of hyperlinked reading experience valuable in terms of allowing me a good sense of the kind of websites the Tots are exposed to and/or where they choose to go for relaxation.

In an endeavour to make use of Kendall’s three types of research boundaries and three spheres of influence, I find it is indeed as Kendall further elucidates, that the aim is not to specify each discrete category, but to see them as interconnected (2009: 22). Kendall employs the metaphor of a ‘translucent faceted gem’: ‘[o]ne can turn the gem so as to focus on a single facet, but through that facet also sees the other facets’ (2009: 22). In this process, an online social group, like the Spiteful Tots community, is found to be defined through relationships. Each participant’s view is framed by her/his connections to others and the behaviour of these people. All boundaries can be extended or withdrawn due to the changing and evolving relationship. Their interconnection with one another is premised on the fact that the community is one that relies upon regular participants’ interpersonal relationships. Researching this kind of egocentric network is difficult in that the community does not rely on any singular set of overarching norms or expectations, but rather on the dynamic and contingent formulation of a relationship that is subject to change, when, for example, a new comer joins in or when they disagree with one another. Therefore, as the researcher, I

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<sup>190</sup> It may also be quite interesting to note that in the Spiteful Tots community there are no more than a few posts that are actually about articles on same-sex marriage legalisation or websites of gay porn videos.

can never know beforehand what lies before me, until I have started to think, observe and participate from a participant-researcher's point of view. It is only in this process of learning by doing that I can gradually be taught how to conduct research and form my methodology. From what I have observed and witnessed, the community is certainly evolving, but the participants, luckily, have not yet started to experience insurmountable problems in getting along with one another.

### **Everyday internet**

Many of the issues concerning research boundaries have to do with how the study of an online community can be much inspired and facilitated by adopting ethnographic views. In *Virtual Ethnography*, Hine (2000) argues that ethnography is essential in formulating the idea that the internet can be treated as a cultural context that makes sense of (as well as contains) interesting issues worthy of further investigation and thoughts. Hine's argument hints at the possibility that the internet is special and different from the banal everyday; it seems more 'interesting'. And yet, in other studies, scholars have reached an understanding whereby the internet is increasingly seen as part of everyday life rather than a separate and automatically virtual sphere (Howard and Jones, 2004; Miller and Slater, 2000; Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). In such studies, the internet is not simply a special context where culture can be noted and further studied; the internet is also a cultural phenomenon that is increasingly being integrated into the mundane and the routine.

Markham (1998) has noted that the internet can be seen as a tool, a place, and a way of being, and these different aspects offer different methodological choices. For an online community, the internet-mediated space is at times a tool, an entertainment, and a place or a culture filled with its own complexity. To journey into the core of the many-faceted culturally and sociologically relevant formulation of the internet, I think this is where both the ordinary and the extraordinary take place. One of the options of

understanding the internet better may be to challenge the notion of the ‘field’ and push it as a combination of different field sites, that is, by conforming as well as transforming ethnographic principles. Hine (2009), for example, thinks that taking note of multi-sited ethnography may be very helpful in researching an internet group.

Hine notes:

Ethnography of the internet can [. . .] usefully be about mobility between contexts of production and use, and between online and offline, and it can creatively deploy forms of engagement to look at how these sites are socially constructed and at the same time are social conduits (2009: 11).

This ‘multi-sited’ ethnography interweaves the online and offline, not because the online has to be ‘supported’ or ‘proved’ by the offline, nor is it related to the idea that the offline version of participants’ lives and experiences should be more ‘truthful’ or ‘authentic’ than those experienced online. Rather, I think the utilisation of multi-sited ethnography pushes the limit of the traditional definition of ‘field’ in ethnographic studies. It encourages immersion into relevant practices, not just into the study of a particular site. In *After Method*, for example, Law (2004) argues that the world is so inherently messy and complex that any attempt to superimpose the methodological stances of social science on it will inevitably do injustice to some features of the situation. Law (2004) suggests that we confront the selective nature of methods, and then develop alternative forms that select for different qualities than linearity and order. Reading Law’s book, I am of the opinion that Law promotes researcher’s agency, encouraging the researcher to become a constructor of reality, rather than allowing her or him to hide behind portrayals of method as a mere technique. Applied to the interpretation of contemporary technologies, the stance advocated by Law, in Hine’s eyes, means accepting that ‘there are many versions of what a given technology is and how it is bounded and that we need to address some of this

complexity with our methodological approaches' (Hine, 2009: 5).

A problem resulting from this methodological stance is, as stated, that a researcher can never know beforehand how s/he is going to conduct the research. In the hope of not missing out on complex depths when setting up research boundaries (particularly in the sense of defining 'fields'), a researcher who wants to approach an online community (like me) will need to endure a strong sense of uncertainty and let meanings emerge through his/her engagement within cultural contexts and the people within them. Instead of determining research methods in advance, the researcher has to be patient and let him/herself lurk, read, participate, link, email, observe, think, communicate, explore, and sometimes—rein in, push and provoke. In the process of making tentative experiments and connections, the researcher is led to a better sense of what has been at stake, why certain things would or would not work, and where to go on with the research. The research process is becoming similar to an ethnographic project that is also about living in a culture, or a cultural phenomenon. It is a long process of trial and error, alternating between exploration and analysis. This process will hopefully help the most appropriate theoretical approach and methodology to become the final outcome, though it necessarily implies that such an approach and methodology can not possibly be predicted at the outset of a research project.

There is obviously still more to consider regarding the issue of where to start and stop the research, and I must also admit that neither decision is entirely self-evident but sometimes bound up with both social constructions and practical considerations. As Gubrium and Holstein (1999) have maintained, the boundaries of methodologies can be fluid and negotiated, rather than fixed and stable. Based on these notions, I have to admit that some of the decisions are about my reading and understanding of (more traditional) ethnographies (mostly enlightened by Geertz, 1973 and Clifford, 1991, 1992, 1997). Some are however my identification of the common ground

between the previous, traditional ethnographies and my technology-mediated ethnography-inspired study. Another part of these decisions is my focus on the culture of BBS and the Spiteful Tots community, and my own engagement in the fields—hanging out, observing, questioning and analysing. Still another would be the collaboration made between my own research encounters (such as my MA specialisation of gender and technology and this PhD, submitted to a department of Women's Studies), supervisory input, what can be defensible in this disciplinary context, and my responsibilities for the funding bodies, the researched community and participants, and whether they can recognise themselves in the study they have let me conduct. The result here may or may not be ethnography, but it is definitely qualitative social research inspired by ethnographic approaches. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) have described that 'There is a sense in which all social researchers are participant observers, and, as a result, the boundaries around ethnography are necessarily unclear' (1995: 1). I argue that transposing ethnography onto the realm of the online and digital will yield fruit as a result of long term immersion and engagement. The kind of depth and reach such internet-mediated social study can provide will be the basis from which the researcher may claim validity in doing such a study.

### **The continuum of private and public**

As clarified, in the process of building up the Spiteful Tots community, it was clear that people wanted this new space to be a kind of private club for themselves and friends who were or were not regulars in SideWorld. This private club for gay, lesbian and otherwise sexual-oriented participants is not just a metaphor, but, indeed, is based on how they themselves have referred to the Spiteful Tots community in a post directed at visitors. I think the place-based metaphor of 'private club' shows, under these circumstances, that it is a semi-public place within which there are also

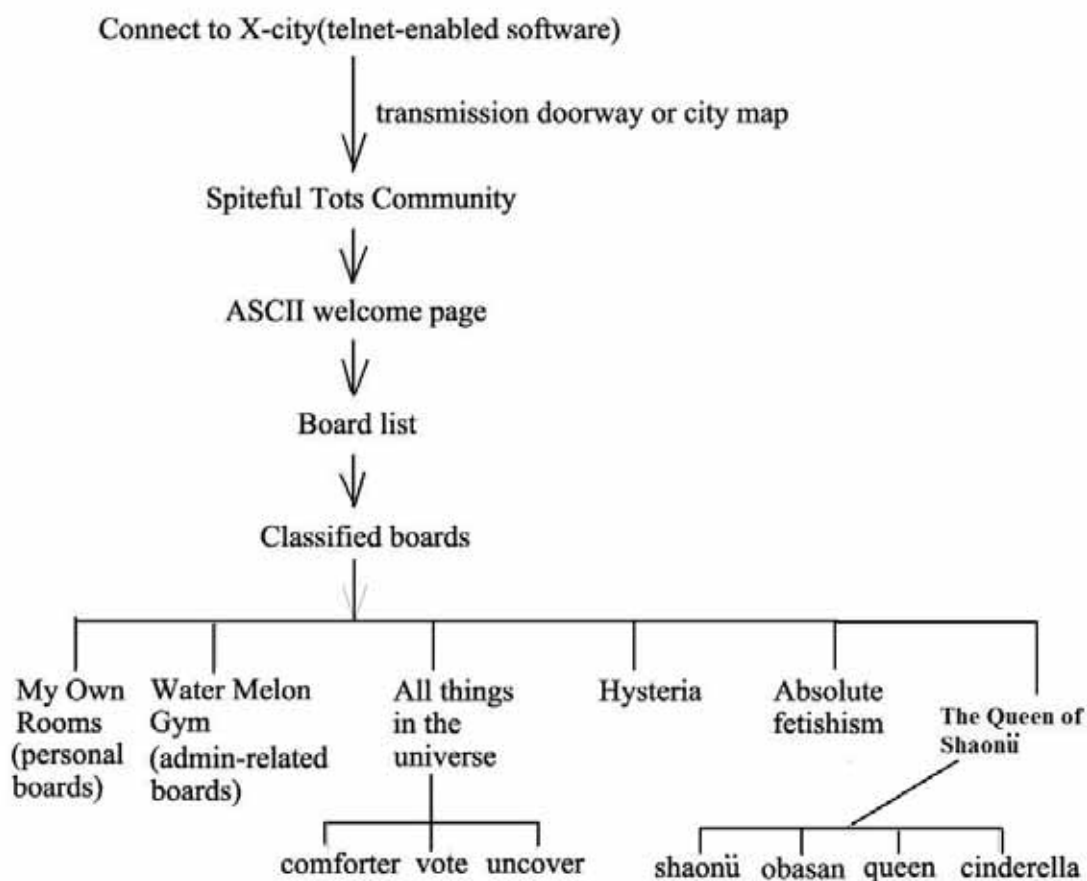
semi-private and extremely private spaces. The ‘private club’ notion is related to the way the Tots treat sexuality – that is, as a simple fact of daily life. All kinds of related issues and descriptions of moments related to non-normative sexuality exist, and these are not separate from life but already part of it. For its worth, this community has thus needed to be reasonably intimate and secure, and the Spiteful Tots community has managed this quality over time by insisting on a respect for privacy.

At the first glance, it might be easy to think that the Spiteful Tots participants are quite wishful in thinking this way; the fact that the community has always been open to all guarantees that it will be anything but private. But, as Malin Sveningsn Elm (2009) has noted, public and private are not at all mutually exclusive ideas, but lie on a continuum: an online place can be public and private at the same time, and this is indeed quite true in the case of the Spiteful Tots community. In fact, as noted, they have demarcated the space for public and private. The community comprises of six categories of discussion boards. One of the categories, ‘My Own Rooms’,<sup>191</sup> gathers together all the private personal boards owned by the Spiteful Tots. The rest of the categories of boards are public and open to all. In ‘My Own Rooms’, private personal boards are also of two kinds; one is completely hidden from new comers and requires editing of the ‘reading list’ before new people are allowed to read and post. The other is public and open, but its attributes are still personal, not topical or thematic. On the public boards which belong the other five categories, then, Board Masters have the power to set rules for the boards, or do whatever s/he sees as suitable for facilitating discussions. As suggested, personal boards are not directly suitable for my discussions and analyses, but indirectly I might use information and knowledge gained from them to facilitate my analyses. The bottom line is that I refrain from quoting and instead

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<sup>191</sup> ‘Room’ is the Spiteful Tots’ phrasing of personal boards on the community.

paraphrase.<sup>192</sup> Here I offer a flow chart of how one can connect to the Spiteful Tots community and what one will be greeted with when connected:



Flow Chart

### Connecting to the Spiteful Tots community

As to why the spatiality in the Spiteful Tots community is divided up as indicated, this will be further explained in the next chapter.<sup>193</sup> For now, I will simply stress how the

<sup>192</sup> However, in a previous version of this thesis, I actually decided to quote from a personal yet public board of one of the Spiteful Tots, Blarelare's (a pseudonym). For this I emailed Blarelare with an initial inquiry to find out if quoting him would be acceptable, whilst without actually telling him which post(s) I would like to include in the thesis. To my surprise and gratitude, he answered with a yes and said that I could use anything on his board that I found useful.

<sup>193</sup> This can be supported by two situations from the Spiteful Tots community. One was when the Spiteful Tots froze the number of personal boards in operation; this was soon after they set up the community. This was so that the public boards could gain popularity as the main method of sharing topical discussions. The other was that one of the founding members of the community started several new public boards of his own (for chatting about political correctness, the metro and allergies). He

Spiteful Tots community conceived the idea of privacy. While, without having conducted any interviews, it seems bold for me to claim that I know how the Spiteful Tots participants think about their use of this place and their perception of privacy, I am claiming this due to the fact that they purposefully limit the number of personal boards and instead let public discussion boards flourish. In the above chart, which also outlines the structure of the community, five out of six categories of boards belong to discussions open to everyone. Although I have talked repeatedly about how much the participants value their privacy, I must also point out that they have been consciously maintaining enough space for dynamic discussions available for both participants and visitors. This means that the participants are aware of the publicness of their community, or more than that, they actually created the publicness. This is the tricky and interesting part of the community's emphasis on privacy: Whereas this internet-mediated place is admittedly public, it does not feel public to its users. This is why the participants can tell who is a stranger to their community and who has been lurking and reading. For many users who just stumble into the community, anonymity in the sense of lacking social and biological cues makes them feel confused and unsure in the computer-mediated communication (CMC), rather than enable them to post with a more intimate tone than they would use in an offline scenario (this has also been observed in Lövheim, 1999). If the poster actually employs a not-too-intimate and not-too-restricted speaking voice in their post message, then it is very likely that this person has been lurking and reading for some time. In other words, the issue of public and private is not just about the participants being vulnerable subjects who are unknowingly investigated and even quoted by researchers working in public online spaces (Sveningsson, Lövheim and Bergquist. 2003). They are, on the

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made a textual announcement of this fact, and added at the end of the post, 'it feels good to be corrupted by power'.



contrary, in control. For the Spiteful Tots community, the public and private is carefully maintained to the extent of enabling clues as to who has been around for a long time and who has not. For example, a previously unknown ID name holder who is composing a message can be revealed as a long or short term community member in terms of how s/he negotiates the public and private quality of the community.

As Allen (1996) has noted, perceptions of public and private may well be blurred as both types of spaces can exist within the same internet arena. I think that the Spiteful Tots participants have come to familiarise themselves with this co-existence of public and private, and they have also made good use of the ambiguity of online spaces by finding a way to maintain the community the way they want it. In between this manipulation of the merging nature of public and private on BBS sites, I think what really makes the major difference is that the participants are using pseudonyms. Although over the years, these pseudonyms have achieved a certain degree of intelligibility, they are still pseudonyms which offer (however thinly) some protection. On the one hand, the Spiteful Tots participants, having been using BBS for such a long time, are aware of how easily the online can collide with or intersect with the offline in most unpleasant way. On the other, they can still be careful about what they reveal in posts and hide both their digital and non-digital traces. Of course, despite all this care and awareness, one can still be exposed in a way that is harmful to his or her feelings. I am certainly not making claims that would render the Spiteful Tots participants as those who are in total control of their luck or fate. What I am however hoping to make a point of, is that, at least for the participants, the personal information read in personal profiles, postings, and even diaries on their personal boards is typed and published in a community they have built for themselves. Much of the contents is actually written in a special style that either omits the subject or object, or expresses feelings that are expressed without the actual cause and effect of

the story being told. Therefore, at the receiver's end, one may or may not be apprehended, since sexuality may just have not been as important or critical in the observer/reader's life. A good example of this is discussed in length in the next chapter. It involves how I did not at first understand why such an enormous amount of attention was paid to many unknown visitors/participants to the Spiteful Tots community. There were strong indications of how important this private discussion (on the BM board) of new people visiting the community was to the Spiteful Tots participants. Although I could tell that the users tended to see the community as inclined to public exposure and this in a sense unsettled them, I however did not know why this was the case. This instance will demonstrate two interesting points: what seems private and sensitive to the community participants may not be regarded so by the researcher, and that even if something relatively private and sensitive is displayed, the reader or observer may not in some cases, see it as private or sensitive.

### **Gender and Sexuality**

Following on from the above points, I also admit that I find my own gender and sexuality quite influential to my research. In a community where the majority of the participants are self-identified gay men, how do I insert myself into their world and claim any understanding of them? In addition, how do I relate the community to Women's Studies? For one, I think the fact that I am not attracted to most of the participants and that this is reciprocal helps. Of course, I agree that feeling attracted to a research subject may not necessarily be harmful to the research; sometimes, it can actually be enlightening and of importance (Newton, 1993a, 1993b; Kulick and Willson, 1995). But I do think that erotic interest can be difficult to handle as it may complicate the situation. It was difficult enough for me to maintain a sense of balance as both a researcher and a friend to the Spiteful Tots community, and I cannot imagine that further complications would ease the situation for me.

Then again, my own physical field is not set aside from my own dormitory, rented house, old apartment and other places I temporarily call home. This is to say I am operating within familiar terrain when I connect to the Spiteful Tots community and the physical experience of gaining access to the field involves using a mouse and pressing keys. None of this is exactly pleasurable or relaxing. The long hours involved in being in the community have actually felt partly like work and partly like entertainment to me (the postings in the Spiteful Tots community are usually quite funny and cleverly sarcastic). Other than online research being both work and entertainment, there is also an element of habituality in such a daily practice of connecting to a community. At any rate, it is perhaps not surprising that I am competent at picking up the everyday theme in the Spiteful Tots community, as the everyday is definitely about repetition and chores and enlivened by the little bit fun that can be slipped in between them. However, I do not deny that insights about how online interaction facilitates sexual encounters or relationships may be missed in my research process, since I have not paid serious attention to the erotic dimension of the field. While I have certainly experienced how erotic attachments can transform the long hours of sitting at a keyboard and typing into a more exciting activity, it would still be quite difficult for me to pick up clues as to how, for example, behaviours of online exchanges gay pornographic video clips are developed or how other kinds of sexual materials are distributed among the Spiteful Tots participants. Until such access information is actively posted on the boards there, I think I can say that it is easy enough for me to be excluded from such a process and behaviour.

So my full participation in the Spiteful Tots community has not included any erotic involvement, experience or observation. But this does not infer that I am not really part of the community. I think that from my own comprehension of the community (along with all the other experiences with the participants in contexts

outside of the community) I see the Spiteful Tots not as gay and not as male. Nor of course do I label them as *tongzhi*. If I were given the power to theorise the Spiteful Tots as a kind of identity, in relation to the contemporary politics of sexuality in Taiwan, I would assert the idea that being spiteful and sceptical of the mainstream perception of what is acceptable and encouraged by society, is necessary, and that the only way to stay that way— to remain spiteful and sceptical— is to stay a ‘tot’ all the time. Several ideas support my theorisation. First, it is perhaps a shared observation among the participants that they have always enjoyed making cynical comments about the institution of the family, both their own and other peoples (that is, people outside of the community) that they happen to be able to observe. Their mocking of families makes them indeed appear rather spiteful. So ‘spiteful’ becomes a way of feeling feel both ‘in’ in the group and ‘out’ in other social scenarios and settings. It becomes a way of making the Tots distinct from one another, and thereby producing a sense of identification in the community. Second, at this level, I find it helpful to further contextualise this naming in the context of existing socially expected ways of interaction in Taiwan. In a heteronormative society, each one of us is expected to do different things at different ages, and failing to do so means that others around you may feel concerned, confused or even distressed about the way you lead your life. Every step in the predetermined human life cycle— being interested in the opposite sex, finding a good job, getting married, bearing children, having a family— is still assumed as fitting and beneficial for the Taiwanese (mostly by the elder generation, such as my parents’ generation and above). Anyone who falls outside of the existing social paths and patterns needs to explain themselves from time to time, which can sometimes result in arguments with parents, relatives, friends, neighbours, and other elders. Claiming to be ‘spiteful’ in this context implies that the participants demonstrate little intention to comply with the notion of ‘how people should

be(come)’. While this may appear to imply a rather premature and adolescent image of themselves as rebels, I am more willing to see that it is really meant as a rejection of socialisation—including the need to marry and bear children in order to prove their maturity, including all the false courteousness and socialised manners which accompany the institution of marriage. Spiteful as a rejection of ‘how people should be or become’ can be understood in the sense that the Tots stop believing in marriage, having a family, raising children, and acting as good parents. On the flip side, too, ‘spiteful’ simultaneously may suggest a deep sense of frustration in the process of trying to adapt and socialise for the sake of others. Relating ‘spiteful’ to ‘tots’ situates more clearly their correlation in this context: based on customised ways; contemporary Taiwanese people tend to think that those who are unmarried and look relatively young (without wrinkles and grey hair, perhaps) are immature (or refreshing) like a boy or girl instead of a man or woman. I think, based on my own observation and experience, it is correct to say that the participants embrace ‘spiteful’ as a word to show (and be identified by) their differences, and their self-positioning as ‘tots’ both mocks and conforms to the notion of retaining one’s adolescence due to ‘ruination’ or ‘torture’ by heterosexual marriage.

According to this initial exploration of the theorisation of the ‘Spiteful Tots’, I think that ideologically this term can refer to anyone who is now past their ‘marrying age’, who stays single, and chooses to remain like a ‘tot’ in order to refuse social expectations. Owing to this definition and understanding of the Spiteful Tots, I see myself eligible as a Spiteful Tot. I think the fact that the community has been organised in such a fashion that invites public interactions that hint at the appropriateness of expanding the meaning or identity of the Spiteful Tots to people who do not necessarily participate regularly, or people who are not gay men. I also find that expanding on this idea of the Spiteful Tots helps concretise an alternative

consideration of sexual identity that is not *tongzhi*, homosexual or queer based. Can a sexual identity be just about retaliating against the social and legal institution of marriage and the administrative notion of a household? Although I have certainly been a regular participant of the Spiteful Tots community and have also represented the community in Pride parades, I am not entirely sure of the answer to this question, and am only offering this theorising as an option for understanding the community and its participants in the broadest possible way.

### **Concluding remarks**

Around 2001 and 2002, I started to recognise from participants' texts that they were practically struggling with some of the most complicated issues of sexuality in contemporary Taiwan. On a daily basis, the Spiteful Tots participants were caught up in issues larger than themselves, such as their discomfort with *tongzhi* as a political sexual identity, the pressure of being politically correct (ex. no verbal discrimination) and the confrontation of ethnic conflict in Taiwanese politics<sup>194</sup>. This recognition touched as well as inspired me. I realised that these were some very sensitive people living in a chaotic time and in a nation that is not recognised as a country, wracked by insecurity and restrained by heteronormativity, feeling that life was spiralling out of their control. The community became a place where they own and where they could remind themselves, through the power of humour, sarcasm and banter, of the fact that what mattered was to try to have a life where they could remain truthful to themselves. Reading message threads and engaging in online chats with them, I related to their feelings, as many of their feelings stemmed from various observations and experiences in our life at the time. A profound sense of connection was identified in my recognition of their sensitivities and feelings, and I wished more than anything

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<sup>194</sup> While I have discussed a little about this issue in Chapter 2 based on the Spiteful Tots' postings, the issue of ethnicity, due to the limited length and scope of the thesis, will however not be included in the following chapters.

else to express and analyse what I was receiving and gradually making sense of it.

At the beginning, the urge to express and analyse motivated me to read, think and write very widely for this PhD project. A myriad of possibilities for developing my ideas and arguments was laid in front of me and suddenly everything I had learned and acquired from previous years of education came together as something coherent and sense-making. I was very excited by this coherence, which was read by me as a sign of it being 'correct'. I was confident in my findings and analyses and told some participants what I was doing and how well it was all going. I also sent them electronic copies of the papers I was going to present at conferences or which were to be published as book chapters. I thought I had all the answers: the feeling was very satisfying. All that the Spiteful Tots participants needed to do was to bravely come out and live openly as gay. But I soon realised that I did not need to present as coherent a picture as that which appeared in my mind; on the contrary, the picture I painted of the Spiteful Tots community was necessarily unrealistic and unsympathetic. I tried more than a few times to find a structure that would pull together everything I wished to engage with in this thesis, especially the idea that political discourses and sexuality theories can be both enlightening and useful. Soon I realised that there was no such thing as having all the answers. Rather, my research focus had to be carefully resituated and ways of interpretation therefore allowed to evolve.

Nancy Baym and Annette Markham (2009) have noted:

The constitution of data is the result of a series of decisions. [. . .] We must constantly and thoroughly evaluate what will count as data and how we are distinguishing side issues from key sources of information. Reflexivity may enable use to minimize or at least acknowledge the ways in which our culturally embedded rationalities influence what is eventually labeled 'data'. (2009: xviii)

It was exactly this process of screening out what can be counted as data that I

examined and re-examined my own point of departure and came to realise how much I wished to solve all the problems by finding one ultimate answer that would work magic on all of them. I was too hasty to notice that I needed actually to slow down and go back to the postings which had initially aroused such strong feelings in me. After all the years of trying to find different ways to talk about the community and experimenting with research directions, I found that, as Sally Jackson (1986) aptly reminded me— method is not a recipe for success, but a means of argument. My argument is that the Spiteful Tots community shows that sometimes it is for a very good reason that an established sexual identity is not embraced, despite the consequent difficulties involved in this rebuttal. When ‘not adopting a sexual identity’ starts to place pressure on people, it is that discourse that enables the pressure of coming out (as this or that sexual identity) that needs to be interrogated, rather than the people who refuse to assume such an identity. While I admit the subjectivity involved in making this argument, I also would like to draw on Peshkin’s words to support myself. Peshkin (1988) thinks that researcher’s unexamined and internalised values will make him or her blind to some dimensions shown by a social phenomenon. This is because subjectivity can be both a possibility and a limitation when the opportunity of making connections between some dimensions with others (in various other phenomena) is not elucidated. Therefore the researcher should reflect upon his or her own subjectivity, and review the overall influence such subjectivity will have on the research. So, in this study, I have had to know what moves me and what does not, since my subjectivity limits my cognition, experience and understanding. Peshkin’s following statement puts it clearly: ‘By virtue of subjectivity, I tell the story I am moved to tell. Remove my subjectivity and I do not become a value-free participant observer, merely an empty-headed one’ (1988: 280). Phillips and Pugh (2000) also point out that research is not necessarily about finding out what was not



known before, but what the researcher or the reader did not know before. This is to say, research is not always about exploring what remains new and unexplored, but rather about finding new perspectives on what has previously been taken-for-granted, and exposing presumptions or bias. As a result, research is not just about explaining 'external' phenomena, but also about reflecting on previous understanding, as well as making people and or a researcher self-examine how they view the world. This certainly follows the understanding that research is, too, involved with the researcher's own growth, self-learning, and reflection.

I offer this chapter as an honest record and reflection of the issues I have encountered, the decisions I made, and the process of making those decisions. What will remain critical in this internet-based research is continued discussion, since the fields of internet studies and the communication, technologies and relationships within them are still in a nascent stage. I hope that the current discussion can be furthered by future academic dialogues, so that the quality and continuation of studies of internet-based methodology and ethics can be ensured and kept up to date.

## Chapter Five | Privacy and Visibility

*Who says ‘Taiwan tongzhi movement “wedges” at the problem of coming out [xienshen]’? [. . .] This does not bother us at all. For ‘Between Us’<sup>195</sup> that has been existing for seven years and for many people who have been devoted to the movement, tongzhi movement has never been stuck at the problem of coming out. The fact is that we have been circuitously and windingly making our way ahead in a very Taiwanese way—ambiguity, hybridity, smuggling and concealing in between the other innocent articles. Playing it in the dark, you live long and lasting. Playing it in the light, you are the first to die. What should be asked is why would anyone think that it is stuck at xienshen? What would it be like if the kind of unstuck situation they assume happens? Would it be San Francisco America or Paris France?  
(Qitian Xiaoshen et al., 1997: 45)<sup>196</sup>*

In this chapter I investigate privacy in the Spiteful Tots community, asking why privacy has been so important in upholding it. To understand the importance of privacy for the Spiteful Tots community, I consider a term that may be seen privacy’s opposite of privacy, visibility. I ask: who is reading (or watching) and who is being read (or watched)? Through discussing private posts between Board Masters, dynamics between the heteronormative public and homosocial private can be revealed. However, I hope such revelations will not simply disclose a dichotomy but, more importantly, reveal a subtle and intricate relationship between the two positions - that of the seeing subject and that of the seen object. At the end, I highlight the idea that visibility presents a complicated and problematic issue, as suggested in the epigraph for this chapter. In summary, I argue that the way the Spiteful Tots community has

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<sup>195</sup> ‘Between Us’, *Women Zhichien*, was the first internet group for same-sex desire in Taiwan. *Women Zhichien* means ‘Between Us’, or ‘Entre Nous’. The name comes from a French film *Entre Nous*, which includes lesbian themes. Initiated in 1990, Between Us was populated by both white American lesbians (who were also researchers) and Taiwanese lesbian women (of various occupations), each taking up half of the group.

<sup>196</sup> Qitian Xiaoshen et al., from ‘Shenli, Yingxiong huo Zhanlüejia: “Xienshen” yu Xian Jieduan Taiwan Tongzhi Yundongde Fazhan ji qi Yiyi’ (Sacrifice, Hero or Strategist: The Development and Significance of “Xienshen” in the Current Phase of Taiwan’s Tongzhi Movement) in *Saodong* (Stir), 1997, p.45

managed to remain a so-called (online) ‘private club’ may have offered a way to fully realise the idea that people of all sexualities should enjoy the same individual respect for privacy in their daily life practices. What the Spiteful Tots community has achieved over the years can be taken as a practical method of validating privacy as a right for all participants— whatever their sexual preferences may be.

This chapter also bases its argument on sites other than the Spiteful Tots community, and on the streets and places where the participants chooses to display themselves during Pride gatherings. In such milieus, the Spiteful Tots are masked and costumed in the same way as a group. Their group appearance is arguably a comparable state to their taking up of screen names. The participants normally choose a character that is suitable for their appeals for the annual LGBT Pride parade, and every one of them assumes the form of this chosen character. Regarding the criteria of how they reach the decision to play particular roles in the parades, it is always crucial that, with the help of disguise, they will be noticed, photographed and even recorded throughout the day. To be able to be noticed is vital for it allows them the ability, via the mass media, to communicate their wishes for a sexually equal environment for all in Taiwan. This is seemingly a contradictory desire of the Spiteful Tots (to be noticed on street as opposed to retain their privacy online), who put a high value on their privacy in the Taiwanese community. But, once a year, they are willing to physically stride across many blocks in the busiest sections of Taipei, alongside other Pride participants in order to make the Taiwanese society understand what they are in support of, which mainly concerns sexual rights and equality. While it is true that they are usually masked and costumed during the process of parades, I also argue, based on previous discussions, that they can be seen as rejecting stigmatisation and the public attempt to make them representative of all homosexual people. If they can instead

utilise a well-known cartoon character or a deity figure,<sup>197</sup> for example, then the focus may no longer be ‘who these homosexuals are’ or ‘how they look’, but may be (at least partially) transferred to the significance of their appearing in such an outfit that disguises them as someone else in this highly visible moment of LGBT pride. In other words, watchers of the Pride parade may start to wonder why homosexuals choose to put up female costumes and masks that make them Shizuka, a character in the Japanese comics and cartoon ‘Doraemon’? Are they making a statement by means of this transgender appearance?

For the purpose of making a thorough discussion of my own observations as a participant at these Taiwanese Pride marches, I additionally make a point of noticing the presence and participation of foreign people, mostly white Westerners. This phenomenon has happened in every annual parade that I have been to, covering the past three years. According to my conversation with other parade participants, it has been noted that the presence and support of foreigners has long become an indispensable part of the Pride event, as they ‘made the show go on’.<sup>198</sup> I find this very interesting, as the juxtaposition of Westerners and Pride seems to suggest some level of legitimacy, of ‘being seen by the world’ (‘they are what makes the show go on’). The idea of Pride is enabled by the notion that it is being watched not only by the local Taiwanese people, but also by foreigners around the world is a complex one. It shows that not only visibility constitutes a sense of legitimacy of the event, but

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<sup>197</sup> The examples of cartoon characters and deity figures are the appearances they have chosen to be in before.

<sup>198</sup> On the parade day of October 13<sup>th</sup> 2007, there were only four of us from the Spiteful Tots community, dressed in army uniforms to show our queering of ‘*tongzhi*’ (as in its Communist comrade sense). The army uniforms with a rainbow arm band attached shows that the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution of China are now the Rainbow Guards in LGBT Pride in Taiwan. Upon our arrival at the meeting point in front of the National Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, we were immediately asked to pose for photographs. Some of those showing an interest were journalists or reporters, and some were simply looking at us nostalgically, hoping for a souvenir to add to their own Pride collection. However, I also soon noticed that there were many foreign people around who were hoping for a photograph with us, and that these same people moved happily in and out of the parading crowd throughout the march. I asked one of the fellow Spiteful Tots participants if foreign participants/audiences turn up every year. He replied jokingly that ‘they are what make the show go on’.

visibility is also intersected with issues of politics of geography (the urbanity of Taipei), mobility (Westerners' presence in Taipei), and class (tourism and travel). This kindles my interest in exploring such an intersection of class, urbanity and Pride parades by means of scholarship about 'Queer Prides' (Lincoln 2005) in urban cities. I therefore think the kind of visibility outside of the community which seems to be the exact opposite of what the Spiteful Tots participants would want in their community does not represent inconsistency, once we consider the fact that the visibility at issue here is formulated on a specific form and in a particular way that, similar to their privacy in the online community, enables the participants to gain a positive and rewarding experience in representing themselves.

### **Why Privacy Matters**

A recent incident in Taiwan society serves as a good example for illustrating how I intend to frame my focus on privacy. In a pre-trial hearing held at a Taipei court on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2009, the former President Chen Shui-bian<sup>199</sup>, attempted to plead not guilty on corruption charges.<sup>200</sup> Here, he invoked the case of President Ma Ying-jeou who was involved in the making of a scandalous DVD where intimate, same-sex relations were visible between President Ma and a former ICRT radio DJ, Charles Mack, also known as 'Chocolate'.<sup>201</sup> Although it was clear that Chocolate featured on

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<sup>199</sup> Chen Shui-bian was the first President from the Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan. Having served in office from 2000 to 2008, Chen was subsequently charged with money laundering, forgery, and corruption.

<sup>200</sup> Having served for two terms of office (eight years), Chen Shui-bian was later questioned about his involvement in a corruption scandal. At the time of leaving office, Chen was almost immediately sent into detention to prevent him from escaping Taiwan. Although this case is under investigation, some of the corruption and money-laundry charges were admitted in early February by Chen's wife, the former First Lady, Wu Shu-chen, who claimed that Chen was unaware of her deeds. For more about this, visit the New York Times archival webpage on Chen:

[http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/\\_chen\\_shuibian/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/c/_chen_shuibian/index.html).

<sup>201</sup> The news can be read on several different newspaper websites (all in English), such as that in The Taiwan News which informs readers 'Taiwan ex-president Chen hits prosecutors with allegations' ([http://www.etaiwannews.com/etn/news\\_content.php?id=875337&lang=eng\\_news](http://www.etaiwannews.com/etn/news_content.php?id=875337&lang=eng_news)), Taipei Times 'DPP caucus whip makes DVD claim' (<http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2009/02/26/2003437067>), and Edge Boston's 'President of Taiwan in Gay Sex Scandal' (<http://www.edgeboston.com/index.php?ch=news&sc=&sc2=&sc3=&id=87836>).

the DVD recording, the image of Ma, despite a distinct resemblance, was still rather blurred. Chen used this DVD to question the fairness and neutrality of the judicial system in Taiwan. He asserted that President Ma had not been completely honest about his sexuality to the seven million people who had entrusted him with their votes. Further, Chen did not think it was acceptable that Ma was seen as just, honest and morally honourable in Taiwan society. His underlying argument was that ‘the voters have a right to know the truth’, and that he (Chen) must then play the part of disclosing the truth for the benefit of all.

When this piece of news was broadcast by the mass media, whilst also admitting that the DVD incident was a disgrace, almost all the commentators regarded the incident as completely irrelevant to the corruption charges that Chen was being tried for. All the interviewed people from government circles and social organisations opined that Chen seemed to have lost his mind in trying to prove his innocence, and therefore turned himself into a low-class muckraker. The DVD incident, however, was ‘hot news’; for instance, a program called ‘News Night Club’ on the TVBS channel discussed the ‘Chocolate DVD incident’ over the two consecutive nights of 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> February 2009. The show invited commentaries from legislators, professors from distinguished universities, political activists, senior journalists, senior newspaper editors, and famous political critics.<sup>202</sup> Like any other talk show specifically devoted to politics in Taiwan, ‘News Night Club’ may be characterised as full of dramatic effects and exaggerated expressions. But in between the extremes of laughter and anger, I noticed that all the invited speakers deemed the DVD incident simply a

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<sup>202</sup> In detail, the legislators who were invited to the talk show were Lai, Suju(賴素如) who belonged to the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) and represents Taipei City, and Huang Shanshan(黃珊珊) who also represents Taipei City from People First Party. The professors were Huang Kuangkuo(黃光國) from National Taiwan University and Yao Liming(姚立明) from the Chinese Culture University. The senior journalists were Lan Xuan (蘭萱) and Lin Chaoxin(林朝鑫). The famous political critics were Ma Yongcheng(馬永成) and Chang Yonghua(張詠華).

gossipy rumour, one that Chen had rather unskillfully utilised in order to distract the Taiwanese people and blur the real focus, which was about his crimes. The public figures who spoke on the talk show also acknowledged that even if this affair with Ma's sexuality were true, then 'President Ma's sexuality is an issue of his own privacy, and has every reason to remain so based on the ideal of human rights', and that 'It only shows that Chen, along with the whole Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) discriminates against the homosexuals'.<sup>203</sup>

While I recognise the fact that in the context of Chen's corruption charges, President Ma's sexuality is indeed on the level of the private, I also find this mobilisation of human rights discourse significant. There were frequent comments made by these commentators about how both Chen and the DPP should stop discriminating against homosexuality and that, even if Ma were gay, Chen and DPP should not have problematised the matter in public. The logic of this argument categorises homosexuality as something that is absolutely private; if homosexuality is somehow disclosed in public, it is then easily conflated with malice or negative intentions and subsequently explained as discrimination. Therefore, it can be inferred that homosexuality is already treated as an act that is not-to-be-exposed, unpresentable and thus open to stigmatisation. Under these circumstances, the disclosure of homosexuality does not automatically bring positive results, but instead

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<sup>203</sup> This was heard from both the activist Zheng Cunqi(鄭村祺)and senior journalist Lan Xuan(蘭萱) on February 24<sup>th</sup>. On the following day a similar argument about Ma's sexuality as being a private matter was heard from a Psychology Professor from the National Taiwan University, Huang Kuangkuo(黃光國). His comments on Frank Chang-ting Hsieh(謝長廷), a DPP candidate in the 2008 presidential election rivalling Ma Ying-jeou, revealed that Huang also followed the discourse of human rights and thought that Hsieh, Chen and the whole DPP were discriminating against homosexuals and should be ashamed of themselves. Although Hsieh recognises that homosexual love is just another form of love, Hsieh comments that it would be 'insane' if seven million Taiwanese people did elect a homosexual president. Video clips for the complete recordings of the talk show 'News Night Club' aired on 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> February 2009 can be accessed on the website [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). The first part of the episode shown on the 24<sup>th</sup> is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glyAFqYheHo&feature=related>. The episode of 25<sup>th</sup> one can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w4ZKES0bgUc&feature=related>, and the episode from 26<sup>th</sup> at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvUVQFYZzXk&NR=1>.

illustrates the discrimination that exists within the Taiwanese society.

A few days after President Ma's official denial of the 'Chocolate DVD' having anything to do with him (that is, on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2009), Professor Ning Ying-bin from the Central University published an article in *Apple Daily*<sup>204</sup> entitled 'If Ma Jing-jeou were my chocolate'.<sup>205</sup> Ning argued that, from the perspective of eliminating prejudice against homosexual people, he hoped that the DVD eluding to Ma's affair with Chocolate was true. Ning asserts:

If Ma and Chocolate were sexually related, then how do we think about the idea of the President and a homosexual? [. . .] We can actually be as proud as the Americans who have elected their black President, [because of] the fact that we have also elected a homosexual or bisexual President. If we do not find this kind of pride in ourselves, it shows that we are still biased and should feel ashamed of ourselves [for being unable to celebrate and feel proud]. We are then nothing unlike some of the Americans who still do not agree with black people's equal rights.<sup>206</sup>

Here Ning tactfully uses the comparison of Barrak Obama's election to the office of President of the United States to make the point that this incident might have provided an opportunity for Taiwan to also show its non-discriminating nature, that is, in expressing pride at having elected a homosexual or bisexual president. Albeit written in a light-hearted manner, this article still aroused much heated debate, from both supporters of KMT and DPP, as can be read in the web comment columns. Among the majority of the comments, I believe that the following are able to be generalised. The first grouping of the comments objected Ning's article because they did not think the DVD showed any truth. These comments came from those who appeared to think in

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<sup>204</sup> 'Apple Daily' is a Hong Kong newspaper based in Taiwan. It is associated with the paparazzi magazine *Yi zhou kan*.

<sup>205</sup> The original in Chinese reads 'Jiaru Ma Ying-jeou shi wuo de qiaokeli'. This title however was changed by the editors of *Apple Daily*, not by Ning himself.

<sup>206</sup> The original in Chinese can be read at [http://1-apple.com.tw/index.cfm?Fuseaction=Article&Sec\\_ID=1&Art\\_ID=31434044&IssueID=20090302](http://1-apple.com.tw/index.cfm?Fuseaction=Article&Sec_ID=1&Art_ID=31434044&IssueID=20090302).



the same way as the Legislator of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), Chang Sho-wen. Their comments tended to dismiss Chen's allegation that Ma and Mack indulged in intimate relations. On the day Chen made this allegation, Chang Sho-wen quickly remarked in front of the TV and press, that 'Mr Ma is very masculine. It is impossible for him to have had an affair with this guy nicknamed "Chocolate"'.<sup>207</sup> For the second grouping, who appeared to believe in the truth of the DVD, it might have been expected that their support was for the comments made by Ning. However, in their eyes, this article was also like 'sprinkling salt on the wound',<sup>208</sup> and caused the situation to go from bad to worse. Their implication was that Ma's right to privacy meant that any homosexual acts occurred strictly as his own business, and should be left so, without any public awareness or involvement.

Most people seem to assume that the DVD was fake— either that it did not exist or, if it did, then the sexual partner of 'Chocolate' was a President Ma's lookalike. Such a reaction suggests that thinking of the President in a same-sex sexual relationship was beyond most people's imaginings. Yet, in programs like 'News Night Club', several journalists and media producers admitted they had already heard about this DVD a long time before Chen Shui-bien made his allegations at court, giving credence to its truthfulness.<sup>209</sup> While my argument is certainly not about whether this DVD was real or not, the public response to this incident does indicate a double standard towards homosexuality. In both the feedback about Ning's newspaper article and the contents of the 'News Night Club' program, aired from 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> February, I

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<sup>207</sup> <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2009/02/25/2003436976>

<sup>208</sup> This comes from a comment in response to Ning's article and is entitled 'What does it matter to be true or false? (真真假假又如何)'. It was posted at the midnight on March 3<sup>rd</sup> and reads:

Does this [Chocolate DVD incident] matter that it is true or false? If it is truly a wound, then please do not sprinkle salt on it. If it is a false lie, then please do not create a bad karma [by spreading it]. Respect other people.

<sup>209</sup> Lan Xuan, Lin Chaixin, Lai Suju have all remarked on the fact that the wife of DJ Charles Mack (Chocolate), Chang Wei-chin, tried to sell this DVD to both KMT and DPP during the Presidential Elections of 2008.

realise that Taiwanese society often defends someone's right to privacy when a particular person is well known. This may be because all famous people are automatically assumed to be heterosexual, and when this assumption is proved false, society does not wish to acknowledge the incompatibility that ensues. Yet, when an ordinary person is accused of being homosexual, such a spontaneous mobilisation of privacy as a basic human right is rarely applied.

From this DVD incident, I have observed the Taiwanese presumption of homosexuality as something disgraceful. This leads to the necessity of it being hidden away, contained in the realm of the private and never exposed to the public gaze. Correspondingly, even if homosexuality should be exposed, then such an exposure becomes, as in this case with Ma, evidence that visibilises discrimination against homosexuality. As I see it, the presumption of homosexuality as predominantly private, is highly problematic, not in its relation to privacy, but in its strong association with disgrace, shame and discrimination. Why is the exposure of homosexuality necessarily understood as shameful? Or, how does remaining private about homosexuality necessarily lead to an escape from discrimination? Whether the DVD was true or false, the public reactions unanimously relegated non-normative sexual matters to the realm of the private, seeming to conveniently preclude the incident from deserving any further attention or probing. This suggests to me that people would rather choose to turn a blind eye on the truth of this incident than seek it out. However, as I have pointed out, what is intriguing is that this is far from the case for a less well-respected person who may be found out to be gay. There, for instance, have been numerous pieces written to theorise heterosexual voyeurism in contemporary Taiwanese society. For example, the homosexual community in Taiwan has long been asked to 'lift their mysterious veil' and 'stand out in the sunlight' (Martin 2003b: 190). According to Martin (2000, 2003a, 2003b), moreover, the public

sphere does not show respect to this sexual minority, at least not without first seeing the relevant faces and learning personal details about who these homosexual people ‘really’ are. Indeed, there have indeed been moments in the past which can provide evidence of this lack of respect and insufficient recognition for homosexuals’ entitlement to a right to privacy. For instance, over a decade ago, Lin Hsien-shiou in his *Kanjian tongxinglian* (Watching Homosexuality) confessed that his real name was not Lin Hsien-shiou— the name that he used for various publications (1995: 43-47). His admission immediately became almost scandalous, as it rendered whatever Lin had ever written subject to doubt and untrustworthiness. The underlying question was: ‘Didn’t you say you’re openly gay, then how come you dare not use your real name in your own writing?’ (Lin, 1995: 43). In response, Lin argued:

Not that I want to boast and compare myself to established writers with a much higher position, but if writers must not use a pseudonym for their written works, then shall we say that predecessors who use pseudonyms, such as Qijun<sup>210</sup> or Xiaoye<sup>211</sup>, can also be suspected of faking their affections in their writings? If critics of contemporary issues cannot use pseudonyms in public, then can we say that Szma Wenwu<sup>212</sup> and Nanfang Shou<sup>213</sup> planned to avoid being held responsible for their speech by using pseudonyms? [. . .] In this compare and contrast, the real problem manifests itself— if homosexuals want to have a say, then they are *not* entitled to privacy rights; privacy belongs to the ‘normal’ heterosexual writers’ ‘exclusively members-only privilege’. (1995: 44-45; my emphasis in italics and original emphasis in quotation marks)

From Lin’s argument, I think what is at stake here is that the homosexual is (too often)

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<sup>210</sup> Qijun(琦君) was a famous and established prose, novel and fiction writer in Taiwan. Now deceased, Qijun had written works which were well-received, and many of them were later adapted into films, dramas, performances and textbook materials.

<sup>211</sup> Xiaoye(小野) is an active writer of prose, novel, plays, and other kinds of creative works. He has also been working in the entertainment business since the 1980s.

<sup>212</sup> Szma Wenwu(司馬文武) is a reputable and experienced journalist, editor and news producer. He is now the publisher of *Taiwan Daily News*.

<sup>213</sup> Nanfang Shou(南方朔) is a famous political and literary critic who also writes poems and prose.

thought of as someone without a name and face— someone who is not known and who has never come in to close proximity with any of the readers; homosexual people's right to privacy is thus rendered invisible. Therefore, when finally there is some representation of homosexuality, it is always about who the homosexual is, what they do, and which tantalises people's appetite for the unknown and exotic. So when the homosexual actually wants to be read, heard and understood, they find the situation always returns them back to this motif of 'showing us who you are', or in the Western way of phrasing it, 'coming out of the closet'. To achieve some sort of political voice and visibility, there has evolved a whole set of processes that literally embody these homosexual subjects in the most blunt and straightforward kind of way, such as the giving of real names, showing up at a press conference, shouting out stereotypical homosexuality, and exhibiting sissyness/butchness. I do not believe that the homosexual can obtain any valid and powerful voice through being visible in this situation, because it is never done without first accepting the negative and self-cancelling label of 'homosexual' (as in the eye of the public, not in the eye of homosexuals themselves). Moreover, what becomes essentially confusing and discouraging in this process of embodiment, is the catch-22 situation where the homosexual will immediately be regarded as abnormal, unfortunate and flawed once s/he admits to being homosexual. In other words, in the mainstream representation of the homosexuals, the authority with which one explains and validates homosexuality still comes from the heterosexual, and the 'honest' and 'brave' homosexual who comes out are is only shown to confess and tell incredible stories, instead of asserting authority from his or her speaking about own experience.

As being visible is not necessarily productive, other methods of developing a more positive environment for the acceptance of homosexuality need to be considered. To create an environment without presumptions about homosexuality, it is

paradoxically useful as well as viable to protect one's privacy by, for example, using pseudonyms both online and offline, acting straight, and/or wearing masks in LGBT parades. By means of these various, sometimes metaphorical and sometimes real masks, homosexuals can keep their own privacy intact. While on the one hand it may seem that the homosexuals are conforming to the society's relegation of homosexuality to the realm of the private and shameful, there are indeed ways to 'return from the oppressed', on the other hand. The homosexual subject can manoeuvre insights gained from a homosexual existence at the opportune time to challenge heterosexist views and stereotypes, that is, without losing his or her own legitimacy by designated by the heteronormative mainstream as a disgraceful homosexual. That is to say, the homosexual subject needs to try to stop their homosexuality being misconstrued by heteronormative discourse by paradoxically assuming a 'normal' role of a heterosexual. As a result, this strategy of *not* specifying oneself as homosexual (Chang, 2001)<sup>214</sup> may offer a better chance for the homosexual subject to be positively interpreted or accepted in the face of heterosexual stereotyping and distortion of homosexuality, as well as societal hegemony, and the embedded rigidity and separation that exists in society between the heterosexual and the homosexual. By so doing, it ensures a clearer understanding of homosexuality and enhances the possibility of liberation and evolution, rather than encouraging gender and sexuality to be further bound and constricted.

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<sup>214</sup> In Chang's book *Lesbians Like This and Like That* (2000), Chang makes a point of accepting all non-heterosexuals as partners in fighting for sexual equality, whether they have come out or not. Some non-straight people may be married, or may be even those who criticises homosexual people. However, they are all struggling with the heteronormative system and dealing with serious problems of self-esteem like the coming out subjects are or once have been. There is no benefit creating more diversifications among ourselves if we want to win the long battle of sexual equality. Furthermore, if the strategy of not outing ourselves is effectively put into practice, then the heteronormative will always be reminded that there are homosexuals around them, and that they are not so distant or faceless as the mainstream might have thought.

## **Privacy in the Spiteful Tots community**

This understanding of how the Taiwanese public currently sees the issue of homosexuality sets the scene for my discussion of posts made by the Spiteful Tots. In the Spiteful Tots community, online discussions about, or in relation to, sexuality are public *and* private at the same time. These conversations attract a lot of outsider<sup>215</sup> attention and interest, and yet tend to be held in a relatively private place, one where free speech can take place, populated by people who do not appear to judge. In this way, the Spiteful Tots community constitutes an online space that *feels* public: though the participants are indeed regulars, they do not necessarily know every member of their audience. While it is true that they could always try to establish the community somewhere more exclusive, they are equally interested in others who may read the posts and wish to join in the conversation. And although the regular participants may tend to act more consciously or cautiously when they post, they may also occasionally behave in a cavalier way, believing they are in good hands with similar minded people and so neglect the idea of carefulness. In either case, most participants post what they think, and what gives rise to such thoughts usually requires a bit of explanation of what they do, where they are, what others around them express, and how they themselves take it or react to it. In communication process like this, it can be understood that there must be something real to be protected, as posts are likely to involve the use of personal stories and anecdotes. Therefore, although the Spiteful Tots online community is devoted to free discussions about the participant's lives and everything else that comes to their minds when posting, it is still concerned with maintaining the community as a place allowing both the public and the private. The participants are so aware of this that they reach a point where they feel expressing

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<sup>215</sup> By 'outsiders', I mean online participants who are not part of the Spiteful Tots community at the time of his/her posts to the community.

their struggles about this intricate balance between allowing public access to their community and experiencing a more private sensibility. Whilst participants pay attention to lurkers who may be viewing the community from a heteronormative perspective, they also try their best to advocate a relaxing and friendly atmosphere within the community. This contradiction rationalises the Spiteful Tots' concern over newcomers to the community. On the one hand, they want to see interesting new people becoming involved with the community, and on the other, they are not sure if the 'interesting new people' are always well meaning.

In the Spiteful Tots' exchanges, much attention is given to the issue of how to deal with 'passers-by', or the non-regulars. Loiterers can be identified by consulting the list of online users which is updated by the operation system of KKcity every few seconds. Regular participants in the community are constantly familiarising themselves with these new people's profile details. Details such as the last login time and IP address<sup>216</sup> for a certain ID are treated as a kind of digital footprint. Some board masters copy and paste these profile details for the purpose of discussion. They try to find out if anyone recognises these IDs, or if their IP addresses mean anything to anyone. Below are some examples:

Author: Rod<sup>217</sup>

Board: BM<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> An IP address, put simply, is the address of a networked computer, assigned by the internet service provider.

<sup>217</sup> In the postings that I have translated throughout the thesis, I use pseudonyms as a simple way to let the reader tell one person from another and provide a more realistic reading experience. Screen names, like real names, also come to represent a person after a period of continued use. I do not however intend to use these pseudonyms in a way that will reveal each person's character or individual inclinations; therefore, there is no need to read anything into what the individual participants say, even when they can be cross-referenced. The point is to show that postings are circulated amongst a group of people, and that they are negotiating and communicating with one another in the process of keeping the community as they want it to be. Of course, by doing so, I do not imply that the community is a totally peaceful group, where everyone all think alike or that they do not each possess different characteristics or opinions. On the contrary, they do encounter difficulties in communication and conflict does arise within its members' private talks. I simply think that it makes sense to cast such issues of knowing the participants individually as a less significant concern, as the Spiteful Tots community is a place where people gather to have a good time, not to argue or dispute over issues. I place emphasis upon what has come of from the community, rather than from the individual participant. In addition, it is also more

Title: Evidence

Time: Thu Nov 16 09:36:40 2002<sup>219</sup>

-----[←Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]<sup>220</sup>

> ※ Quoting 《John》 :

> I've discovered that some IDs present in the Spiteful Tots

> [community] are newly registered ones; some have only been used online

> for a couple of times, others less than twenty times. I feel weird about

> this. Seems more and more people are reading [our boards].

>

> ID      Nickname      Location      Current Activity      Idle time

> txxxxy   A-□      Spiteful Tots      Reading articles      0:10

>

> txxxxy(A-□) has been here 1 time(s), posted 0 messages, has not passed

> ID check<sup>221</sup>.

> Last time visit(2002/11/17 16:39:55 Friday) From(4.48.174.25)

> [current activity] reading articles [has been inquired] 0 time(s)

>

I find it weird. I've even noticed those which have only been on KKcity for the first or second time. It remains unknown if they register on purpose (avoid being recognised as who they are). But you know, if there is a problem, we can always set those IDs as bad people to the community.<sup>222</sup>

It's just a temporary solution, though. Just don't be afraid.

In this posting, John shares with other Board Masters some observations of his own about new comers to the community. On the profile details John has copied, it shows that there is a new visitor who has only connected to KKcity once, and that s/he is on

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productive for the sake of research to first understand what the community has been based on for the past years and how it has operated.

<sup>218</sup> 'BM' is the acronym for Board Master.

<sup>219</sup> The 'time' here is not completely real in terms of day and time (hour, minute and second); they have all been adjusted. But the year (2000) remains faithful to the original postings.

<sup>220</sup> What I am presenting here is a copy pasted from the original post, with, of course, the names of the poster and some names off the board modified for concerns of confidentiality. The basic format of the quoted postings should be easy for one to relate to the BBS postings in Taiwan.

<sup>221</sup> An ID check is a formality. It comes after ID registration to any BBS site, and it simply means that the system operators check whether the information that one gives to register looks real or not. If one deliberately gives a name such as 'Gay Focker', then it will be rejected. But if it is 'Julia Stone', then they will trust the information even though they cannot be sure whether it is the person's real name.

<sup>222</sup> A function enabled by KKcity, whereby the community can set certain screen names as 'bad'. Following this those screen names can no longer participate in the community.



the Spiteful Tots community reading posts. Although John does not spell it out directly, it is suggested as strange that someone would come to the Spiteful Tots community on their first visit to KKcity, since the Spiteful Tots, among the many other popular communities, is not obvious or eye-catching. Rod finds it 'weird' and implies that he does not think it is a coincidence; the new visitors to KKcity may not be 'new', but have known about the Spiteful Tots previously. The underlying worry is that these seemingly new people may be those who personally know the regular Spiteful Tots and want to cover up this fact by pretending to be new. However, Rod, on revealing this possibility, is keen to reassure others (and perhaps himself too) that the community can always set particular IDs as 'bad', thus rendering the community invisible to them. What Rod does not say and yet is very possible, is that people holding a 'bad' ID can always create and use another one to access the community. This is the reason why Rod admits that his solution is just a temporary one.

However, soon after Rod's reply, there comes an unexpected development about this concern:

Author: Harry

Board: BM

Title: Curious. . .

Time: Thu Nov 16 09:55:27 2002

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※ Quoting «Moni» :

>> ※ Quoting «Kate» :

>> I am under the impression that two new IDs came from the same IP

>> address. This is what I find most weird. But what on earth do they

>> register a new ID for?

> As spies? To prevent people like me from criticising others.

Maybe it's my sister. . .

Moni and Kate also joined in the discussion of the new ID names. Moni noticed that there were two new IDs coming from the same IP address, which suggested that the

two screen names are probably used by the same person. But why did this person feel the need to have two different accounts for the Spiteful Tots community? Or, I would ask, maybe since KKcity contains thousands of other communities, are the two IDs specifically there for the Spiteful Tots community? Kate replies to Moni's inquiry and speculates that new screen names are likely to be employed by people who probably know about the Spiteful Tots and may serve as online devices for spying on other people's online speech. But a short reply from Harry indicates a previously unthought-of train of direction. He suspects that the never-seen-before screen name might turn out to be his sister: Because Harry has told his sister about the Spiteful Tots community, and his sister obviously wants to read about Harry's everyday life written in posts on the board, there comes this strange new ID name with an identical IP address to Harry's other less well-known ID. If the new ID name indeed belongs to Harry's sister, then will this offer relief to the anxiety experienced by the Spiteful Tots over being spied upon?

Author: Rick

Board: BM

Title: Re: Curious. . .

Time: Thu Nov 16 10:45:24 2002

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※ Quoting «Harry» :

> Maybe it's my sister. . .

What?! Your sister is here? What about your brother-in-law? Or your aunt's daughter's cousin? Maybe I should switch my board to private. . .

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Author: Nell

Board: BM

Title: Re: Curious. . .

Time: Thu Nov 16 10:47:20 2002

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※ Quoting «Harry» :

> Maybe it's my sister. . .

(shocked) You let your sister in?! Invited your whole family here? Next

time maybe someone would get his mother here.

The two replies to Harry's post show a sense of hostility. Rick deliberately asks if Harry would invite his 'aunt's daughter's cousin' to the community, thereby expressing the idea that the community is not something to share with ones family. Nell, too, finds it shocking that Harry should tell his sister about this place and comments that maybe somebody else will soon invite their mother to join the community. In these two posts, it is apparent that this online community is not deemed suitable for family members, most likely because, though not explained at all here, families are a heterosexual and heteronormative socio-cultural institution. Family members' reading will certainly constitute the community being viewed through a heterosexual lens and judged according to a heteronormative perspective. And it also follows that the Spiteful Tots community will be influenced, and intruded, upon because of this. The only way to refuse this kind of influence or intrusion may be, as Rick suggests, to switch one's personal board to private, although this is not an option on public boards which are open for discussion to everyone connected to the Spiteful Tots community, even by default.

So how does Harry react to this unanimous disapproval of his invitation to his sister? Harry responds:

Author: Harry

Board: BM

Title: Re: Curious. . .

Time: Thu Nov 16 12:55:27 2002

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Is there a problem? She was the second one who learned [about my gayness]. My cousin reads no Chinese, and my aunt doesn't use computers.

Let alone my mother. . . (sigh)

In light of the fact that somebody<sup>223</sup> would become an exhibitionist in

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<sup>223</sup> My understanding of this 'somebody' is that it means the poster, Harry himself.

rough times, you can probably ask this new ID next time you see one to find out who told him or her about this site.

Rather than assume a defensive stance towards people's deprecation, Harry explains that his sister knows and understands his sexuality and implies that she wants to learn more about his gayness by visiting this community. Harry further explains that his cousin does not read Chinese and neither his aunt or mother use the computer, which reassures the Spiteful Tots members that his sister is probably going to be the only relative that he does extend an invitation. From this explanation, it can also be inferred that Harry's family is probably dispersed at various points abroad, which is why his sister needs to seek help from the internet in order to catch up with Harry's life, and why Harry's cousin reads no Chinese characters.

The second passage of Harry's reply is complex because Harry skips some necessary parts of the sentence, thus making the passage difficult to understand. I think that Harry hopes to say that, especially when things are not looking good, he (reads 'somebody') will want to talk and share his misfortunes with others, and that he would like to have people there for him in the community, people who can read what has been going on through the posts exhibited on his board. In light of this situation, Harry suggests that Rick, Nell and others in the community could just strike up an online conversation with new comers; instead of guessing why they are there and feeling anxious, they can just find out very quickly who actually told them about the Spiteful Tots community.

However, as can be seen by Rick's response (below), Harry's suggestion of 'asking directly and find out' was not well received:

Author: Rick

Board: BM

Title: Re: Curious. . .

Time: Thu Nov 16 10:45:24 2002

※ Quoting 《Harry》 :

(deleted)

Who is this ‘somebody’? And why do people like introducing others here?

This is not a zoo.

First, Rick does not (want to) understand the last bit of Rick’s reply, especially in terms of this ‘somebody’. Harry’s choice of words can read as a euphemism showing that he wants to somewhat soften the idea of his invitation stemming from exhibitionist tendencies. Also, in Mandarin, to refer to one’s self in terms of ‘somebody’ is understood as a feminine way of self-addressing. So Harry adds in a touch of femininity by using this indirect way to express his tendency. Rick however, obviously does not appreciate this downplaying, or Harry’s playing cute. In this post, Rick does not think that anyone, other than Harry, would ever actually want to invite other people or indeed family members to the community, as this place ‘is not a zoo’. Rick’s comparison of the online community to a zoo discloses an interesting relationship between seeing/watching and the seen/watched. It seems to hint that, for homosexuals, any kind of heterosexual/heteronormative gaze implies consumption and spectaclisation. This is especially so given Harry’s choice of the word ‘exhibitionist’ in the previous post. Rick’s mention of a zoo further challenges the idea of ‘being seen willingly’.

### ***Spiteful Tots’ concerns over public/private***

Before developing a discussion on the idea of whether a homosexual can be seen/watched without being negatively judged, I need to be clearer about what kind of technical mechanisms affect the Spiteful Tots community. One way in which BBS differ from WWW pages is that there is no way of adding ‘applications’, for example, a counter, a guestbook, or a banner that embeds a link. BBS does not show how many people have read a certain post, or how many ‘hits’ have targeted a discussion board.

Although there are billboards showing the most popular discussion thread or the most popular screen name (based on the number of enquiries made by others), it is still far from WWW applications which give a definite figure of hits and visits for each article entry, photo and commentary. BBS has always been without these functions, although this lack does not seem to bother those who continue to connect with BBS-based communities or discussion boards. This is one of the reasons that, when the above discussion took place (when the community was in its infancy of the first year of establishment), I found myself quite unsure of what was really going on. If these experienced BBS users have always accepted the fact that BBS does not provide a comprehensive surveillance system like the WWW, then why is it suddenly a big problem for them, one that requires them to initiate serious private debate among themselves?

I did understand that it was a discussion thread particularly about readers using unknown screen names behind which might lie a host of disruptive online users. But I did not understand why users with unknown screen names reading posts in the Spiteful Tots community should automatically cause concern, let alone trigger the intense sense of threat detectable in the above posts. However, by identifying a sense of threat from those who might be termed ‘random visitors’ (or perhaps ‘curious readers’), I realised that the sources of anxiety were because these visitors were *not* random, and did not just ‘happen’ to have stopped by this community. Studying the messages, I came to understand the possible reasons for this profound concern over unfamiliar screen names: 1) they are afraid their posts will be read by people who actually know them in person but who are disguised under unknown IDs in order to facilitate this ‘secret’ reading; 2) they do not welcome straight people who, though possibly a family member of some of the known participants, may read their posts and therefore pass judgment on them 3) they do not want people ‘lurking’ who are very

unlike them: of a different sexuality, generation or personal belief system, and 4) they do not see this part of themselves as sharable with family members or other straight people. With these possible ways of understanding and the way their disagreement was expressed ('this is not a zoo'), I recognised a deep sense of discomfort resulting from a larger, unaccepting social environment, encompassing the existence of the Spiteful Tots community. Later, it dawned on me that, as a sexual minority, the Spiteful Tots participants are inevitably watched or, in other intricate ways, put under heteronormative surveillance, at all other times, that is, when living their 'everyday' lives, away from the message boards.

This is also why I have set out the chapter to examine both the inner and outer of the online community. So far, this discussion on the Spiteful Tots' anxiety due to unknown visitors to the community has hinted at the blurred boundaries of the online and offline. The edges of the community are blurred and causing a fear for the participants. While the online community was set up to create a safe space, it will not, and cannot exist without the increasingly frayed edges. The outer of the community is sometimes as much a player as these insiders of the Spiteful Tots. Now, looking back, I admit to having been surprised at this discovery, being previously oblivious of their fear of their community being pried into. This oblivion certainly impacted my lack of understanding regarding the overwhelming panic about new IDs when I first read online posts about the topic. However, I do find the issue of identifying agency between seeing and being seen hinges upon a problem actually created by various embodiments of self-righteous interest, that is, in sensationalising and spectaclising the sexual 'Other'. The idea that a reader with a heteronormative mindset may find postings about gay sexuality 'interesting' and 'funny' manifests that frequent visits to the community are really not unlike frequent visits to the zoo. In this case, non-normative sexuality is either treated as a disgraceful, needs-to-be-hidden

stigmatisation, or as a free trip to an exotic land facilitated by an entertaining reading experience. None of them, clearly, do justice to the experience of a sexual minority, and none of them, either, are interested in attaining real and in-depth understandings. This may be why, during the same time period of time when the above-mentioned postings were made, the community was repeatedly positioned as a ‘private club’ in their announcements in the administrative boards. Such a realisation struck me as revealing where my own position of privilege comes from: that is, I was not personally acquainted with either of these worries; nor was I carrying the heavy baggage of anxiety endured by sexual dissidents. And I was so, I think, because I had been regarded as heterosexual by default, and I had not thought of myself otherwise either.

This clear reflection of my own status inside contemporary Taiwan society invokes and connects back to the brief discussion in the earlier sections of this chapter, on the idea of not coming out as either heterosexual or homosexual. Without coming out, non-normative sexuality will not be pinpointed and recognised, and thus this heterosexual façade will keep a person’s sense of agency intact when he or she is being watched or even when he or she is made known as (potentially) gay. On the contrary, when non-normative sexuality is recognised in association with a particular person, that person then loses his or her agency because he or she will never again be looked at and thought of as otherwise but simply ‘a homosexual’. This is also observed by Lin Hsien-shou (1995):

If you have become<sup>224</sup> a homosexual, you can then only be a homosexual. Even if you had won the Nobel Prize, people would still think of you as a homosexual. The kinder people might add a comment: Wow. Remarkable. A homosexual who makes an effort! (1995: 41-42)

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<sup>224</sup> In the original sentence, Lin uses the phrase 要是成了, and therefore in translation I use the words ‘if’ and ‘have become’.



In other words, 'homosexual' has become the clothes that a person cannot take off once put on. No matter how ridiculous this may seem to be (as a piece of cloth does not represent the person, it does sadly reflect some understanding of homosexuality in contemporary Taiwan.<sup>225</sup> Any positive representation of the homosexual does not change the fact that a person is homosexual and that is automatically deemed negative. Therefore, the way out is not coming out, but guarding one's privacy. This is what I think is the main reason for the Spiteful Tots' insistence upon having privacy policies in place for their community. Dispensing with formal declarations, which will only open them to stigmatisation, the Spiteful Tots community instead offers the possibility of speaking and acting as if without the constraints or expectations as a supporter of heteronormativity. They do so by dint of maintaining their emphasis on free discussion in relation to non-normative sexuality.

### **What is online privacy?**

If the Spiteful Tots community is a space that champions privacy, then why did the participants take me in without copy-pasting my profile details and discussing my identity? With so much insistence on privacy and visibility in the community, my role as a researcher appeared to be quite ambivalent. Admittedly, I have been a regular participant for almost a decade now, although, whether as a participant or a researcher, my posts have not been frequent. Partly, this has been for personal reasons: I am not

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<sup>225</sup> On the evening August 24 2009, I was briefly watching a talk show called *Xinwen wawawa* (新聞挖挖哇) before going to bed. The show invited a psychiatrist (潘建志), TV producer (沈玉琳), writer columnist (江映瑤), and a cultural observer (朱學恆) to discuss Zai Kang yong (蔡康永), a famous TV host who is the only one who has been outed as gay. Zai did not plan to come out, but was instead put in a situation where he was questioned as to his sexuality. However Zai admitted to his gayness, and hoped that many others would follow in his footsteps and come out too. But as all the invited speakers on this show agreed, instead of opening up the possibility of outing oneself as gay, Zai's coming out has drawn everyone else (who also self-identifies as gay) even further backwards, rendering him both obvious and alone. People still do not think that it is viable to come out. Although Zai's career does not seem to have been negatively influenced, his gayness remains the only thing that crops up when people think of him. Zai thus stays as the only person in the last eight years who has come out as openly gay in the entertainment industry of contemporary Taiwan.

in the habit of posting when connected to a community, and I have always felt more like a reader wherever I go.<sup>226</sup> But partly, posting in the Spiteful Tots community can be a hassle. The participants are quite particular about posters' choice of words and manipulation of textuality, including the way a certain concept or idea is communicated. For example, they are used to precise expressions integrated with emoticons and other (sometimes self-created) symbols in their typed dialogues or monologues. Instead of just saying 'I feel sad', they would be likely to chose: \*withdraw oneself from the crowd and silently shed tears\*. Rather than simply saying 'Merry Christmas', it might be more appreciated if the sentence was represented by an ASCII graphic, such as:

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      ★
      ^^
      /*\
      ● ●
      / ∞∞ \
      /▲$$▲\
      ○ ○ ○ ○
      /● ⊕ ⊖ ∞ ⊖ ● \
      _ || || _
      \_____/
  
```

In other words, the Spiteful Tots participants appreciate posts that are more than simple and straightforward sentences. They instead tend to utilise special creative methods for communicating and make good use of BBS online-specific textual expressions. Sometimes, this makes their postings extremely enjoyable to read, especially for those who like a similar degree of complexity. The abundance of meaning also becomes an elitist way of sharing, as it functions as a private message

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<sup>226</sup> Possible reasons for are manifold: it could be due to differences in gender, sexuality, ethnicity, urbanity, personality or/and class.

on a public board, where, while everyone sees it, only those who stop and think while reading will actually 'get it'. In this sense, I think that for some members, it is a significant constituent of online privacy for their community, as well as an enjoyable badge of exclusivity.

The history and evolution of the community also constitutes part of these private feelings for long-term participants; that is, the longer one has associated with regular participants, the closer s/he is to the community's private circle. Take me for example. Despite my infrequent presence in postings, as previously mentioned, I nevertheless serve as Board Master (BM) for the discussion board 'Chicken rib'.<sup>227</sup> In the hope of facilitating discussions here, during the first three years (2001-3) of my acting as a BM, I made an effort at posting much more often so as to solicit responses from others. I tried to keep up with the speed of production of new posts during those years, managed to create labels, and archived every post on the board before the number of posts reaching the quota of the board (1500 posts) and resulting in losing past posts without archiving them. The efforts I made as a BM for Chicken rib board provided me an insider identity into the community. Though I have not been involved so much in BM affairs post 2003, I remain access to the BM board, as well as a known participant in the community.

My role as a BM has given me access to the BM, board, where I am allowed to read private discussions about new visitors, and post my request for researching the community. But how was I able to become a BM? This relates to another aspect of why I am seemingly accepted into the community: having participated in the community from its inception. In the first month of the Spiteful Tots community's

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<sup>227</sup> Chicken rib is a term used in Mandarin. It is a customary way of saying something/someone is unwanted or uninteresting, and yet cannot be cast away or completely erased because it seems wasteful, improper or pitiful not to keep this thing or person. I started to act as a Board Master from 2000 onwards because I was the initiator/applicant of this board.

establishment, all participants who could access the community at the time were encouraged to propose ideas for initiating a board on any topic they like; the only condition was that the proposer had to act as the BM, or if s/he could not, they must recommend anyone else to manage it. Although the participants did not know me so well back then, they were still willing to let me manage this board since I was the person proposing it.

So how did I end up in the community when it was barely there? This process has been detailed in the Methodology, and it is because of my connection to the former BBS site ‘SideWorld’. As most of the people who were based on SideWorld had been my ‘internet friends’,<sup>228</sup> it was relatively likely for me to ‘pass’ as a friend’s friend: the assumption was that I must have known and befriended some regular participants in the Spiteful Tots community so as to be involved.<sup>229</sup> Participating in the Spiteful Tots community for me therefore became a journey of mutually knowing and learning (sharing about myself and learning about the rest of the community); we started by way of misconceptions about each other—I thought they were extra friendly for taking me on as a Board Master, and they thought I was a friend of someone there. This however eventually evolved into a type of acquaintance. Having experienced a number of online interactions, I eventually attended their offline gatherings. While some of the people were also like me, becoming involved with the community long before its participants started to be aware of and worried about newcomers, there were also those who recognised other participants from a university-based context.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> I use the phrase ‘internet friends’ because on BBS it is termed ‘好友名單’ (list of good friends) when one online user decides and adds in ID names to this list via which the private discussion board becomes visible for the added IDs.

<sup>229</sup> I realised this when I chatted with several of the Spiteful Tots participants in 2001. It seemed to me that they all thought I was a friend of someone there, though in fact I had neither met nor knew anyone when I joined.

<sup>230</sup> This is also mentioned in the Introduction.

In hindsight, prior to the coming together of Spiteful Tots (i.e., in the Sideworld era from 1998-2000), I witnessed a much looser and non-community style network occurring among small groups of friends who later became the specific one that associated with each other in the Spiteful Tots community. After moving to the Spiteful Tots community in 2000, these online participants started up a much more intense friendship, while, at the time, they did not actually speak much with each other in person (perhaps due to different classes or distant geographical location within Taipei or Taiwan). Therefore, the BBS site of KKcity that enabled the Spiteful Tots community brought them together, facilitating talks with each other and the possibility of making new friends. Later, when most of the people from this small, founding group were in the transitional phase— graduating and entering the job market (roughly from 2001 to 2002)— they started to notice unknown visitors to the community. Instead of treating this as a potential chance to meet new friends, the community becomes aware of the potential threats to disruption from the new and unknown. Seeing all these changes, I think I am lucky to have been able to join the community without much difficulty. Perhaps the members felt a need to more formally get to know me and others like me, people similar to strangers but who did not solely reside in that category, and hence the offline parties played a role. No matter how the story is related, the outcome is that we ended up posting and corresponding with each other, not necessarily because we were far apart around the world (many of the Spiteful Tots participants live in the same city, Taipei), but because visiting the internet, and this community particularly, has become part of our own lives, whilst we, the relative regulars on the list of discussion threads, have also become part of each other's lives.

### ***Research menace?***

However, in 2003 there came a period of trial in my relationship with the Spiteful Tots.

I posted on the BM board that I hoped to research the community. When I did this, I made a point of mentioning my investigation of the community rather than of the people/participants, as I knew many individuals would stay away from any proposed research project. Therefore, I felt that my study must be about the community as a whole, which for me meant (and means) both typed textuality and participants, instead of being solely about the participants. I understood that any association with politics and/or activism of any kind would run the risk of disrupting the community's preference for seeing itself as a private club. Despite all these preparations and considerations, when I posted the message, no one replied or commented on my post. This was frustrating, but I was also curious as to the lack of response. It turned out, as I discovered later, that their insistence on privacy was perhaps far stronger than I had imagined.

I conversed with some of the participants privately on a one-to-one basis. Such exchanges were part of the background of my research, and also part of my personal confusion regarding the lack of response. However, as they were 'off the record', I shall not quote them verbatim but offer an overview of the ideas as they are helpful for understanding their ideas of privacy. The most shocking response was that none of the participants felt that they could represent the whole community and reply to me with a yes or no. In other words, since my research was about the community rather than about each participant, no one assumed they could give me any permission (or rejection) to research the community. This came as a surprise to me as I did not think of this way of viewing it. Yet the people I spoke with asked me to carry on with my research as they did not see any objection to my request anyway.<sup>231</sup> In retrospect, I

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<sup>231</sup> In fact, I must add that my post was later marked as part of the 'essence of the board discussions' which means that it was deemed as important enough to keep on the board. I was not sure who did the marking, but I saw it as a sign of approval and confirmation of what I wanted to do for the community. Later, I also had people ask me about my work or say nice things about it, which also came as a great relief and filled me with a sense of encouragement.

think this shows the lack of hierarchy operating in the Spiteful Tots community, and the extent of everyone's awareness of privacy (so that no one can speak for others or for the community) with therefore no one single person or group of participants entitled to give permission.<sup>232</sup>

However, despite tacit permission from some to continue, the silence still puzzled me. My attempt at avoiding causing discomfort or their withdrawal from the community might have actually made the participants unsure of how to respond to my request for research, but this does not mean that they were totally unable to explain their reluctance or position by replying to my post. So why hadn't anyone replied and helped me understand? In my private talks with the more friendly participants they replied that, for one thing, they did not want people they knew in the offline world to sneak into the community and read what they had posted. Even though they might trust me and allow my research to continue, they were unsure if such work would eventually attract people from their offline lives to the community. They suspected that their lives might then be pried into. They also understood that the public could be violent and unsympathetic towards homosexuality, picturing them moving in some kind of abnormal underworld. Just a single online user who did not want to understand homosexuality could be more than disruptive to the community.

Another reason for experiencing problems gaining approval for my research was related to two incidents that took place on March 18<sup>th</sup> 1992 and August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1998. To make clear the connection, I need to first give a brief background explanation. A journalist who worked for Taiwan Television (TTV) Enterprise in 1992 sneaked into a lesbian T bar in Taipei and shot a video without people noticing or giving consent. Later that day, the footage was broadcast on national TV, causing moral panic as well

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<sup>232</sup> The response also hints that the community has evolved into something that is more than the people and the text, but an entirety that is, whilst devoid of any intrinsic substantiality, a unit of relationships and interdependence.

as renewing public interest in homosexuality. The T bar was soon shut down because many people tried to find the location of it, and wanted to either go and see it for themselves, or break the windows and demand that the participants left the neighbourhood. Although many famous music artists and cultural producers who supported lesbians and gay men issued a public letter of strong condemnation at the unauthorized filming, this incident still did not mark itself as a serious violation of the lesbians' privacy and human rights, but simply a story that sold well.<sup>233</sup> In fact, the TTV channel made higher profits than the settlement fees that they had to pay the Government Information Office.<sup>234</sup> Throughout the process, at no point did a lesbian or gay spokesperson emerge to address this issue, which was then understood by the public as a sign of weakness of these sexual minorities. Perhaps the media therefore saw through the impossibility of a lesbian fighting back as being openly gay, so they renewed society's interest in sexual minorities again in 1998. On August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1998, a similar episode occurred, this time featuring the Chinese Television System (CTS) filming in a lesbian lounge, although, in this case no charges or resolutions were made.<sup>235</sup> Despite lesbians who were based on an online website called '*Women Zijien*' trying to condemn the behaviour of CTS by making use of newspaper pages featuring readers' feedback, the discussion however did not result in much that was substantial.

These incidents demonstrate the vulnerability of gay, lesbian and other sexual dissidents to the danger of being stigmatised without any protection of their privacy rights. The curiosity and aggression of the media and society shown in the two past incidents was depressing. For a LGBT person who witnessed these two incidents, it is

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<sup>233</sup> Six years later, in 1998, a similar incident took place again. Chinese Television reported from a T Bar in a programme called *CTS News Magazine* with footage that was filmed without authorisation.

<sup>234</sup> The details are based on an online and offline publication from 2005, *Renshi tongzhi shoze*, a guidebook for understanding and identifying *tongzhi*. The online version of this book is available at: <http://hotline-ttha.myweb.hinet.net/2005handbook/main.htm>.

<sup>235</sup> The *Tongzhi* Hotline website has recorded these two events in traditional Chinese at: <http://www.hotline.org.tw/gisplay/2001hp/2001/i-history.htm> (last accessed on Feb/16/2004.)



likely s/he might still remember the raw feelings of vulnerability that resulted: of being chased, watched and judged. This is based on the idea that, from either of the above cases, anyone who is involved in non-normative sexuality and/or relationships learns that they cannot publicly condemn this kind of violation, as society does not validate their condemnation, but will only take their condemnation as proof of their gayness. Therefore, such condemnation would be likely to attract problematic media exposure. In this situation, LGBT subjects are indeed sexually minoritised and marginalised by the media and society in a twofold manner: firstly, they cannot live an openly non-heterosexual lives, and secondly, when they indeed do find small pockets of privacy they are not allowed to fight back when those spaces are endangered. Back in the 1990s, it seemed to me that public exposure of people who were connected to non-normative sexuality risked serious public disgrace, so much so that even though TTV and CTS acted disgracefully, society turned a blind eye and focused instead upon the stigmatised lesbian women.

Although I recognise that these two past incidents have little to do with my research on the Spiteful Tots community, for some of the participants, their understanding of the silence is precisely based on the horrible memories from these incidents. The participants I chatted with used the stories to inform me why many of them opt for a life of discretion, which means that, even online, they want to stay fully aware of potential danger, or the risk of being unwillingly exposed. In their eyes, research might well induce such exposure. While my first step of posting an intention to research differs greatly from what happened in these two incidents, they still associated my research request with negative memories of the reported incidents. Perhaps, according to the people I talked to, this was why that they chose to remain silent. Silence allowed them *not* to give out permission for my research (at least not in a black-and-white, straightforward way), and so maintaining the feeling of being in

control. That is, for example, being in control of the kind of information that they themselves were willing to reveal to me. Silence enabled them the ability to wait and see what would come out of my research and helped retain their right to withdrawal from the research should they find it unsatisfactory or even threatening at any point. In other words, my reading of this silence is that, though they could not prevent the community from heterosexual dominance and surveillance, it was still viable for them to protect their vulnerability by remaining silent, thus enabling feelings of safety.

After my initial private discussion with some of the participants, I was able to, to a much more significant degree, understand that being able to discuss topics safely and privately is a privilege for Spiteful Tots participants. Even though I am not a journalist and have nothing to do with the media, my coming out as a researcher still made them alert. While pondering this, I received a private comment that came about through chatting with another participant. I was informed that, for the Spiteful Tots participants, being researched was a form of being looked at, and thus reminded them of the previous episodes where women in lesbian T bars were watched and reported on as if they were spectacles from some dissident underworld. This tension between maintaining privacy and being researched, or between keeping the community part of the everyday and somehow being worthy of close study (because what is deemed everyday is usually regarded as unspecial and therefore lacking in research value), has therefore become an important issue to negotiate in my research of the Spiteful Tots community.

What calls for meticulous attention, in this situation (that is, where my research has been associated with a malicious form of observation or ‘watching’), is their assumption that the ‘majority’ of people doing this watching in Taiwanese society are straight people who uphold normative values. While there is little direct evidence to support such an assumption, the community is also not making a case for fair and just

investigation, either. What concerns the community to a much greater extent is their wish to create and maintain a space that would be beneficial to their mutual bonding, via the online interactions of posting and replying. The way that the public and private boards are related to each other, for example, shows this intent of deliberately drawing a boundary within the online group, so that there is both sufficient space for interactions with long-standing and new people, and, at the same time, completely private space, where the participants can keep a reflective, electronic journal about events, as well as hold clandestine discussions about pertinent issues, such as strange ID-name holders. Never for once throughout the past 9 years did I see any unwelcoming messages to new comers of the community.<sup>236</sup> Nor did I ever come across direct suspicion of new comers as ‘spies’ or dishonest people. It seems to me that in the Spiteful Tots community there remains a need to maintain a friendly atmosphere and try to still be as welcoming as possible to ‘lurkers’. In between such online segmentation and arrangements of the private and public boards, the concern of moderators (the Spiteful Tots participants with administrative powers) to keep a substantial presence in public areas is quite obvious. Whether a conscious desire or not, the keeping of public spaces indicates certain power concerns by the moderators. Perhaps this can be theorised is a desire to stop private relationships and agendas from forming too much or too deeply, due to an overriding concern with basing the community on issues of commonality, since the Spiteful Tots community did originate with a group of friends. Therefore, despite existing participants being fearful of identification when contacted by people with new screen names, the community still holds onto what they have in common, which I see as is a wonderful sense of humour, textual creativity, and general good intentions towards one another. However, all of this needs public space, and without this, the Spiteful Tots community will fragment.

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<sup>236</sup> There were, however, candid and unkind replies from one regular participant to another.

### *Online mechanism of inquiry and modes*

One significant aspect of BBS is that any online user can inquire about another user's screen name. By using the 'inquiry' function they can identify how many times a specific user has been online in this KKcity system (including the last date and time), how many articles they have posted, and what their IP address was the last time they were connected, indicating whereabouts they are based. Online surveillance is thus enabled by the BBS program itself, and everyone is constantly under everyone else's scrutiny via this easy-to-operate function.

This KKcity system is also a digitalised way of knowing and being known to someone. Though the information does not offer the kind of data that people usually access offline, it still serves as the first step of familiarising oneself with the world of IDs which are made up of a unique combination of letters, which digitally represent someone. By regularly inquiring about a certain screen name, the user may come to feel more familiar with the person behind that name, relating the person to a seemingly unofficial, unreal screen name, which can then be understood as both meaningful and recognisable. This is the kind of information that should be treated as socially meaningful in the realm of KKcity and its multiple online communities.<sup>237</sup>

I single out the inquiry function here because its frequent use can be seen as equivalent to the offline fear of 'outsiders'. By making use of 'inquiry' and 'copy and paste', the postings I have quoted both disclose and record the effort of trying to keep track of certain screen names. What may be summarised as 'track and trace' in this situation serves as a piece of solid evidence: everything about the inquired user is

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<sup>237</sup> Since any one participant can easily be active in several different online communities under KKcity, I could certainly have done my research differently and focused instead on participants' digital traces and shifting of scenes. But I decided not to follow people but instead centre on 'place', focusing solely upon this particular community itself. This was because I think it grants and allows a more in-depth analysis of the issue of privacy, framed not in credit-card purchase scenarios, but in terms of human rights.

quantified and proved by the precise nature of the computerised system.<sup>238</sup> Every detail of the inquiry is reliable, convenient, easily available and open to the public. Such online information potentially renders (and encourages) everyone to be a detective.<sup>239</sup>

For a short period of time, Board Masters looking at which IDs were in the community when they themselves were first connected, thus soon became a frequent activity for many of the insiders. Many of them would also report the suspicious IDs that they noticed from the online ID list. Below are a series of discussions on ‘The Last Dinner’, a thread about 13 unknown/relatively new-looking ID names which were active in the community during the year of 2002. These were seen to be either reading posts or doing other miscellaneous things when Rick was online at 3 AM:

Author: Rick Board: BM  
Title: ‘The Last Dinner’<sup>240</sup>  
Time: Thu Nov 19 03:05:05 2002  
-----[←Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]  
H<sup>241</sup> Rick (DARK-CHAOS) Spiteful Tots Users List  
H Askdjwe (Rainbow) Spiteful Tots Reading articles  
9:40<sup>242</sup>  
H egi (Tears and whisper) Spiteful Tots Reading articles 7:10  
H pskp (happiness in hands) Spiteful Tots Reading articles

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<sup>238</sup> This can also be understood, I argue, in relation to the larger argument of whether information such as that revealed in the profile inquiry should be publicised on websites (Gellman, 1995; Nissenbaum, 2004). The debate of whether public records should go online hinges on the key idea that ‘the net effect of computerization is that it is becoming much easier for record-keeping systems to affect people than for people to affect record-keeping systems’ (Rights of Citizens, 1973). In this situation, the transition from paper-based to online access is not a simple and neutral behaviour of changing the medium, but constitutes an issue of realising technology is making deeper and wider impacts on our lives.

<sup>239</sup> For example, they learn to recognise that IP addresses that start with 140 come from university servers, 68 or 213 from the Internet Service Provider of company A, 128 from company B etc. It facilitates quick tracking and locating, or conversely, being tracked and located. It tells stories about each online participant, though the stories are subject to frequent change (IP addresses may be superimposed every time the screen name is logged on from a different computer location).

<sup>240</sup> I translate it into ‘dinner’ instead of ‘supper’ here in order to differentiate it from the painting *The Last Supper*, facilitating the following discussion and analysis.

<sup>241</sup> The ‘H’ in front of the ID indicates that this ID is used in the homosexual mode.

<sup>242</sup> The numbers here suggest how long this online user has idled in KKcity. For example, ‘9.40’ shows that s/he idled for nine minutes and forty seconds.

H ccbearo (%Ohio)	Spiteful Tots	Reading emails	
Satanangel (Serial Lightning)	Spiteful Tots	Reading articles	
H bhp (Don't come here)	Spiteful Tots	Reading articles	
H annie (any)	Spiteful Tots	Board Lists	3:10
f <sup>243</sup> H Mo (Thom)	Spiteful Tots	Reading articles	
fA <sup>244</sup> cheheart (amber)	Spiteful Tots	Reading articles	9:40
sool (players of the blue)	Spiteful Tots	Reading articles	
todu (The so-called loved wife).	Spiteful Tots	Inquiring [rxxxxx]	
takeall (Meaty naked bin)	Spiteful Tots	Reading articles	

What's weird are those who don't have the sign of 'H' or 'A'. Are they really IDs from people we know of?

Here Rick borrows the name of the famous painting *The Last Supper*, by Leonardo Di Vinci and appropriates it creatively in a very different context. Making use of the authority of SYSOP,<sup>245</sup> copied from the page that identifies those online at the moment he himself connected to the Spiteful Tots community, it appeared that thirteen screen names were online. With these thirteen people engaging in different activities and yet all listed as being connected to the Spiteful Tots community, a comparison was made to the twelve 'guests' sitting together at Di Vinci's long dining table, stealing a glance at one another, wondering who will betray the powerful figure in the middle, Jesus Christ. Suspicious that one of the twelve has 'sold the community out', the inquirer Rick tries to read the scene for clues. Although compared to the art work of *The Last Supper*, 'The Last Dinner' post is, however, not so much about 'finding the traitor', but more about confronting an inevitable threat - to be sold out, to suffer and to die, or more precisely in the Spiteful Tots' situation, to be exposed to the

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<sup>243</sup> The small 'f' indicates that the person behind this IID only talks to people they have befriended. If they have not added you to their friend list, then you cannot talk or chat with them.

<sup>244</sup> The 'A' in front of the ID name means that this ID is in its 'adult' mode and can access boards and postings which are rated as adult only.

<sup>245</sup> Only SYSOP is authorised to see *all* the online users of homosexual, adult and normal modes. Otherwise, users in the normal mode cannot see users in homosexual or adult modes, and vice versa.

judgmental gaze of the public.<sup>246</sup>

In addition, what Rick asks in the post is also worth attention. Since four of the unknown IDs on the list are neither in the ‘H’ (homosexual) nor A (adult) modes, then would they be completely innocent people who accidentally connect to the Spiteful Tots community at 3 in the morning, not knowing any friends or acquaintances with Spiteful Tots participants? Or would they turn out to be more family members of the existing Spiteful Tots participants from abroad (and therefore at 3AM)? The ‘H’ and ‘A’ are added prior to an ID name in order to indicate people’s interest and purpose. The way Rick picks this up shows that H and A modes indicate who is more aligned with the interests of the Spiteful Tots community, and who is not. What this question shows is that only IDs switched into the H mode would represent some possibility of being in use by someone already integrated into their circle. The non-marked ID names are much more likely to be, passers-by, who have nothing to do with the community other than reading to pass the time, or who are part of someone’s family. Rick’s question discloses the fact that the Spiteful Tots community is not actually listed as an ‘H’ community, and so this is why IDs in their non-marked mode (the so-called ‘normal’ mode) can have access to the Spiteful Tots community. The Spiteful Tots community actually refuses to be listed as ‘H’ because, on the one hand, the community does not want to be labelled as a *tongzhi* community, and on the other, the participants would like to be distinguished from H-moded communities which already exist as many on KKcity and which can be read and joined exclusively by IDs in their H modes. They do not really want to be constrained within the homosexual circle of KKcity, so to speak. While it can certainly be further asked whether doing so would risk a higher potentiality of being read with a biased heteronormative eye, it

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<sup>246</sup> I have deliberately used ‘public’ in both senses: first as in public spheres generally and second as in the public boards in the community, for these two levels of publicness certainly can and do overlap.

must also be kept in mind that KKcity is made up of more than 800 BBS sites, thousands more of discussion boards and other small-scale communities. Hidden inside the category of unmarked/normal-moded sites and communities, the Spiteful Tots community may actually have found a clever way of staying unmarked and thereby ensuring a better chance of safety and non-disturbance. The participants of the Spiteful Tots community understand perfectly that as long as what is typed and exchanged in the community does not concern or influence anyone outside it, nobody would ever make a fuss or care about their existence in the seemingly normal crowd. That is, of course, to say that the community generally stays safe and undisturbed unless somebody gets especially interested in them and publicises them from a certain angle or with a specific idea in mind that goes on to create a sensation within society.

Reading Rick's copy-and-paste, people's reactions to the thirteen IDs in the 'The Last Dinner' will subsequently become the next focus of this discussion. Gathered below is a long and list of people's replies:

Author: Mary Board: BM  
Title: Re: 'The Last Dinner'  
Time: Thu Nov 19 08:16:01 2002  
-----[<-Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]  
maybe there are birth marks of frogs on all of them.

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Author: Harry Board: BM  
Title: Re: 'The Last Dinner'  
Time: Thu Nov 19 11:59:26 2002  
-----[<-Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]  
These people's [textual] styles are very Spiteful Tots. Either they are just another ID used by some of people in the community, or they have lurked for a real long time.

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Author: Harry Board: BM  
Title: Re: 'The Last Dinner'



Time: Thu Nov 19 18:27:48 2002

-----[←Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]

It frightens me that suddenly all these people show up at once. (silence)<sup>247</sup>

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Author: Rod

Board: BM

Title: Re: 'The Last Dinner'

Time: Thu Nov 19 18:45:08 2002

-----[←Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]

I want to introduce whitesnow. She is the vice Board Master of Weber and Dockshu [a name for another board in another online community]. She is a very interesting middle-aged woman (haha luckily she cannot see this board). She is not a passer-by. As for all these strangers-- if anyone knows them, please introduce them. (appearing lacking a sense of security)<sup>248</sup>

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Author: John

Board: BM

Title: Re: 'The Last Dinner'

Time: Thu Nov 19 19:04:43 2002

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Ah, be good and not afraid. I only know Satanangel (very famous, really, legend has it that s/he is the chief editor of a theatre magazine). The others I think they might be following him/her. I know, this time I am being miraculously optimistic about it.

Reading the postings and replies, I find it clearer than ever that what is understood from Rick's question is 'categorisation': who is inside and outside the community. Other than Mary's quirky, out-of-nowhere reply that serves as a kind of joke, the remainder of the posts show both uneasiness, due to a sudden rise in random midnight visitors and attempts to try to locate the identities of new comers. Following 'The Last Dinner' came a series of endeavours to 'out others as friends': people started to recognise certain IDs from other contexts or communities, although most of the IDs

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<sup>247</sup> The word 'silence' in brackets represents a form of expression; though varied in terms of context, it usually means either an appalled sort of silence or a deprecating one.

<sup>248</sup> Here 'lacking a sense of security' can be read as a kind of appropriation of 'stage directions'. The same as stage directions featured in a play, it also shows the inner state of a person, or what s/he is really thinking about, with a view to giving the reader some ideas about the poster's interior state..

on the list still remain yet to be discovered. The amount of work and anxiety involved in finding out about the unknown IDs, seeing if they belonged to trouble-makers, does not really allow the Spiteful Tots participants to move anywhere meaningful. They are still in an uncertain situation without knowing whether the new comers of the community are 'good' or 'evil'. Also, as all this devotion to uncovering these possible miscreants remains invisible (that is, from those who cannot access the BM board) the amount of emotional labour and investment made, is therefore unrecognised. The Spiteful Tots cannot prevent people from visiting and re-visiting their community, which is a public space, and so the only way to keep reasonably secure boundaries is to make observations and talk amongst themselves. The community is not complacent about this position; indeed, they admit to being plagued by insecurities whilst also trying to stay rational.

As this point in my discussion of privacy, I must say that I do not think that those who are able to discuss other people behind their backs are necessarily the ones holding the reins of power in the community, despite the fact that they can oversee and to some degree, investigate people. If anything, it is simply their status as not being powerful *enough* in the larger society that is the reason for their insecurity. The participants do not know how to fully hide themselves and still have fun, and neither can they figure out other ways to proceed with the public status of the community, ways which do not cause concern regarding gazes that are unfamiliar and menacing. Therefore they imagine the worst case scenario: that after being alert and careful, the most dreadful situation could still happen, some journalist or experts could 'discover' them and expose them as an 'interesting *tongzhi* community', in turn attracting many 'cybertourists' (Nakamura 2002) to the community, destroying this site of theirs. A Spiteful Tot thus once joked that everyone should just 'play dead' when the 'enemy'

comes,<sup>249</sup> and, optimistically or wishfully, hope that the strange screen names around the community are actually friendly and well meaning. In this interplay, to sum up, there manifests an inevitable clash of interests in terms of Spiteful Tots communality; it is exactly because of this clash that the community has to be simultaneously public and private. The Spiteful Tots community does not sit well with the existing heteronormative organisation and dividing up of online space. It is important, therefore, that the Spiteful Tots participants are able to hold onto some private space of their own. Indeed, their need to gain some privacy in a society of compelled publicness is not unlike the pagurian relationship of the hermit crab to its borrowed shell. The Spiteful Tots community offers the participants' limited choice, and they must rely upon the imperfect, non-ideal and unstable conditions offered by contemporary computerised technological devices, which are, however, still socio-culturally organised, according to the ideas and concepts of heteronormativity.<sup>250</sup>

### **Where Visibility Comes into Play**

For lesbian and gay political projects, the visibility of queer subjects is usually considered as empirically combating heteronormative hegemony.<sup>251</sup> By claiming a

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<sup>249</sup> 'Play dead' and the 'enemy' were the actual phrases used on the exclusive BBS board to discuss this issue.

<sup>250</sup> Priscilla Regan in her *Legislating Privacy* (1995) has already pointed out that:

Privacy has value beyond its usefulness in helping the individual maintain his or her dignity or develop personal relationships. Most privacy scholars emphasize that the individual is better off if privacy exists; I argue that society is better off as well when privacy exists. I maintain that privacy serves not just individual interests but also common, public, and collective purposes. (1995: 221)

Nissenbaum (2004) further analyses that 'privacy is essential to nourishing and promoting the values of a liberal, democratic, political, and social order' (2004: 150). She further uses Goffman's idea (1959) of privacy as a 'social personae', 'which serves not only to alleviate complex role demands on individuals, but to facilitate a smoother transactional space for the many routine interactions that contribute to social welfare' (Nissenbaum 2004: 150). Although in this case of the Spiteful Tots community, it is more significant to explain their need for privacy in the context of the heteronormative ordering of the community, I also find Goffman's view of privacy as a kind of social personae that facilitates the operation of groups, organisation, and society an equally persuading and relevant argument.

<sup>251</sup> I am certainly aware of the difference between 'queer' and 'gay and lesbian' in terms of nature,

public presence, the contested nature of sexuality is intensified. Rosemary Hennessy (2000) has pointed out the importance of visibility in queer critiques of heteronormativity:

Chants like ‘We’re Here, We’re Queer, Get Used To It’ and actions like Queer Bash Back, Queer Nights Out, Queer Kiss-Ins, and Mall Zaps, which ushered in the public reclaiming of queerness in the early nineties, were aimed at making visible those identities that the ubiquitous heteronormative culture would erase. Politically the aim of queer visibility actions is not to include queers in the cultural dominant but to continually pressure and disclose the heteronormative. [. . .] Both queer activists and theorists employ some of the same counter-discourses to expand and complicate the parameters of sexuality; both set out to challenge empiricist notions of identity as a version of performance [. . .] Across the promotion of more permeable and fluid identities in both queer theory and activism, however, visibility is still fetishized to the extent that it conceals the social relations new urban gay and queer identities depend on. (2000: 114-115)

As suggested by Hennessy, the importance of visibility in queer critiques (by both academics and activists) calls for a further examination. The urban settings, in Hennessy’s opinion, formulate a special kind of cultural politics that consists of ‘concepts of the social, of resistance, and of pleasure that keep invisible the violent social relations’ (p.115). While Hennessy does not fully explain what these ‘violent

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politics and starting/standing points, and that their difference may well cause significant implications in my discussion of the national commitment to market Taiwan as a well-behaved and well-developed country. Although I have been using ‘gay and lesbian’ and ‘queer’ interchangeably, these terms are indeed contentious. While ‘homosexual, gay and lesbian’ assume a polarised understanding of heterosexuality and homosexuality, the fluidity and ambiguity of ‘queer’ may seem more of a fit in an urban industrial society where transnational travelling and contacts are more often and likely, and therefore may create a more hybridised or indefinite location of identity. But at the same time, whether ‘queer’ can seriously encompass a wide range of intersectional differences between sexuality and other issues or conflicts—such as religion, national identity, race—remains to be further critically examined and challenged. I do see that different expressions and potentials are, however, being used to name non-normative sexuality, and I value such attempts and endeavours. When these two sets of gay/lesbian and queer of terms, theories and discourses are mobilised under different words, even in most contesting ways, there is a great desire to effect social transformation and intervention. While I certainly do not wish to conflate them, there are nevertheless messiness, gaps, and overlap in such contesting standpoints, attempts, subjectivities and politics, which make any such clarity in identifying their positionings an almost impossible task in, especially in terms of formulating and theorising matters of sexual contestation.

social relations [which] new urban identities depend on' are (p.115), it does introduce the idea of a new urban formation of queer identity. Reading into this initial analysis, I think that there is an attempt by Hennessy to accentuate the idea that queer subjects' everyday, concrete life existence, informs, conditions and shapes the queer political gestures they might be engaged in; also, that this queer, urban and political gesture may not be fitting or applicable for some who are not as committed to or not as familiar with a urbane context. Obviously, there are issues in between the utilisation of political visibility and the further imbalance caused by the specific forms of which visibility takes which may further create unjust representation or simply oppress others, and which, all in all, call for in-depth clarification and examination.<sup>252</sup>

In order to do both clarification and examination here, we need to begin with a further investigation into visibility. What constitutes visibility and what is it for? What kind of visibility is assumed as valid, and are there other ways of making visible one's non-normative sexuality? In her text 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', Judith Butler (1991) argues that coming out is a process that cannot be fully achieved, for identity is always undermined by the ongoing changes that result from the unconscious and signification, and that whatever can be disclosed can never be done fully. Therefore, whatever is testified or acknowledged in public shall not constitute all the facts about one's homosexuality (or even heterosexuality, for that matter), but is instead always a fiction. However, if this argument makes sense, and identity and

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<sup>252</sup> Although this is a point that I do not intend to develop further as Hennessy herself is a bit unclear on this observation, yet I suspect that what the Spiteful Tots community is about—sharing with others a specific form of everyday existence in contemporary Taiwan (mostly in and about Taipei)—is also what informs them about their the queer political gesture they are able to mobilise and take advantage of. In this scenario, however, what differs greatly is that the participants are not really making any activist or political appeals in certain ways which may keep invisible the 'violent social relations [which] new urban identities depend on' (p.115). While I would not go as far as declaring the Spiteful Tots participants as thus more 'ethical', I however do see merit in their not taking a firm stance in relation to sexual politics, or assume a close relationship with political activities as such. Although this seems certainly a problematic way of putting it, yet a choice of 'non-visibility', i.e., prioritising one's own life-related matters and keeping one's head above the political pursuits. In terms of devoting oneself to activism and making political appeals, the Spiteful Tots participants can be counted on as much less of a participant role but a role of the onlooker.

coming out can be taken to be only fictional, then what may be deemed problematic about the idea of queer visibility is the act of making visible one's sexuality as a kind of concrete, upfront presence in Taiwanese society, when a subject comes out. In Taiwan, a queer public queer presence is not taken as performative; it can therefore never be confirmed that such presence makes any positive impact. This is because if we consider what David L. Wallace (2002) has noted: 'The problem for many people who have no experience in speaking/reading/acting as "others" is that the performative nature of discourse is not readily visible' (p. 53), then it follows that, for these people who has little experience speaking/reading/acting as 'others', they read what is manifested as the opposite of fictional, or performative; they understand it as truthful. As illuminated in discussions in Chapter 3, for those who have never quite been exposed to critical ideas and discourses which deconstruct truthfulness and have in many aspects been the product of existing social and cultural forces, such people would easily think that there must be some reason for the homosexual to be able to 'cross that line' between gender conformity and non-conformity.<sup>253</sup> At best, they assume that homosexuals are those who with some faults, have encountered difficulties or mishaps, or are of a disadvantaged life, class or family. These people with little pre-knowledge of non-normative sexuality, and are unfamiliar with the notion and debates of queer visibility, and when they witness moments such as the LGBT Pride parade, they, as audiences of the performative acts, would be likely to find the drag warrant some explanation as to why queers would want or must do such

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<sup>253</sup> This comment of 'cross that line' is produced by several university students (age ranges from 18 to 20; who do not know one another) at different schools where I have taught and am still teaching since 2008 in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. While I am aware that this sampling is quite small, and yet it is still significant. To me, it has been clear that when I teach and discuss gender and sexuality issues, their reactions are all disgust, non-comprehension, and little interest. I take this as a sign in that these students represent those who are making their way into the universities, and are relatively capable of being exposed to new and critical thoughts in contemporary Taiwan. Despite this, these students have all remarked, at different times, about their inability to understand, or puzzlement of, how people are capable of 'crossing that line' and engage in same-sex relationships.

transgender acts (especially such drag performances would be the focal point of media attention). In this case, performativity is not something many of the Taiwanese society can fully grasp. People as such also do not realise that queer visibility aims for both deconstructing *and* doing gender and sexuality by way of performativity. Thus, performing queer gender/sexuality is not in itself self-evident enough to destabilise the polarised, intractable gender/sexual conventions that operate in a Taiwanese social context. Instead, giving some explanation regarding what mishaps or disadvantages of life which had caused the LGBT's non-gender-conforming acts, behaviours or identities would more quickly and readily let society understand their subversiveness of gender and sexuality. In this situation, the act of coming out to the spotlight of the media representation is predominantly interpreted as the consequences of individual mishaps and/or some innate, essentialised quality of inferiority, not as the undermining of heteronormativity that society in general supports.

Under such circumstances, it becomes clear what kind of gay and queer visibility can be formulated and accepted in contemporary Taiwanese society. That is, beside the performativity that sets itself beyond gender and sexuality norms, people expect there to be some first-hand stories about subjects' painful and problematic coming out as gay and lesbians, or about these LGBT people being some benign and yet still abnormal subversion of the naturalised gender and sexual norm. The paraders should not just be simply completing a one-off political visibility, but they should be honest enough to people around them and continue to lead an open gay life in which other normal people might be so kind as to accept him or her. If the paraders are only disclosing this 'truthful' aspect of themselves only for this one time every year, then it is not considered worthy of media attention or public recognition from such a heteronormative perspective. In this way of viewing, homosexuality or non-normative sexuality should instead be something that marks the person more thoroughly;

something this homosexual subject can never shake off once they have assumed this sexual identity. Qitian Xiaoshen (1997), whom I quoted at the beginning of the chapter, also makes the link between such exposure and the lens of the mass media, when he expresses his understanding of ‘martyrs who are born to be sacrificed’:

Once involved in the *tongzhi* movement in Taiwan, in order to spread ideas and to draw together a dispersed group of people, coming out [*xianshen*] becomes almost like organising an ‘exchange’ with the media: I will give you a face (with its real name attached) if you give me a few seconds . . . It is like a sacrifice. (1997: 45)

According to Qitian Xiaoshen, once a sense of corporeality is given as a valid reason for coming out, Taiwanese society immediately makes the coming-out subject unable to keep intact his/her privacy, and instead demands he/she become a sacrificial victim of society’s compulsory heteronormativity. However, it is obvious that the invisibility of LGBT subjects does not work either. This then becomes the subtle balance that a coming-out subject has to keep. In the previously mentioned unauthorised TV broadcasting, or in the following discussion about Taiwan’s annual LGBT Pride Parades, ‘gay and lesbian’ are terms that are understood as genuine identities instead of identities which serve as gender parodies or queer subversions and challenge the dominance of heteronormativity. This understanding involves a reading of these people as suffering themselves: that they are unable to act against their will, or evade their own genetic impulses. Therefore the best the society can give them is pity and sympathy, and nothing more. In other words, society takes queer visibility as a manifestation of deviance and absurdity.

This is why Antonia Yengning Chao (2001a) notes that

In Taiwan, ‘*xianshen*’ has [. . .] specific epistemological significances [. . .] The people who *xianshen* are set in the ‘mainstream’ *tongzhi* discourse as some kind



of powerful human subjects who, like the mass media, can re-present images of themselves. [ . . . ] Under such operational logic resulting from this particular epistemology, the human subjects who *xianshen* or who are involved in actions of *xianshen*, will definitely become objectified by the visual media Other—and hence lose their power (pp.31-32; original emphasis)

According to Chao, the media has the power to represent images of non-normative sexuality, and yet the media represents these images as if they themselves, not the media, were at the centre of such powerful representations. For readers of the press and audiences of the media, it may thus appear that these abnormal people are out of their minds, and must be aberrational. How sexual dissidents are represented here is an area that remains unexplored. The media acts it as if it were simply a mirror reflecting the ‘truth’, without recognising it as being always about the a power of representation, that is, in the way the media conducts its coverage and reportage. As a result, the operational logic of media representation returns to the simple black-and-white binarism where gay and lesbian presence makes the doubts and disavowal of homosexuality disappear and where the existence of gays and lesbian means little. Without *xianshen*, coming out, or public visibility, their sexuality is nothing but air. While any human being can expect to be recognised publically *and* privately existent, the gay and lesbian population are somehow deprived of such a right to be recognised as existent without deliberately making their existence visible. Politically, I agree that to be present at a certain place means such existence is not only there, but also that it demands a good deal of attention being exerted to such an existence. It is when such a public presence is primarily performed as political *and also real* that a difference is made. However, this then runs the risk of designating people’s general everyday existence as normal and taken-for-granted. There is an assumption that people existing around the work place, online community, or grocery stores are heteronormative, whilst those attending LGBT street parades, *tongzhi* press

conferences, or lurking in dark corners of pubs and parks, are cast as abnormal or unnatural. In this way, gay or queer visibility may be argued to be actually conforming to, rather than subverting common, predetermined ideas, where gays, lesbians or queers belong to the realm of the extraordinary, and heteronormativity is more likely to be associated with the everyday and the banal.

### **Visibility, presence and display**

While a gay and lesbian presence can also be a regular existence made known to others, it is its emphasis or declaration of 'We're here; we're queer' that differentiates everyday existence from public presence. Here, someone deliberately draws attention to his or her own existence as a demand, to make circumstances possible, to reverse an unfavourable situation. Eventually, this difference between existence and presence can be seen to hinge on the political manipulation of each human subject's visibility. This key idea of political manipulation makes me want to argue that being visible is not the same thing as being present, though I do concede that in some particular moments the discrepancy can be very small. I would nevertheless wish to emphasise that this difference, however small, can still significantly determine what the most suitable strategies for politics of gay, lesbian and queer visibility may be. While a gay or lesbian person does have to be present to be visible, it does not follow either that their non-present existence achieves so little as to be insignificant; rather, I believe it reasonable to expect that both visibility and invisibility create some level of achievement and therefore both are equally significant. This is particularly so in some situations where gays and lesbians manage to be present and visible in 'an everyday manner', and succeed in doing so without sacrificing their right to privacy.

The Spiteful Tots can certainly be identified as involved with this strategy of being visible in a fashion that is private but in an everyday way. Without their offline identities and affiliations being known, their utilisation of a screen name in an online

community makes their autonomy in the community possible. Also, their wearing of a mask or make-up at annual LGBT pride parades in downtown Taipei constitutes a demand for 'privacy in public' (Nissenbaum, 1998). Keeping their sense of privacy intact, the Spiteful Tots manage visibility without directly showing who they are, and therefore without sacrificing their own human agency in other social, professional and familial roles. While the aforementioned displays of masking obviously contain different layers of meaning, the online screen names of those involved still provide individual identification, that is, rather than the parade masks, which render gay marchers a vague, unknown collectivity. Therefore, I still see a unifying theme of a different kind of queer visibility here, one that rejects the heteronormative gaze whilst demanding equal attention and respect.

This assertion of 'privacy in public' corresponds well to Ferdinand Schoeman's (1984) concept as 'one of the deepest and most subtle accounts of privacy' (Nissenbaum, 2004: 139):

[a] person can be active in the gay pride movement in San Francisco, but be private about her sexual preferences vis-à-vis her family and coworkers in Sacramento. A professor may be highly visible to other gays at the gay bar but discreet about sexual orientation at the university. Surely the streets and newspapers of San Francisco are public places as are the gay bars in the quiet university town. Does appearing in some public settings as a gay activist mean that the person concerned has waived her rights to civil inattention, to feeling violated if confronted in another setting? (Schoeman 1984 quoted in Rachels 1975: 403, 408)

From a legal point of view, Nissenbaum (2004) has argued for norms of appropriateness in her reading of this passage. She thinks that '[t]hese cases illustrate Schoeman's sense that appropriating information from one situation and inserting it in another can constitute a violation' (2004: 140). For Nissenbaum it is the norms of

appropriateness that capture the moments or possibility of violation; however, as this research is situated in Taiwan, the norms of heteronormativity are the norms that fail to recognise violation in such circumstances. While Schoeman has clarified the violation of privacy in his examples, the media and society in Taiwan do not seem to apply them in a similar way; this is because the norms of heteronormativity have overridden the norms of appropriateness.

### *Pride parades in Taiwan*

In the following section I argue that it can still be meaningful and productive for a private group like the Spiteful Tots community to have exceptions or even tradeoffs, that is, where they self-determine that they are willing to compromise their privacy somewhat (putting on masks and costumes does not prevent the loss of privacy), and meet society's request for a physical gay presence. In terms of gay and queer visibility, I find the participation of the Spiteful Tots in Pride parades the best illustration of how privacy facilitates community and the development of relationship. I also find the notion of Pride marches an interesting one to develop in terms of making discussions and argument about class and geopolitics. I will now supply the reader with more examples of postings to facilitate dialogue on the Spiteful Tots' participation in the LGBT annual parade that has been held in Taipei since 2003. By doing so, I will also incorporate detailed discussion and examination of the issue of masking. In previous chapters, I have suggested that participants often choose to take on the identity of a particular character when they join a Pride parade, with character choice highlighting a particular theme. This is a regular pattern for Spiteful Tots participant online: each year, they discuss finding a character and dressing up as a group of these characters for Pride. Pride movements are becoming increasingly important in Taipei, although it

has quite a short history,<sup>254</sup> embedded in significant cultural and political events. The predecessor to Pride, the civil events movement, began as a government-funded activity in Taipei, and was supported by the City Government of Taipei, opening in 2000.<sup>255</sup> On that cusp of this annual festival, the first-time *tongwanjieh* (LGBT Civil Movement, Taipei)<sup>256</sup> invited American queer activist Michael Bronski and Nan Hunter, a lawyer and Professor of law from New York, to jointly run a forum on LGBT rights with local activists and academics. During 2001, a series of basketball games were organised and the winning team of lesbian players made it into the Gay Olympic Games in Sydney. Especially notable in 2001 was the premiere of Zero Chou's *Corner's Murmuring*, which was also held as part of the festival. It films, for the first time, the rise and fall of several queer bars, and works as a way of historicising a short period of gay and lesbian history in Taipei. However, the following year's *tongwanjieh* was on a much smaller scale due to shrinking funding from the City Government. Dwindling resources made private fundraising imperative, especially as in 2003 and 2004 financial aid from the City Government was further curtailed. In both 2003 and 2004, the LGBT parade made its way into the Civil Movement and was financed by funds and grants primarily raised by individuals and the private sector, including groups such as the Taiwan Pride Community and Taiwan Tongzhi Hotline Association.<sup>257</sup> Of interest to me is that, whilst the annual LGBT Civil Movement is partially 'staged' by the government, LGBT parades from 2003 onwards can be seen as epitomising the nascent emergence of locally represented

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<sup>254</sup> At the time of writing, there have so far been 7 years of LGBT Pride parades in Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>255</sup> <http://www.lgbttaipei.net/index.htm>

<sup>256</sup> This is the official title of the movement as found in government documents.

<sup>257</sup> The Taiwan Pride Community is a loosely organised community that exists only for the purpose of coordinating annual parades ([http://twpride.net/?page\\_id=28](http://twpride.net/?page_id=28)). Without a regular meeting place or office, they mostly concentrate their efforts via the internet and other technological means. The Taiwan *Tongzhi* Hotline Association, on the other hand, is a registered association, undertaking regular work for people who are disturbed, upset or confused because of their sexuality. Training is available for volunteers who go on to communicate with people who call in for help or consultations.

sexual minorities in Taiwan. Given these circumstance, I argue that such an emergence, though in a way fostered by the City Government, is, however, understood as threatening to the government of Taiwan, a point which can be underlined by their decreasing financial involvement in the parades since 2003.<sup>258</sup>

The Spiteful Tots participants took part in marches held in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007 and 2008,<sup>259</sup> making their imaginary/historical/religious characters came to life. Their characters included: in 2003, *Shizuka*, the leading female character in *Doraemon*, a long running Japanese cartoon and comic series; 2004, *Kuan Yin*, a localised Buddhist deity; 2005, *Bao zhen*, a well-known judge from the *Song* Dynasty; the Rainbow Guards in 2007, a recreation of the Communist Red Guards from China, and *Yang Huimin* in 2008 (disguised as the movie star Brigitte Lin Ching Hsia who played *Yang* in the movie *Ba bai zhuang shi*, 800 Warriors). Yang was a female student who swam across a river in order to send a national flag into a ROC<sup>260</sup> army battalion defending the Sihang Warehouse, which was under siege during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai during WWII; this time the Spiteful Tots as *Yang* sent rainbow flags to the City Government of Taipei.<sup>261</sup> The impersonation of *Shizuka* offered an alternative reading of the girl-next-door. *Shizuka* in Japanese means a feminised silence, that is being pleasant and attentive to men without speaking too much, and thus the Spiteful Tots made a statement here about gay men who are just as pleasant and attentive as *Shizuka*, but can no longer keep silent about heteronormative dominance. The following year, Spiteful Tots' participants marched in the Pride parade masked as *Kuan Yin*. In Taiwanese Buddhist beliefs, *Kuan Yin* is a god(dess)

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<sup>258</sup> After 2004, the annual LGBT Civil Movement stopped producing anything other than the LGBT parades.

<sup>259</sup> In 2006, they decided not to continue. This was because they were feeling the pressure of 'being a idol singer who has to release an album once a year and yet agonisingly finds himself or herself running out of ideas and inspirations'. This interesting comparison comes from a post during the discussion of 2006 pride.

<sup>260</sup> The Republic of China, which is Taiwan.

<sup>261</sup> The 2008 parade ended at the square in front of the Taipei City Government.

who transforms into a tree, an animal, a woman or a man in order to help people remember the preciousness and importance of showing kindness and generosity to all sentient beings. *Kuan Yin* is usually best known depicted as a woman in a white robe, which was how she was appropriated by the Spiteful Tots in the 2004 parade. In the Spiteful Tots appropriation, *Kuan Yin* demonstrated fluidity in terms of gender identity, showing an ability to take on any gender and illustrating that all these different gendered behaviours and dispositions are just different forms of the same *Kwan Yin*. In addition, *Kuan Yin*, the god(dess) of mercy in Buddhism, asserts that all people are equal, and that love for everyone lies in the spirit of tolerance and kindness and the Spiteful Tots were quick to utilise such an assertion with their own humanistic appeal for sexual citizen rights.

In 2005, they were transformed into *Bao zhen*, the famous judge from the *Song* Dynasty, who was impeccably just and defiant against evil doing. This is because in that year saw many juridical cases directed at *tongzhi* populations such as the police's online 'fishing' projects, looking for gay men who meet for sex and meeting them offline to catch them. At this time there were also random checks being made on gay bars and home parties,<sup>262</sup> whilst the *Gingin* bookshop was identified as 'illegally' selling male-on-male pornographic magazines (meanwhile male-on-female ones were seen as acceptable). For the *Bao zhen* costume, the Spiteful Tots purposefully chose a different Chinese character (with the same pronunciation) instead of the correct one, making use of the homophones of *bao* to refer to a contemporary blockheaded judge at court.<sup>263</sup>

In 2007, they painted their faces in rainbow colours and wore rented soldier

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<sup>262</sup> A local and colloquial way of indicating a house party, they are also sometimes known as 'home pa'.

<sup>263</sup> They wrote 苞(bud) instead of 包(*Baozhen's* surname) because this character, also pronounced as *bao*, is written as grass and *bao*, meaning that *Baozhen* is no longer intelligent and upright, but idiotic and fatuous.

uniforms to the parade, and again, made use of homophones, this time the homophone of *hong*, which can be both red(紅) and rainbow(虹). This allowed them to subvert the meaning of *tongzhi*, as in both a comrade in the Communist Chinese context and as homosexuals in contemporary Taiwan, that is, not just as Red Guards, but also Rainbow Guards. And finally, in the most recent Pride march, participants dressed up as female students from the 1930s, with plaits and long black skirts. They all walked wearing the mask of *Brigitte Lin Ching Hsia*, sending a rainbow flag to the City government of Taipei to inspire the authorities concerned to try again and fight against heteronormative forces.

Below are some pictures from the parades, though lacking the *Shizuka* crowd of 2003.



(A) *Kuan Yin* in 2004, photo taken by a friend of the Spiteful Tots community.





(B) *Bao zhen* 2005, photo taken by a friend of the Spiteful Tots community.



(C) Rainbow Guards in 2007, photo taken by a friend of the Spiteful Tots community.



(D) *Yang Huimin* in 2008, photo taken by a friend of the Spiteful Tots community.

In terms of role-playing, the ability of the Spiteful Tots to tactfully take advantage of cultural, political, religious, academic and social images and ideas, when representing themselves at Pride, is evident. What is even more remarkable, I think, is that they are so comfortable and even graceful at incorporating global and local thoughts and concepts, while effectively clarifying ideas about sexuality. A significant part of brainstorming for their choice of parade outfit comes from the wish to receive abundant media attention, as well as for the enjoyment of being noticed, reported upon, printed in any newspapers— that is, being validated by mainstream culture and situated as the centre of attention. Such attention-seeking as is evident the parade communicates itself as a desire for personal public recognition (though in a collective way), as well as a need for their creativity to be acknowledged, that is, in the way they

present themselves visually. By being mobile in a group that upsets the heteronormative understanding of what constitutes male and female bodies, their recreated versions of embodiment, flowing in the busiest areas of Taipei each year, continue to unravel the complexities of gender and sexuality.

### *Offline parades and online discussion*

It is useful to explore how the Spiteful Tots themselves comment upon and understand their experiences in LGBT pride parades. To understand how this is experienced, especially in terms of media attention, I offer the paraders' discussion on the Spiteful Tots community both before and after their participation for a whole afternoon's walking for 4-5 hours in the Taipei Pride parade in 2003. This is especially meant to serve as a way to compare and contrast their insistence upon privacy in the community:

Author: Dex

Board: Spiteful Party

Title: 1101<sup>264</sup> Tongwanjie Tongzhi Big Parade

Time: Fri Oct 24 20:49:02 2003

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Could I ask how we should decorate the Spiteful Tots Dynasty?

Flower petals are not good enough anymore

Dex is someone who works as an unpaid-for secretary for the Tongzhi Hotline Association, an organisation that, as mentioned in footnote before, takes phone calls from both sexual minorities and their parents.<sup>265</sup> This association also works with schools in Taiwan to advocate sexual rights and familiarise students with non-normative sexuality. Because of Dex's work, he was one of the first to know anything about the 2003 parade, which was the first LGBT Pride parade in Taiwan. While Dex posts as if he knows almost for a fact that the Spiteful Tots participants

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<sup>264</sup> 1101 means November 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>265</sup> In the light of protecting Dex's privacy, details about his work have been omitted.

would all agree to come, this is not necessarily the case:

Author: Rick

Board: Spiteful Party

Title: Re: 1101 Tongwanjie<sup>266</sup> Tongzhi<sup>267</sup> Big Parade

Time: Fri Oct 24 21:12:31 2003

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※ Quoting 《Dex》 :

> Could I ask how should we decorate the Spiteful Dynasty?

> Flower petals are not good enough anymore

Does anyone wanna come?

Time and date is 4 pm Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>.

Place is Xinmending.<sup>268</sup>

Treat it as a Spiteful Tots Party. Especially those who have been to the parties before, don't be shy wahahaha<sup>269</sup>

If shy, wear a mask hahaha<sup>270</sup>

Sign here.<sup>271</sup>

1. Rick

Rick replied to the post with more details and further, more concrete ideas about the parade itself. Rick compares the parade with the offline parties which they have had in the past and suggests those participants all come this time. However, he does understand that the Pride parade is after all different from a private party and that will definitely be qualms about showing up on the streets of Taipei seeking media attention.

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<sup>266</sup> As previously mentioned, the first parade was based on the annual *tongwanjie* (LGBT Civil Movement) event.

<sup>267</sup> Although in English it is termed 'LGBT pride parade', in Chinese it is usually referred to as 'tongzhi parade'.

<sup>268</sup> Ximending refers to a neighbourhood in Wanhua District, Taipei City. It is popular for its shopping malls, individual street vendor and large business buildings as well as its diverse expressions of sexuality with student prostitution, a line of gay restaurants, shops and bars near the Red House Theatre and instances of fetishism such as old men buying school girls' panties.

<sup>269</sup> 'Wahaha' is an expression or an interjection, usually used when one is excited, exhilarated or proud. To clarify, this has nothing to do with the Sino-French Joint Venture Company, or the Chinese holding company of Hangzhou Wahaha Group.

<sup>270</sup> 'Hahaha' is just 'ha' repeated three times to indicate the continuation of laughers.

<sup>271</sup> The 'sign here' sentence indicates that whoever wants to participate should repost the message and sign up.

Thus he puts forward the idea of wearing a mask.

Next, Mark starts to contribute some parade theme possibilities for the group:

Author: Mark

Board: Spiteful Party

Title: [tongzhi parade] a brick- throwing proposal

Time: Sat Oct 25 02:03:46 2003

—————[←Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]

0. Moulin Rouge, Cancan dance. Feather skirts to the sky.

1. Shanghai night, wear once again<sup>272</sup> Yin xueyan<sup>273</sup> cheongsam

2. Vampire, Gothic black makeup.

3. High-school girls,<sup>274</sup> appearing violently in a pleated skirt that is so long that touches the ground.

4. European palace party. Bodice corset skirt bone wig (if the heat does not put us to death, we would not be able to walk anyway)

(to be continued)

The postings on the one hand show that the Spiteful Tots' participation in the 2003 LGBT parade seemed somewhat casual and natural. There were not too many post discussions, and almost immediately (on the early morning of the next day of the first post) some ideas about the parade were thrown out for group brainstorming by Mark. On the other hand, the postings do nevertheless suggest, through comments such as 'Treat it as a spiteful party' or 'Shanghai night, wear once again Yin xueyan cheongsam', that the way the Spiteful Tots intend to perform in the LGBT parade is heavily influenced by the Spiteful Tots parties they previously held. These parties, taking place in January 2001 and September 2002, were open to all, including those unfamiliar to the core group and were held in Taipei, each with a different theme and dress code corresponding to each year's private celebration for the participants in the Spiteful Tots community. In 2001, the Spiteful Tots community dressed up as party

<sup>272</sup> As will be subsequently discussed, a theme party based on a 'Shanghai night back in the Thirties' occurred during an offline gathering attended by the Spiteful Tots in 2001.

<sup>273</sup> *Ying xueyan* (尹雪豔), a female character in Pai Hsien-yung's 1971 novel *Taipei People*.

<sup>274</sup> In Taiwan the term 'High-school girls' (Gaoxiaonü 高校女) belong to a specific genre that comes from Japanese cartoons, comics and adult video films.

goers from a Shanghai Night back in the Thirties, and, in 2002, they celebrated ‘having no dates on Valentine’s Day’ when they dressed as they chose, but so that they could not be recognised by each other. In 2003, then, they made the Pride parade their actual gathering place, and continued to celebrate like this in following years.<sup>275</sup> As the Spiteful Tots parties were meant to be annual gatherings, it seemed sensible to match them with the LGBT parade events, especially as this seemed to match with their original intention of meeting each other and catching up once a year. This situation then made the LGBT parades an occasion on which the participants become used to thinking up a theme and dressing up for an event. Their way of participating in the Pride parade therefore bears close resemblance to the previous Spiteful Tots parties. It is then reasonable to see their choices of self-representation in the LGBT parades as an extension of their private parties that had already existed before the Pride parade organisation came along. In other words, despite the LGBT parades’ occurrence not exactly being foreseen by the Spiteful Tots, their own private offline parties were able to set the tone of the group’s particular way of presentation and participation.

While the way they organise and participate in the parades may be similar to the way they organised and participated in their private Spiteful Tots parties, I must hasten to add that I recognise that these two types of events are not the same in terms of their features. Instead, I would like to highlight that they are two very different types of ‘gatherings’. Whilst both are about socialising, the LGBT parades, to the Spiteful Tots, certainly do not simply serve as an annual gathering for the whole community, but as a highly public and publicised moment of active display. The public exposure and political presence that a LGBT Pride parade entails, would obviously be quite problematic for such a community such as the Spiteful Tots

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<sup>275</sup> Except the LGBT parade in 2006. Reason for absence is as explained before in footnote 65.

community with such a private orientation, and would also challenge the idea of a private online club. These participants therefore need to overcome their fears by willingly emerging into the light: by cooperating for photo shoots, facilitating news coverage and allowing themselves to be the subject of media attention.<sup>276</sup> Due to walking for at least four hours during the day of the Pride march, they also have other, more practical worries: about finding a toilet or sweating so much that they risk damaging their make up or losing their mask. Having walked with them twice on the street (in 2007 and 2008), I realise that for this specific occasion they happily submitted themselves and their voice to the public realm so as to highlight a cause that the Taiwanese society has not yet fully dealt with. Their belief is that by joining in the parade, a (gradual) change may be wrought. It is not so much about activism, but about showing society that there such a huge range of people who are willing to support and contribute to the Pride cause, both by showing up and spending their time at this annual event.

I suggest that it is important to note that this situation does appear to be more about display rather than coming out. Display is the result of the kind of exception or tradeoff I mentioned at the beginning of this section on visibility. Because the Spiteful Tots choose to put their faith in the idea that society might eventually become friendly to sexual minorities, they are willing to think of their visibility in the LGBT Pride as displaying a different part of themselves, perhaps the playful part that has not been yet solicited or exercised in lives that are usually more discreet. Display is not so much about the Spiteful Tots displaying themselves for the reward of self-congratulatory pleasure, although this may be argued as integral. In my eyes, display is much more

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<sup>276</sup> Almost as soon as they prepare themselves for the parade at the meeting point, there will be cameras pointed at them, as well as people/tourists asking for photos. Also, the Spiteful Tots participants are always ready with a passage written as their press release in case any newspaper wants an interview or coverage during the parades.



about leaning towards the optimistic and hopeful, despite the many wrongdoings and injustices done to sexual minorities in the past. It is also about finding ‘display’ as a viable tactic to gain leverage from existing traps which force the homosexual subject to speak out about their pains, or confess their abnormalities when assuming a gay, lesbian, or queer identity. All in all, since display is by definition<sup>277</sup> about a type of visibility intended for public viewing (and possibly for making favourable impressions, too), then display per se does, at the conceptual level, counter their private concerns. However, I argue that, in these circumstances, the private Spiteful Tots are also active agents in spite of their preference for privacy. Their relationship and role in the LGBT Pride is as active agents happily sacrificing a day of their weekend, even when the City Government has stopped financial aid for this event. The relationship among each of the Spiteful Tots marchers needs also to be strong and stable so as to carry out the necessary but time consuming activity of organising their group. In addition, Pride events in Taiwan are largely organised by the Tongzhi Hotline and Gender/Sexuality Rights Association, two of the largest and most well-known associations in Taiwan, which are never absent from discussions of gender and sexuality. For the Spiteful Tots, as long as they have considered a number of parameters in their way of displaying themselves in the LGBT Pride marches, and they have a Saturday afternoon to dispose of, then spending time displaying and mobiling is perhaps the least they can do to contribute to the construction of a more accepting future.

The kind of positive feelings engendered from walking in a Pride march is also

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<sup>277</sup> According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1978, 1995), display as a noun means either ‘an attractive arrangement of objects for people to look at or buy’ or ‘a public performance of something that is intended to entertain people’. As a verb, display can be used as ‘to show goods for sale in a shop, or paintings, historical objects etc in a public place’ or ‘to clearly show a feeling, attitude, or quality by what you do or say’ (p. 388-89).

witnessed in the postings.<sup>278</sup>

Author: Dex<sup>279</sup>

Board: Spiteful Party

Title: Re: The TVBS News Just Now

Time: Sat Nov 1 19:39:40 2003

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※ Quoting 《Dan》 :

> ※ Quoting 《Mark》 :

>> Full of Shizukas.

>> Just one second but it was astonishing

> I saw it too. Was even in slow motion. . .

I watched it on TV with a bunch of hotline volunteers<sup>280</sup>

It could not be described as astonishing

It felt as if these pink girls would cause a big earthquake

= \_\_\_\_\_ =

Dex is referring to the 2003 Pride march when the Spiteful Tots took to the streets as *Shizuka*. Since *Shizuka* is all about girly outfits and includes, pink faces and watery eyes, the group thought they could make good use of a group jump in front of the cameras. This is why Dex says ‘It felt as if these pink girls would cause a big earthquake’ to mean that the cute *Shizuka* jump might be perceived as especially shocking and therefore potentially cause a great change in contemporary Taiwan society. The emoticon of a textualised facial expression ‘= \_\_\_\_\_ =’ is employed here to show the happiness hidden in a smileless and solemn face; this can be understood as a way of being very happy and yet wanting not to show it too much or make it too obvious.

Michael who also participated in the 2003 Pride event replies to Dex’s post and

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<sup>278</sup> The following postings have been changed and modified for considerations of keeping confidentiality and acceptable length.

<sup>279</sup> For those who have appeared before, they are the same persons. And if not specified, they are self-identified gay men.

<sup>280</sup> ‘Hotline’ means ‘Tongzhi Hotline’, a non-profit association dedicated to issues of gender and sexuality, mostly concerning gay and lesbian people’s rights and issues in Taiwan. They provide telephone helplines from Thursday to Sunday evenings. They are also the major force behind the LGBT parades in Taiwan. Dex works as a permanent volunteer for this organisation.

makes a suggestion:

Author: Michael

Board: Spiteful Party

Title: Re: The TVBS News Just Now

Time: Sat Nov 1 20:59:14 2003

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※ Quoting 《Mark》 :

> ※ Quoting 《Dex》 :

>> I watched it on TV with a bunch of hotline volunteers

>> It could not be described as astonishing

>> It felt as if these pink girls would cause a big earthquake

>> = \_\_\_\_\_ =

> Ingénues makes the earth speed up spinning ahahahahahahahahahah

> (massaging the cramped legs)

After eating spare rib meals we should have gone to foot massage -\_-

Michael finds walking in a parade very tiring physically and suggests that instead of the group ending the day by having a dinner of spare ribs together they should opt for a foot massage. However, despite the hardships, Michael still affirms the effort involved because playing pink-coloured *Shizuka* 'makes the earth speed up spinning'. Rick, in turn, as one of the organisers of the Spiteful Tots' participation in the Pride parade, uses this opportunity to thank all those present:

Author: Rick

Board: Spiteful Party

Title: Re: The TVBS News Just Now

Time: Sat Nov 1 22:03:21 2003

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※ Quoting 《Dex》 :

> ※ Quoting 《Momi》 :

>> After eating spare rib meals we should have gone to foot massage -\_-

Half of the way my calves were already in spasms >\_<

Thank everyone for joining. I will for this life remember the reaction of passersby along the way XD<sup>281</sup>

<sup>281</sup> 'XD' is an emoticon, and it should be viewed in the same direction as '(:)' which expresses great

Rick brings up the issue of exposure by mentioning the reactions of the other pedestrians on the streets of Taipei that day. Although it is not clear from his message exactly how the other people around the parading group reacted, it can be inferred that others' reactions were not very positive; this is especially shown by the emoticon of 'XD', which is a crying and laughing face lain on its side. Jay replies to Rick's message:

Author: Jay

Board: Spiteful Party

Title: Re: The TVBS News Just Now

Time: Sat Nov 1 22:40:39 2003

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※ Quoting 《Mark》 :

> ※ Quoting 《Rick》 :

>> Half of the way my calves were already in spasms >\_<

>> Thank everyone for joining. I will for this life remember the reaction of

>> passersby along the way XD

> I think they will also remember today

Well, actually I was a bit beside and behind you

When you gave that child a balloon, that kid was frightened and jumped away

And then I heard the kid's mom said: Don't take it. Take it you will be

homosexual.

It's good that I didn't tell you right away, or you would have gone [and reasoned with them]. Then we would have another piece of news today. = =

Jay tells a story of how a mother and a child reacted to the balloon given out by Rick wearing his *Shizuka* disguise, where both mother and child showed fear and doubt. The child's first instinct was to avoid being given a balloon under such circumstances, and the mother also commanded the child not take the small gift, because of her belief that it would taint her child in some way with homosexuality. The last two sentences show that Rick might be a man with a quick temper, and that Jay, in light of this,

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laughter.

chose to keep silent at that moment (regarding the scene he witnessed) so Rick would not be written up by the media and cause trouble. In Jay's message, there is no comment from him about this particular story that hints at any clues of how a randomly chosen heterosexual family might react to a Pride parade. Instead, there is only his reworking of a kind of relief, where he feels good about not letting Rick learn about the small episode that took place earlier.

The Spiteful Tots community did manage to join in the historical moment where they were politically visible and the object of attention without reducing their rights to privacy. For the group, this feeling of success and self-affirmation alone is, in the long run, much more important and significant than anything else that occurred during the parade. Therefore, I would like to include three more posts here that relate this triumph:

Author Nora<sup>282</sup>

Board: Spiteful Party

Title: Re: The TVBS News Just Now

Time: Sat Nov 1 22:42:01 2003

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※ Quoting 《Dex》 :

> ※ Quoting 《Rick》 :

>> Half of the way my calves were already in spasms >\_<

>> Thank everyone for joining. I will for this life remember the reaction of

>> passersby along the way XD

> I think they will also remember today

In this way, it seems everyone will remember today.

Make it Shizuka Memorial Day then?

In response to Rick's mention of his memories of the way bystanders reacted to the *Shizukas*, Dex remarks that the bystanders will also remember the marching crowd.

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<sup>282</sup> Nora is a heterosexual woman in the community. She takes up the role of a kind of 'queen' for the community, in that she at times makes decision for them when participants are involved in a discussion but cannot reach a consensus.

Nora further adds that since everyone will remember the day, why not make it ‘Shizuka Memorial Day’, hinting at the importance of the first parade day for the Spiteful Tots participants. In confirming the significance of this day, Holly confesses:

Author: Holly<sup>283</sup> Board Spiteful Party

Title: I feel touched too

Time: Sun Nov 2 21:59:10 2003

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Although I did not have the courage to wear Shizuka ingénue outfit with everyone (Really, I would rather be recognised than to put on a skirt =.=!)  
But I am very proud that I have walked all the way with you Shizuka’s

While, for her, the *Shizuka* image was not exactly how she wanted to present herself due to her own gender perception, Holly still accompanied the group and finished walking the route. She can be seen to share their sense of pride and also embody the idea that one does not have to be part of the Spiteful Tots’ group theme in order to be part of the group. Even without the *Shizuka* look for the 2003 Pride, Holly is still a Spiteful Tot. This brings me to a post made by a heterosexual man, Norman, who also participated in Pride that day:

Author: Norman<sup>284</sup> Board Spiteful Party

Title: A Beautiful Afternoon

Time: Sun Nov 2 22:12:53 2003

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This was indeed a beautiful afternoon.  
I paraded with the Spiteful Tots friends in make up and disguise  
When Sam told me about this parade and its theme  
I almost immediately wanted to join

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<sup>283</sup> Holly is a butch lesbian who refused to wear the *Shizuka* outfit, which was a pink blouse/shirt and a red mini skirt.

<sup>284</sup> Norman is a heterosexual man whose girlfriend at that time (in 2003) befriended a gay man in the community and therefore was able to participate in the Spiteful Tots group..

Though changing clothes at the RTS station<sup>285</sup> made me whine a lot  
But the fact that you let me participate and parade with you made me stay on and  
continue  
I just wanted to express my support to tongzhi by means of action  
Although I chipped in and walked down the streets  
I did not do any of the tailoring, computer graphics and handcrafting  
You however are still willing to take me in  
This makes me feel very happy and honoured  
Thank you for the memorable afternoon

Norman's post shows that, despite the designated heterosexual masculinity rife in Taiwanese society, he still made the decision to adopt the role of *Shizuka* and walk the streets of the city in a mini skirt all afternoon. Norman says that he did so to lend his support to his 'tongzhi friends', without knowing, obviously, that the Spiteful Tots participants refuse to see themselves as *tongzhi*. In spite of this mismatch of ideas on sexual identity however, Norman's participation was still warmly welcomed by the Spiteful Tots parading group, and his presence as a *Shizuka*, I argue, was a significant help in blurring the dichotomous distinction between heterosexual and homosexual.

All these posts and messages indicate that the parade was understood as something that gave the Spiteful Tots as much pleasure as did their private parties, while apparently also being a more significant experience for them than merely going out and having fun. Parading is a way for them to share the mutual process of moving together and achieving the same goal. It also furthers the participants' friendships and intensifies it to the level of comradeship as they collaborate with one another to organise their participation. It has transformed the community's daily existence into a solid presence, underlined by a great sense of empowerment. In previous scholarship, there has been confirmation of the intimate relationship between autonomy and

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<sup>285</sup> RTS station is the rapid transit system station in Taipei, so is another name for the metro. In this case, Norman would mean Ximending Station, as it was the nearest RTS station to the starting point of the 2003 LGBT parade.

freedom (Westin, 1967), which ‘taken together, have indicated the need for wise restriction on access to personal information’ (Nissenbaum, 2004: 148). Nissenbaum (2004) further addresses this:

Thoughtful works on privacy by Ruth Gavison, Jeffrey Reiman, Julie Cohen, and others have demonstrated a rich array of associations between autonomy and privacy. These works assert that freedom from scrutiny and zones of “relative insularity” are necessary conditions for formulating goals, values, conceptions of self, and principles of action because they provide venues in which people are free to experiment, act, and decide without giving account to others or being fearful of retribution. Uninhibited by what others might say, how they will react, and how they will judge, unhindered by the constraints and expectations of tradition and convention, people are freer to formulate for themselves the reasons behind significant life choices, preferences, and commitments. In defending robust broad protections for informational privacy, Cohen reminds us that autonomy touches many dimensions of people’s lives, including tastes, behaviors, beliefs, preferences, moral commitments, associations, decisions, and choices that define who we are. (2004: 148-49)

In Nissenbaum’s summary of prior work on privacy, privacy is theorised as both beneficial and indispensable, as it endows people with a sense of autonomy. If we are allowed to have a private space, then we can eventually acquire the ability to exercise autonomy; we can be in control of which information we are willing to reveal, and which we would rather keep to ourselves. When we become autonomous, we become aware of the extent to which information technology may reveal us and therefore make appropriate or desirable adjustments where possible. In the case of the Spiteful Tots, a comparable logic is at work: the kind of privacy they have been trying to maintain and enjoying now comes to fruition. Privacy has helped catalyse the Spiteful Tots’ ‘tastes, behaviors, beliefs, preferences, moral commitments, associations, decisions, and choices that define who we are’ (Nissenbaum, 2004: 149). It may be



argued that the Spiteful Tots enjoyment of and participation in such a relatively private space, has provided them with the strength and subjectivity needed to participate in the Taipei LGBT parades.

Moreover, the conspicuous presence of ‘passers-by’ in this situation formulates a significant part of their public participation. By masking, the Spiteful Tots can actively choose to be visible and displaying, without it costing their life or sacrificing their right to privacy. Technically, they are not present as a specific person with legally valid names, or affiliations. So their visibility does not entail the disruption of their everyday lives. Although for some of the Spiteful Tots it seems that to be out without a mask is doable (such as in Holly’s case<sup>286</sup>), for others, this kind of masked visibility in a group of diverse sexualities is positive enough.

However, at this point, I want to discuss the ideas and observations which have not yet been mentioned in the community postings so far, and yet were experienced and observed by myself when attending the 2007 and 2008 parades. This is, in fact, the presence of white Western foreigners in these events, using joining in the marching line, enjoying themselves by taking photos and showing off their bodies.<sup>287</sup> During the 2007 and 2008 events that I attended there were also various moments when a white Westerner started up a conversation with some of the Spiteful Tots and it was me<sup>288</sup> who had to answer the questions they asked about our choice of costumes, makeup and masks. The question I answered most frequently was about masks. Masks were assumed to be a way of hiding and thus the foreigners wondered

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<sup>286</sup> It is however beyond my knowledge as to what made the difference for Holly and allowed her to join the parade without worrying too much about being recognised. It may be that she has already paid the price for being able to do so, or that since joining the Spiteful Tots community, circumstances have altered for her.

<sup>287</sup> While commenting on the way white Westerners show off their bodies, I must also add that a host of Taiwanese men in the parades also tend to show their own well-built bodies off as well.

<sup>288</sup> This is because my comforts in using the English language. While many Spiteful Tots are also good at the language, or at least quite capable of expressing themselves in English, they might just not feel as comfortable doing so.

if we were afraid of coming out. Simultaneously waking and talking, I found it very difficult to do justice to the complex portfolio of 'fear' that is assumed to be associated with coming out. No matter how much effort I made in order to explain the position of the Spiteful Tots, in the end, masking was still considered a manifestation of fear, instead of a way of objecting to stigmatisation. In this instance, I think the foreigners' interpretation of masks and costumes further complicates the issue of visibility.



A picture I took while taking part in the 2007 Pride



Taken in 2006 Pride parade by a friend<sup>289</sup>

### *Westerners in the Taipei parades*

Western foreigners attending the Pride parade take the whole issue of visibility to an even higher level of complexity, not merely confined to the realm of normative and non-normative sexuality. As Lynda Johnston (2005), who is a geographer, researching queer tourism, Pride marches are also sites and spaces where tourists assemble. In the case of Taiwan, I think the support of people from Western countries in the marching crowd gives extra weight to the sexual dissidents' human rights arguments and requests. The local understanding is that the attendance of Westerners means that Taiwan is being noticed and may stand a chance of being identified as modern,

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<sup>289</sup> Since I was not able to participate in the annual LGBT Pride parades in Taipei from 2003 to 2006, I am only able to offer here a photograph taken by a friend in 2006, and another one taken by me during my participation in the 2007 Pride. However, to show more clearly what I mean by the participation of foreign people, I would like to direct readers' attention to the 2009 Pride by offering the following website link: <http://www.wretch.cc/blog/tenhoursshih/21263624>, a blog entry on which many foreigners' participation in the LGBT Pride in Taipei 2009 were recorded by photography. This would be ideal in compensating what I could not have done for the past parades.

progressive, liberal and democratic. In this context, Taipei may then become an internationally visible city due to its involvement with queer tourism, a stance which necessarily facilitates a tone of celebration for both the foreign tourists<sup>290</sup> and local queer marchers. And yet this thinking too easily ignores the implicated sense of class that also accompanies Pride: most especially this is implicated in the ability to travel, for travelling consuming and feeling a transnational citizen is not necessarily part of everyone's life experience. As Jasbir Puar asserts, 'While it is predictable that the claiming of queer space is lauded as the disruption of heterosexual space, rarely is that disruption interrogated also as a disruption of racialised, gendered, and classed space' (2002: 936).<sup>291</sup> With the white Westerners' presence and participation, the local Pride parades seem much more legitimate and comprehensible, and to certain extent, more meaningful as they seem to illustrate some modicum of international attention. In this way, therefore, the Westerners' attendance at Taiwanese parades may be contextualised in neo-colonial terms, and this is because European and North American Pride events have long been known as positive examples for combating heteronormativity. However, this understanding of the LGBT Pride again reiterates what Jasbir Puar has argued about the space created by queer marches is also a highly racialised and classed one, with its racialised and classed order or hierarchy remained intact or non-disrupted.

On the one hand, from the perspective of legitimising the parade experience and making it merrier, the presence of Westerners is considered positive and helpful. For example, the predecessor of Pride, the LGBT civil movement in Taiwan, was arranged

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<sup>290</sup> By foreign tourists, I mean to include many people who may appear similar to Taiwanese but are really from the Asian regions, such as Japan, Malaysia, Hong Kong and others. They are as much a presence as the Caucasian and African Westerners, but as a marcher myself, I find them a lot more difficult to be spotted than the white and black people in the crowd. So my discussion seems to leave them out, but this is indeed a pity due to my inability to act as a thorough investigator while being a marcher and participant in the LGBT Prides.

<sup>291</sup> This may be, as I suspect, part of the basis of Hennessy's observation on the violent social relations that new urban formations of queer visibility have kept invisible.

as a series of events which aimed to facilitate exchange and collaboration with the West, fuelled by the anxiety of trying to mirror Taiwan in Western eyes (Chu, 2000: 1-2). To this end, then, it seemed that only Western appreciation will complete the LGBT civil movement's task. Of course, by no means do I imply that sexuality events during this period fell out of touch with their 'origins' and were thus not 'authentic'. On the contrary, I argue that Pride parades, being stimulated by the LGBT civil movement, are indeed representative of local voices and awareness. But at the same time, it is reasonable to think that these Pride events might not be in such a specific form nor have become so eye-catching to the press, had the parades in the West not been so well-known and iconic on a global scale. This is to say that not only are feminist and queer theories globally disseminated, but also, the way LGBT people march in costumes, cheer and dance in front of the cameras has also become memorable due to the wide-spread and long-lasting transmission of the mass media. This fact ties into the previous discussion about some urban forms of gay and queer visibility (Hennessey, 2000), while identifying a major theoretical trope when we think of it in relation to identity. If the dressed-up paraders represent a public announcement of a queer or sexual dissident politics, status and preference, then the marching becomes a process by which to seize that politics, status and preference in a certain spatial and political way. And in this case, it is not just about the politics of spatiality, but a Westernised view on the intersection of spatial and political, as well as the reclaiming of heteronormative space as queer.

On the other hand, in a visually oriented event like the Pride parade in Taipei, the marchers and the cameras they attract, form a symbiotic relationship, both aiming to please the public and occupy the largest chunk of media space. As one of the marchers, I realise that on an occasion such as these annually held events, being seen is not enough, as what we really desire is to produce an overwhelmingly strong impression

and to grab the attention of others, both bystanders and other marchers. We want to make an impression that will last for a whole year, that which will run until we are out on the streets again. This satisfies both the hunger for recognition and a kind of narcissistic appetite. Parading in the city casts a spell, as it were, to cogently transform the everyday streets into a long stage; here, collective and performative dressing produces an aura that validates magic, hope and difference. This is a time when participants can rightfully demand to be the focus of attention in Taipei, posing for records of Pride celebration and occupying the city space with examples of transgressive iconography, while also making public statements about their needs and their desire to challenge the border of urban, heteronormative governance. However, as powerful as the experience of marching in the LGBT parades is, such opportunities are also excruciatingly discriminating. The masks the Spiteful Tots wear still embody society's hostility and stigmatisation of homosexuality. Although the Spiteful Tots have made a great effort in trying to reclaim public space<sup>292</sup> by marching through the

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<sup>292</sup> For example, New Park is the epitome of urban history in Taipei, and a historically significant site for homosexuals. According to Fran Martin (2003: 48-54), New Park has long been treated as a major site of contestation and demonstrations of power by different regimes of the time, such as Japanese colonization and the KMT (*Kuomintang*, or nationalist) government. As a public park, New Park has experienced several different stages: from its European design as the first modern, Western-style park in Taiwan in 1908, to a setting up of the Taiwan and South Sea Islands Ethnographic Museum in 1915, and later to the establishment of a Beijing-style pavilion and the Taiwan Provincial Museum in the KMT era. The changes of scene at New Park, (up to 1987, when martial laws were lifted), repeatedly marks the attempts at rewriting previous colonial/national memories and altering the previous urban inscriptions New Park therefore has become a shifting ground of discursive leverage, intertwined with, on the one hand, placement and replacement of national identification and urban remarking, and on the other, performances of (male) sexual dissidence (p. 48). As Martin has elucidated, '[p]olice harassment of men cruising in the New Park area possibly has a history as lengthy as that of homosexual use of the park; certainly, it has been a routine occurrence since the establishment of the KMT government in 1949' (2003:54). What becomes at stake in this seeming conflictual relationship between the state and sexual dissidents may be especially clear in the words articulated by Lucas Hsien-hsiu Lin, a gay essayist and journalist in Taiwan. Lin puts the official state of anxiety and state concern over New Park, due to its homosexual associations, into the following words: 'The main entrance to the Presidential Palace is not three minutes' walk from [the New Park]—how could it be admissible that male homosexuals should cruise right at the gateway of the nation!' (qtd. in Martin, 2003: 54). The irony thus zeros in on the fact that New Park has always been a geocultural and political location that is highly queered *and* highly regulated, both physically and symbolically. The clash between the LGBT history of gay cruising and the national memory of the 228 massacre (which has been explained shortly in Chapter 2) can therefore be seen as a concrete embodiment of this tension. Manuel Castells (1997, 2004: 270) also notes that in 1996 sexual dissidents protested in the hope of keeping the park's name and maintaining its status for gay and lesbians' free use. The first LGBT Pride parade (2003) also

busiest streets of Taipei, the present situation is still a step away from Manuel Castells' (2004) reading of gay and lesbian movements in the 1990s. Castells believes that the gay and:

...lesbian movement in Taipei [. . .] shattered the preconception of the solidity of patriarchy, and heterosexuality, in cultures inspired by Confucianism. It was an extension of the feminist movement, while linking up at the same time with the gay liberation movement in a united front for the defense of rights to sexuality in all its forms. It joined the mobilization against AIDS, relating it to the consequences of housewives' sexual submission. It bridged the cutting-edge theoretical debates on feminism and lesbianism in the world with specific adaptations to Chinese culture and to Taiwan's social institutions in the 1990s. It used a whole range of cultural expressions to "come out collectively" in the midst of public attention. It made extensive use of the Internet, and of alternative means of communications [. . .] (2004: 270-1)

Despite being aided by new technologies, what escapes Castells' attention is that, in all these movements and participatory acts since the 1990s, less possibility is available, for example, for those who reside outside the capital city; those who are without a group or community; those who have too little social and cultural capital to be noticed by the media; and those who simply do not understand why being *tongzhi* or queer necessarily connotes behaviours such as: camp, cross dressing, drag and other dominant socio-spatial enactments of queering. At the same time, marching at a LGBT Pride event does not mean that the marcher has come out collectively with the others in the group, since there is still a difference between 'coming out' and 'being spotted as a supporter'. As the parades and the internet rise up as new forms of collectivism and public expression, they have also become a new way of oppressing the 'other' in an already othered population of gays and lesbians. These differences in class, geopolitics, age, ableness and social and cultural capital are neglected and

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began in New Park.

rendered invisible in the context of a cheerful Pride parade, and yet they still concretely exist, functioning as a preselecting mechanism for who can attend the parades and those who cannot.

### **Concluding remarks**

Returning to the issue of privacy and visibility as two ends on a spectrum contextualised in the realms of community and parades, I first tried to demarcate the contour of the social, cultural and political context of Taiwan. Therefore I have visited previous Spiteful Tots' discussions to identify the context from which their perception of the un-accepting environment of contemporary Taiwan springs. Then, I visit both the online and offline fields in which the Spiteful Tots participants are able to join physically the LGBT Pride. For them, the kind of visibility that does not turn out harmful is a display or gesture, a display of being (proudly, happily, celebratorily) present in a politically creative way. What has been represented about homosexuality outside of Pride occasions has been what can be termed as negative visibility, visibility that functions as a blade cutting the homosexual subject from both sides. Positive visibility, on the other hand, takes effect in a more complex way, which is via the popularisation of discourse or some specific social conditions, such as in the LGBT Pride events, but also in other more sites, such as classrooms, voting venues, movie theatres and various everyday consumption processes. Such positive visibilities allow wider room for private development and interaction which does not need to be constantly scrutinised through a heteronormative lens.

Many scholars worldwide have looked into the issue of queer visibility in terms of gay populations and consumption (D'Emilio, 1983, 1993; Hennessy, 2000), filmic representation (Berry, 2001; Leung, 2008) and political influence (Haider-Markel, Joslyn and Kniss, 2000). Many of these works, in my opinion, address the importance of 'cultural visibility', which is perhaps more in line for arguing that such visibility



prepares ‘the ground for gay civil rights protection’ (Hennessy, 2000: 111). Such scholarly attention that describes gay and queer images as a form of visibility is generally prefaced with the assumption that the more gay presence is associated with positive ideas or messages, the better it is for advocating gay civil rights. The affirmative images of gay and lesbian people in this way thus not only function as a kind of validation from the dominant culture, but also provide the grounds on which LGBT Pride parades can be materialised in the hope of increasing the legitimisation of lesbians and gays in the mainstream media, in the public streets and, ultimately, in civil society. Changes in lesbian and gay visibility in Taiwan, however, while certainly carving out more space, have also been a result of a number of other factors. This is to say that I have observed that the progress of gay liberation cannot purely be measured by the organising efforts of lesbians and gay men, but has to be recognised as stemming from the effects of interests and influences coming from other intentions and purposes, which are often much less linked, if not totally unrelated, to sexuality.

As observed by Rosemary Hennessy (2000), money is involved in the gay visibility scheme in the US as an effective way to facilitate ‘capital’s insidious and relentless expansion’ (p.112). I would take this further by arguing that the expansion of capital easily pushes forward an expansion of international reputation and recognition, by means of promoting a more internationalised market— one that carries out business transactions based on the appeal of sexual equality and human rights. In Danae Clark’s (1991) analysis of lesbian commodification in the US, there are concerns about lesbian and gay acceptance in the selling-and-buying market as being less about homosexuality per se, but rather about simplifying gendered non-normative sexuality as a series of ‘styles’ that can be appropriated via purchases (p. 192). According to Clark’s observation, gay and lesbian people are not so much taken as social actors, but much more significantly as consuming subjects. Therefore

the kind of visibility that queer consumption achieves, while prominent, is not a total victory, but really constitutes a more limited success. What is even more problematic is that this in turn popularises a class-specific image of gay and lesbian people for both straight and non-straight audiences. This consolidation of gay visibility easily infiltrates the production of subjectivities within national, academic and public contexts.

As indicated above, a complicity similar to that observed by Clark also takes place in Taiwan, especially when the national aspiration and large enterprises incorporate in making right-based appeals for the sexual minority, and when that mutual process is not limited to the spheres of knowledge promoted by activism and social movement, but also participates in those of popular culture and retail advertising. A reversed traffic, as it were, can be witnessed in the process of the Taiwanese government actively taking up the initiative of sponsoring (partially) the LGBT Civil Movement and boasting about its preparation to legalise same-sex partnerships under Human Basic Law.<sup>293</sup> Although the state has flashed a green light for both gay and straight citizens to be engaged in a project to promote queer visibility, it has not however aimed at reshaping the nation as a progressive and minority-respecting state and society,<sup>294</sup> but still based on a wish of creating an open and liberal self-image so as to be internationally considered progressive and different from China, to which Taiwan has simply been regarded as a rebellious province for the past 60 years

Another part of the reason for the state's inattention to the welfare of sexual minorities has been its immersion in heteronormativity. Still part of the reason, I think,

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<sup>293</sup> This boast took place in 2003 when we had our first LGBT Pride parade. Until today, this Human Basic Law has not been passed at all. Same-sex marriage or partnership, as a result, still presents a slim opportunity to be legally passed, and there is a long way to go before such attempts can ever be made again in the Legislative Yuan.

<sup>294</sup> If this indeed were the goal of the Taiwanese government, then the situation of sexual minorities would have changed drastically from 2003.

still hinges on the misinterpretation, or incommunicability, of performativity. For example, Pride events are problematically events where people presume that ‘what you see is what we are’, or perhaps that ‘what we wear and perform is our name: queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender’. Performing one’s identity by means of outer appearances at LGBT prides is taken for granted; however, it also reflects what Marjorie Garber describes as the ‘hegemonic cultural imaginary’s’ desire to see and interpret otherness in order to ‘guard against a difference that might otherwise put the identity of one’s own position into question’ (1991: 130). That is, the visually hyperbolic gender and/or sexual performance, while exposing the unnaturalness of gender binaries and heterosexuality, also functions as an embodied essence, one that is marked as drastically different from that experienced by ‘ordinary people’. Therefore society’s heteronormative ideology can still remain intact, because such performance, in this situation, is simply too unrealistic to be considered as subversive. I argue that this epistemology of visibility, whether in or out of the Pride parades of Taiwan, reveals an urgent call for a less theatrical and less extreme theorisation as the new locus of political agency. In the next chapter, I will resume looking at everyday life, which I suggest may assist in deconstructing the seemingly fundamental categories of identity which are visually represented at Pride marches, whilst also blurring the boundaries of normativity and non-normativity.

## Chapter Six | Textualised Records of Everyday Life

*Being excluded, as [homosexuals]<sup>295</sup> have been, from the making of ideology, of knowledge, and of culture means that our experience, our interests, our ways of knowing the world have not been represented in the organization of our ruling nor in the systematically developed knowledge that had entered into it.*

(Smith, 1987: 17-18)

In the previous chapter on privacy and visibility, I pointed out that my research into the Spiteful Tots community has caused some tension between the participants' ability to keep the community as part of their everyday lives and my own view that finds it worthy of close study.<sup>296</sup> This tension is hinged upon the idea that what is assumed as everyday is not special, not interesting, and instead rather banal— lacking the value to be researched. Within these two ways of seeing this online community is an assumed dichotomy that what is worth researching. The common perception has been that research should focus on something important, provocative, intriguing or extraordinary, rather than that which appears plain, mundane and ordinary. Therefore, before addressing the issue of the kind of everyday life represented in the Spiteful Tots community, I need to first affirm the value of researching the everyday, and then look at some of the posted entries of the everyday by the community. To do so there is a need to make sure what is meant, for example, when something is described as provocative or as ordinary. This way, I can be assured that the discussion will be fully balanced, that is, in order to avoid the confusion that may be caused by one's ordinariness being thought of as another's provocation. Not only do I aim to clearly contextualise both the everyday and the non-everyday, and carry this out in the context of the Spiteful Tots community, I also find it imperative to answer this

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<sup>295</sup> The original word in this bracket was 'women'.

<sup>296</sup> See this passage on the previous section of 'Research Menace?' in the chapter on Privacy and Visibility from page 226 to 232.

following question: what does this understanding of the Spiteful Tots as something ‘too everyday to be studied in a PhD project’ tell me? This is the leading question of this chapter; finding answers to this question is expected to help me become more informed and grounded in my research, opening up space for more in-depth dialogues.

To begin with, this question clearly suggests that there is a mismatch between how the Spiteful Tots community is perceived by the participants and how it is perceived by me, the researcher. For the community participants, it is nothing more than part of their everyday lives. You log on to the BBS site when you are at work, and read, chat, reply or post when you are free. And when you return from a day at work, you log on to check who is online at that time, to see if any of your posts have been replied to and to see what is going on in other communities or on other BBS sites. For a researcher coming from an academic community, however, it is not so much a site where I have found relaxation and company, but rather where I have identified interesting things to work on, locate and address – such as issues appertaining to sexual politics in contemporary Taiwan. Although part of an academic’s job is to problematise what is commonly perceived as taken-for-granted, I am aware that I need to respect the fact that I *am* problematising their everydayness, and that this strategy may be unsettling for the community’s participants. The fact that the Spiteful Tots participants still prefer to keep their everydayness intact by asking ‘what is there to research here?’ indicates to me that rather than straightforwardly challenging this notion, I need to make sense of it before I contend it. I am primarily interested in why the idea of this community being part of everyday life has been identified as so crucial by the Spiteful Tots, especially when they learned that they were part of a research process. What exactly about this location is rendered under threat by research?

## The Everyday

### What kind of everyday?

The first issue I need to address is: what is the textually represented everyday in the Spiteful Tots community? I will approach this by reading three postings which help my investigation into this concept:<sup>297</sup>

Author: Bob

Board: Shaonü<sup>298</sup>

Title: Re: He is now with someone he's only known for 2 months

Time: Thu Mar 15 00:19:32 2001

—————[←Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]

> Quoting 《John》 :

>> Quoting 《Paul》 :

>> And I know him for almost two years.

>> What a useless underground adultery.

>                    'We're still friends'.

>                    This sounds so uselessly warm.

But this sentence is very cruel.

Sometimes, though, under the mystical chemical black magic, all cruelty turns into happiness.

And you end up knowing that you will eat yourself into betterment, and getting to be over 60 kg. (big silence)<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> I made the choice of the three postings here based on the following criteria:

A. the three of them were posted around the initial period (2000-2002), the middle period (2003-2004) and the most recent period (2005-2007) so as to represent the different time periods of postings. To protect the community, I avoid quoting from postings that were made in 2008 and 2009. As the community is ordered like any other email boxes, the most recent post is the most obvious and easy to access, while the older ones are much less to be found and read.

B. the postings are understandable as they are, without the need of further explanations about the context, events or cultural background.

C. these postings can be accessed by everyone logged onto the Spiteful Tots community.

D. the three of them should consider different topics and issues, in order to show that the postings in this kind of freethinking style are very common for discussions held by the Spiteful Tots community.

<sup>298</sup> *Shaonü* means 'young women', possibly most closely related to 'ingénue' in French, addressing women who appear young, beautiful, kind-hearted and innocent. As a board, 'Shaonü' welcomes posts that, while still based on everyday life experiences, uncover the naïve, rosy-eyed and innocent side of people, especially including some ridiculously romantic ideas and thoughts on the 'Prince Charming' for male homosexual participants. This is done to the point of almost ridiculing such characteristics of *shaonü* (such as happily singing to or being sentimental about cockroaches), and so oftentimes the posts can be composed in a quite self-ridiculing way by designating the spiteful tots themselves as *shaonü*, despite their gender.

<sup>299</sup> This is a posting where Paul is the person who started the whole thread. Obviously someone he has secretly been going out with has recently started seeing someone else. It appears that they have only

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Author: Leo

Board: Fake<sup>300</sup>

Title: Re: Stealing photos

Time: Thu Jan 15 02:04:09 2004

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[←Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]

Quoting 《Brian》 :

> Quoting 《Leo》 :

>> I think when most people learn that their photos were stolen [and used to  
>> represent somebody else], their reaction is probably anger.

>> But I actually have always been hoping that my photos would be stolen  
>> someday. I think it shows a kind of appreciation of how you look. It's  
>> because other people think that you look good and attractive

>> (at least more so than the thief himself), so he uses your photo as if it was his  
>> own. Like this other personal, small and humble hope of mine has been to  
>> become someone other people would try to find [via the electronic bulletin  
>> board].<sup>301</sup> But I am ordinary like a sparrow, and this will never happen to  
>> me -\_- \*sigh\* I also want to experience what it is like to have such kind of  
>> worries that only good-looking people have.

> I can realise your dream immediately!<sup>302</sup>

No need. -\_- I wanted people to say 'Not way. You're handsome' or other lies  
like that.

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Author: Sam<sup>303</sup>

Board: Chicken Rib

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known each other for two months, while Paul has known the former person for almost two years. Then John, probably Paul's good friend, repeats what this person (whom Paul is fond of) saying to him in this post: 'We're still friends' and comments that it sounds warm ('We're still friends'; hence still able to be friendly to each other) despite useless (this is obviously not what Paul wants). And finally, Bob, reading the previous posts, remarks that this is a cruel sentence, and yet 'under the mystical chemical black magic', which means either infatuation or love, such cruelty may still gives Paul some taste of happiness. Nevertheless, once entering into this oxymoronic process of cruelty and happiness, Paul is probably going to be eating a lot to comfort himself and getting heavier. The 'big silence' in brackets is a way of expressing a kind of black humour about Paul's possible weight gain.

<sup>300</sup> As the name of the board indicates, this is a board that gathers posts on everything that has to do with fakes, falseness, copies, imitation, insincerity, untruthfulness and the like at all levels and in all ways.

<sup>301</sup> Since many younger homosexual people in Taiwan are in the habit of connecting to BBS communities every day, there are boards in other communities where gay and lesbian people can post and describe someone who they are attracted to in a specified function or place at certain day and time. The bulletin boards might assist them in getting in touch with that person. See, for example, Yang Changling (2000) 'Shenzhang yüwang zi yi—wanglu kongjieng qinyü dijing' (Stretching the wings of desire—the sexual landscape of cyberspace) for the younger homosexual people's use of BBS communities in Taiwan.

<sup>302</sup> This means that Brian can steal Leo's photo and use it as if it were Brian's. This implies that both Leo and Brian are using other dating-related websites on the WWW, and are fairly familiar with each other's personal webpages.

<sup>303</sup> The contents have been adjusted and changed, and all the information that can be used to identify individual tastes and interests is fictional.

Title: My Tasteless life

Time: Wed Jun 4 14:37:48 2006

—————[←Leave] [Page Up] [Page Down]

I was on a date Monday night and so had to miss ‘Betrayal of Love’.<sup>304</sup> Last night<sup>305</sup> right before it was to be aired, I found P online to quickly learn what the previous episode was about. I went disconnected twice. Nearly got a heart attack for this.

Work has been delayed due to some external reasons, and the first thing that came into my mind was: Great! Now I can go rent ten more episodes of ‘Betrayal of Love’. Hooray.

Somebody asked me to go to XYZ<sup>306</sup> with him.

Someone: Wanna go clubbing at XYZ tonight?

Me: Whatever for?

Someone: Dancing and picking up someone.

Me: I can do dance anywhere. Picking up someone . . . ? XYZ is not a good place to pick up someone.

Someone: You’re so lifeless.

Me: Now you know people can still survive when they are unhappy or even lifeless.

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These three posts (and their previous message threads, which are in quotes) have been chosen because they show a tendency of naturally addressing several strands of life under one discussion thread. While these are meant to be single-topic posts, they still lead to more complex conversations as others join in and go ‘off-topic’. What I mean by off-topic, however, is not that others talk about (for example) British post codes when one raises the question of when its going to rain next. This example is indeed very off-topic, and it is also likely to happen in the operation of internet chats via twitter or plurk,<sup>307</sup> where people tend to talk about anything without being bothered

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<sup>304</sup> *Betrayal of Love*, a popular South Korean soap opera.

<sup>305</sup> Therefore, the ‘last night’ here is Tuesday night.

<sup>306</sup> XYZ is the name of a night club.

<sup>307</sup> Twitter.com and plurk.com are real-time chatting online programs that enable small talk (within 140 words) to be made between the people you have added as a friend there. I have started to use plurk seriously for more than a month now and realise that strange combinations (such as rain fall and British



about the topic. In the Spiteful Tots community, it is simply not 'allowed' (and I do mean this word) to veer substantially off-topic (as in the example above). While deviating from the topic sometimes naturally happens in online conversations, the Spiteful Tots community has rules for each and every public discussion board requesting all postings cling, to some extent, to the theme of the board. Anything that is just too unrelated to the thread will be eliminated and removed by the Board Master. Therefore, going 'adequately' off-topic serves as a way to respond to the original post, invite more dialogues and share relevant experiences. Post threads slightly extend into other parts of everyday life, and become no longer only about one topic, or one sociological notion. A posting presents a mixture of many issues and ideas which can however still be organised or loosely related to what was talked about in the original discussion. It is exactly this kind of 'all-togetherness within a certain range, or in some kind of order', which manifests this tendency to formulate a careful mixture of other things as a way to respond and converse. It is also this special way of mixing that makes me think that the textuality of the community features the everyday. Also, it seems to me that to dissect matters into categories and put them under different labels when analysing their textuality shows that the analyser does not quite understand what is occurring in this online community. Rather, all the discussion boards in this community function as representations of that which is experienced in different ways or from diversified perspectives about some specific thing. Looking at the wholeness of everyday life is what appears to work here, as it embraces whatever comes up on the board. As previously stated, the rule of the community has always been that, while each board is designated a topic, conversation is fine as long as the discussion is loosely related to that field. Consequently, maintaining a vision of wholeness about the everyday in my analysis of the Spiteful Tots is a suitable one, and

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post codes) are not a rare combination at all.

will lead us to understand further about the textuality is this community .

The quoted postings imply, narrate and represent experiences, ideas and perspectives gained from a variety of materials, surroundings, encounters and interactions. People ‘show up’ with their own thoughts, and share a slice of their lives, not by straightforwardly displaying it, but by offering it in response to other people’s sentiments or reflections. This kind of textual interaction hints that a friendly atmosphere is generally expected in the community. Such friendliness and laid-back-ness is found to be much more significant for the participants than the passionate discussions or even disputes (‘flaming’<sup>308</sup>) which may be seen in other online communities of a similar composition.<sup>309</sup> The site of the Spiteful Tots is all about socialising, and even if there is an attempt at making a discussion specifically about some personal issue (such as the second posting), there is still vibrant response and engagement with the topic.

Due to their relation with the textual snippets or thoughts from daily life, the postings read like informal stream of consciousness thinking, connecting one thought to another by way of a variety of topics. While this may start with something specific (an event or a thought), it easily and simultaneously turns into both a self dialogue and an invitation to ‘look at a part of my life’. Whether the post is added in with others’ responses or not, the contents jumps from one topic, aspect or narrative to another, warranting little explanation and few conjunctions. In between the lines, public and

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<sup>308</sup> ‘Flaming’ was first used academically to mean online quarrels in Mark Dery’s 1993 article ‘Flame Wars’ and his 1994 book *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*. Later, in 1997, Millard wrote about flaming in his essay ‘I Flamed Freud: A Case Study in Teletextual Incendiarism’.

<sup>309</sup> While there have certainly been quarrels and verbal conflicts in the community, the main idea, as has been discussed in the methodology, is that there should be a consensus of being friendly and positive to the people in the inner circle of the community, which is constituted by people who are offline friends, or friend’s friend(s). At one point they addressed this intention to maintain a generally good atmosphere in the community as being hypocritical, and some even admitted that they were cowardly and irresponsible in confronting what was rendered under threat in some of these circumstances. While there is certainly conflict in the Spiteful Tots community, I argue that the work of managing to maintain some kind of harmony there has still mostly succeeded over the years. This comes from the premise that I have studied the Spiteful Tots community as a whole, without paying so much attention to their own differences in opinions and thoughts.

private realms interweave; mixing as such takes place without the need for segregation. From the above postings, it can be observed that talks about the public and private naturally take place on the same public board (Chicken rib, Shaonü and Fake). Their ability to coexist without needing to be screened from one another tells me something about the main idea of the Spiteful Tots community, which is that it should be a free place for participants to talk, share, whine and express themselves. However, typed talking and sharing is easily cast as unexciting and uninteresting, associated with the discourse of banality, ordinariness and/or boredom. There is an association of people who are out there—outside of the Spiteful Tots community, that is—with all that is attractive and interesting, where those in here are assumed to be much less glamorous or attractive. With an inclination to view themselves as homely and ordinary, the Spiteful Tots participants enter into a discourse where ‘us’ relates to those people who are not as busily engaged as the good-looking ones, for whom, life is simply more ‘lively’.<sup>310</sup> Self-demeaning seems a way to further consolidate the everyday ordinariness of the community—since we are nothing interesting, there are unlikely to be any academic researchers who are interested in studying us.

When analysing the everyday in an offline context, we researchers usually take note of the routine practices of everyday life. What these routine practices include may take the form of activities, or behaviours. It may involve the making of food, the purchase of groceries, or a daily walk to pick up the children. In the online space occupied by the Spiteful Tots community, however, the everyday is textually offered with the connotations of human *labour*—its persistence and endurance when the internet at home has grown unstable, when somehow what has been typed and posted

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<sup>310</sup> Whilst noticing this dichotomy occurring between the posted lines, I do not think that it is necessarily implies that those who go online and use the internet frequently are homely and ordinary people. As written about in the chapters of Taiwan in context and Methods and Methodology, the internet is very much an integral part of everyone’s life. Although there are exceptions, the elderly and more rural people, the online participants who I am talking about and their generation and social circle cannot be adequately characterised by such demographic facts.

disappears due to some inexplicable computer failure, or when the composer of a post just needs to sit several hour to finish reading or writing it. While such situations are not constant, for a community that has been in existence since 2000, it is more than reasonable to acknowledge that the online participants are no strangers to such unfortunate happenings. So why do the participants keep on participating in the Spiteful Tots community? I argue that it is due to the redemptive power that human labour has. The everyday as textually reproduced (written) here in the online is invoked precisely as remembered and already-experienced, a form of life that is able to survive the hardships of a being reared within a heterosexually structured family or society. This collectivity, which I attach to the thousands of posted conversations similar to the above, can arguably be seen as the ‘Spiteful Tots historiography’ in the form of all the mentioned or implied daily life objects, residences, gestures, actions, and exchanges, that are configured into online textual representations. In this manner, the everyday takes on the import of a technology-assisted correspondence between human activity and social environment.

### **Why everyday?**

Even though I have briefly explained one aspect of the everyday as all-inclusive and am keen to not make distinctions, I must also recognise the fact that the everyday is similar to Rey Chow’s (2002) analysis:

The everyday: an open, empty category, one that allows critics to fill it with critical agendas as they please. This is why both its defenders and its detractors can use it to stake their political claims, either as the bedrock of reality, the ground zero of cultural representation, or as a misleading set of appearances concealing ideological exploitation, a collective false consciousness. (2002: 639)

It is precisely because the everyday contains anything and everything without

necessarily telling distinguishing one part from another, that I need to further argue for my application and utilisation of the everyday regarding the the Spiteful Tots community. One of my premises for doing this research is to tease out issues that which can help express the perspectives of Spiteful Tots participants, perspectives that reflect the concrete social, historical, and geopolitical detail of their lives. Central to this concern is, I think, the validation of the everyday, which develops a particular way of seeing, that is, from where these participants live, into the powers, processes and relations that organise and determine their everyday context of that seeing. While this seems a circuitous research strategy, it emphasises, however, the importance of always taking into account the context and the position of the subjects.<sup>311</sup> The benefit of this is that as researchers we can develop a closer observation with normativity, or heteronormativity, without subscribing immediately to the idea of resistance. The everyday gives us a chance to see what this hegemonic discourse and socio-cultural system is really like for the Spiteful Tots participants who live in it and with it on a daily basis. Another benefit is that by doing so I can be temporarily exempt from any involvement with the idea of the ordinary. ‘Ordinariness’, on the one hand, is certainly constructed on the socio-cultural site of the everyday, and yet on the other, it is connected to the idea of being ‘good and normal’ in a harmless and non-threatening way. As civil partnerships and/or same-sex marriage have provoked many heated debates over normativity and queerness in the UK, Western Europe and North America, I would like to keep my discussion here primarily informed by the everyday, rather than by the ordinariness or normality that relates to the kind of normativity that has arisen from these recent legal enactments.

In the Spiteful Tots community, there is no norm or unwritten regulation that

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<sup>311</sup> While this point of departure in choosing to focus on the everyday may ring a bell and hark back to situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991), this chapter mainly centres on the discussion of their everyday online textuality, which informs a concrete and dynamic representation of the community’s subjectivity.

defines what is everyday and thus part of the community, and what is not-everyday and thus outside of the community. The in-and-out mechanism, as pointed out in the previous chapter, is much more significantly determined by who the community's new comer knows before coming to the community, how long this person has been around and what s/he has posted or said in the community. This is to say, that all kinds of matters that happen in the context of the participants' everyday life are potentially ripe for incorporation into the postings of the community. Although whether such potentiality can be materialised still depends upon the attitude or decision of major participants of the community, I think it is, however, safe to argue that the Spiteful Tots online community as created and operated by these participants was never meant to be obstructive. To sum up, my choice of appealing to the everyday relates to the fact that everydayness is a concept that always calls for contextualisation; it returns the issue back to the human subjects' daily routine of living, and thus situates heteronormativity as a form or a source of power connected to that everyday context. The everyday functions as that which contains the praxis of heteronormativity, rather than becoming heteronormativity itself. I also believe that it is helpful to establish that the everyday is epistemologically available for every participant in the Spiteful Tots community before moving onto analyses of who and what can benefit from this emphasis and utilisation of the concept of the everyday.

### **The theorisation of the everyday**

Having clarified why I chose the everyday as the conceptual tool for helping me think through some of the issues in this chapter, I now return to the three earlier posts.

While the selected texts are based on recounting everyday life experiences through different aspects, the overall content seems to be a mixture of almost anything that came to the mind of the composer when he posted it. I find Henri Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualisation of the everyday very useful in the sense of reading the posts as a

kind of jumbled representation and/or reflection of life. Lefebvre says:

Everyday life, in a sense residual, defined by ‘what is left over’ after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities [. . .] must be defined as a totality. [. . .] Everyday life is profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them with all their differences and their conflicts; it is their meeting place, they bond, their common ground. And it is in everyday life that the sum of total relations which make the human— and every human being— a whole takes its shape and its form. In it are expressed and fulfilled those relations which bring into play the totality of the real, albeit in a certain manner which is always partial and incomplete: friendship, comradeship, love, the need to communicate, play, etc. [. . .] The substance of everyday life—‘human raw material’ in its simplicity and richness—pierces through all alienation and establishes ‘disalienation’<sup>312</sup> (1991: 97).

According to Lefebvre, the value of ‘everyday life’ as a thinking apparatus is for countering the compartmentalisation that occurs in modern capitalist society, where elements of contemporary human life are differentiated and separated, for example, into work and leisure, or public and private. Such demarcation shows that activities are often deemed to take place in different spheres while, in fact, the collectivity of all these discrete and disparate components shapes, influences and even constitutes a fully-functioning individual. It is this Lefebvrian sense of the unity and totality of everyday life that I will explore in this chapter. I also attempt to investigate how and why the textual exchanges of the Spiteful Tots are such an integral part of their everyday life as complex and embodied people.

While Lefebvre’s theorisation of the everyday is helpful, it does present

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<sup>312</sup> It should be pointed out that the word ‘disalienation’ does not come out of nowhere, but rather, that Lefebvre’s ideas are somewhat immersed in the early Marxist theory of ‘alienation’. In other words, for Lefebvre, everyday life is important because it also lies within the circuit of production. Like Bakhtin, Lefebvre shares some of Bakhtin’s post-Cartesian views, and valorizes pre-capitalist and premodern societies where work and leisure were more integrated. The ‘total man’ is analogous to the Marxian concept of ‘species being’. For Lefebvre, an understanding of the social totality and the refutation of bourgeois idealism can only emerge through the analysis of everyday life. For more discussion please see Gardiner (2000).

problems for my application of this idea, namely that he made attempts to elaborate the now distant postwar dynamics, and that the contemporary introduction of the media and internet has caused the everyday to look quite indistinguishable from the extraordinary, rendering the everyday quite different from the kind of everyday Lefebvre had in mind. Michael Gardiner's *Critiques of Everyday Life* (2000) is helpful in that it overviews the several volumes where Lefebvre works with the theorisation of the everyday. According to Gardiner, Lefebvre's conceptualising of the everyday happened in a drastically different time from the present. Lefebvre speaks from the vital position of the immediate postwar period, and his intervention at that moment showed that he was very critical of the domination that occurred in the early post-war years. Lefebvre called into question the freedoms offered by representative democracy, capitalism, or the state socialism of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European bloc of nations. To his mind, freedom could not be realised within these institutional frames of practice. In these circumstances, the everyday was located in the region outside official politics and large economic organisations. In 1947, Lefebvre writes in his *Critique of Everyday Life* that 'the critique of everyday life involves a critique of political life, in that everyday life already contains and constitutes such a critique: in that it *is* that critique' (1991: 94). Therefore the critical issue identified in this concept of daily life was the recognition of big politics failing to offer an adequate domain for human life. The everyday thus belongs to the realm of the human, or the humanitarian, whilst politics is unwanted and useless with regard to human freedom and human life.

Having recognised the importance of the everyday as a resistance to politics and institutions, Lefebvre is, however, aware of the limitation of this notion of the everyday as a critical position. He points out:



a problem which is fundamental for the critique of everyday life. [. . .] Many men [sic][. . .] do not know their own lives very well. [. . .] Men [sic] have no knowledge of their own lives: they see them and act them out via ideological themes and ethical values. (1991: 92)

In making lucid this idea, Lefebvre shows an awareness of the limitation of the everyday, as well as people's un contemplated thoughts in everyday life. The general public's lack or insufficiency of self-reflection, in Lefebvre's view, does not result in critical social change, and neither does it automatically point to a critique or a space of liberation. Instead, everyday life is often one of ideological distortion, of absorption into the language of domination, of internalising and prescribing hegemonic institutions.

Mark Poster (2002), following and examining Lefebvre's notion of the everyday against today's transformed socio-cultural backdrop of media and communication, has also noted that:

the category of the everyday and [. . .] its critical capacities in the current context, when information machines or media have been disseminated widely in places like the home and the street, perhaps [undermines] the boundary between the quotidian and the extraordinary, the private and the public. I shall argue that the media transform place and space in such a way that what had been regarded as the locus of the everyday can no longer be distinguished as separate from its opposite. This change operates to nullify earlier notions of the everyday but also opens the possibility for a reconfigured concept of daily life which might yet contain critical potentials. (2002: 743)

What Poster means by this 'everyday's opposite' or 'the earlier notions of the everyday' hinges upon his reading of Lefebvre's move to the everyday. Poster thinks that it has been about identifying the human as 'a "subject" rich in potential subjectivity', and that the everyday would not be where the human existed as 'an "object" of social organization' (Lefebvre 1971: 59). Poster (2002) thinks that

Lefebvre searches for some kind of hope and optimism by finding a way to resistance in his theorising of the everyday, but it actually instead ‘points us to the conceptual need for a theory of the quotidian that enables a grasp of the specific cultural mechanisms through which the subject is constituted, and by which the subject constitutes its world’ (2002: 748). This is especially true for the modern world full of various instances of media and communication. Poster (2002) observes that media and information machines bring all kinds of culture into close proximity and that such close contact is actually impossible without these technological devices. He further writes that:

In this way, media accentuate greatly the tendency of daily city life [sic] to mix populations from different ethnic or racial origins. Media enact this mixing in ways different from the urban topography. Juxtaposing cultures in media is often haphazard and instantaneous, whereas cities feature neighborhoods with particular ethnic groupings. Media tend in this respect to destabilize local customs, to extend awareness of other ways of life, and to add complexity to the process of socialization. (2002: 751)

The fact that everyday life has no official status within the dominant regimes of politics and economics all the more hints at this possibility of technology assisting the ‘destabilisation of customs and extension of awareness’. If society is indeed constituted by the segregation of the distinct spheres and organised practices known as ‘institutions’, as Max Weber (1978) argues, then that which is informal, unorganised, coincident, and messy may then be considered part of the everyday. In these circumstances, the everyday is subject to a distracted and inconsistent participation in the realm of the political and ideological. Nonetheless, with the help of the technology, the everyday, while informal, unorganised, coincident, and messy, becomes the site where ‘institutions’ exert their power and try to take control while the users of technology make the decisions of whether to comply or not. This is, I

think, what makes this study of the Spiteful Tots community's everydayness in urgent need of critical attention.

### **Textuality about the everyday**

In order to further understand how the everyday may fall outside the locus of the political, I suggest that we start by in considering how the trespassing as well as interweaving of private and public spheres is made possible via the online textuality of the Spiteful Tots community. Participants in the community have long been contributing to online discussions that are both slices of their personal life and critical views on issues current at the time of discussion. Most of the time, both public and political issues are juxtaposed with personal life stories without any effort to categorise. For example, the presidential election in March 2008 was embedded into some consoling posts in response to the death of a participant's grandmother. Another emotionally charged post was added right after 911, which stated that even though this participant knew about the terrible violence the US has wreaked upon the Middle East, she still found the terrorist attack completely wrong. She further rejected the idea that it was not politically correct to feel unsympathetic towards those Americans killed in the attack, since part of her extended family was actually in New York. She strongly condemned such thinking and eventually concluded that this world is messed up by politics that produce endless vicious cycles of violence. There is also another post in response to a recent article written by the famous Taiwanese feminist scholar Dr. Huang Chang-ling (2008), entitled 'Mingzhu shehui juhe keneng?' (How is Democratic Society Possible?). The article was forwarded and reposted on a board with mention of the 'Wild Strawberries Student Movement'<sup>313</sup>. The replier seemed a

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<sup>313</sup> Towards the end of 2008, undergraduate students initiated a sit-in movement against the 'Parade and Assembly Law' which contradicts the Constitution Law. The protesters ended the sit-in by wearing mocking costumes of former emperors and current mainland Chinese Communist officials in a parade that had been officially sanctioned by the government. The main focus of this movement demanded that the current Taiwanese government of President Ma Ying-jeou abolish a law requiring protesters to

bit irritated by a sentence stating that Taiwanese people's respect of the public appeal of the Wild Strawberries Movement was important and precious.<sup>314</sup> The replier first asked a simple question: 'Does silence of the public mean people's respect for it? Is it really respect or negligence?' And then he comments: 'It is strange that indifference and the superficial non-dissenting view towards this movement should actually be taken to be respect'. In all these instances above, public events, views and opinions are framed in a small scale that holds no more than a handful of people's perspectives and life experiences. Their opinions are accompanied by some intensely personal emotions (sadness, worry or anger), whilst also chronicling the historical moments of the larger context at both local and global levels. While this juxtaposition of bigger-smaller, local-global or private-public is by no means particular or revolutionary, it is however noteworthy that private interpretations and experiences are always *the* part that occupy centre stage of all posts in the Spiteful Tots community. This is to say that these public events and happenings are always already textualised through the participants' perspectives, emanating from their quotidian endeavours regarding both emotional feelings and everyday practices.

I would thus like to propose that such electronic posts may be read as constituting contemporary records of gay (and to a less extent lesbian) life experiences that provides some insights into their historiography. The posts constitute a kind of open texture that can require a thousand different interpretations or possibilities for the posts to be understood, framed, or applied to certain situations.

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obtain prior permission for all public protests. They made their point by merely notifying local officials of the march but not waiting for approval. The reason that this was explained by the expression 'Wild Strawberries' Strawberries is a term used for students born after the 1970s and used by both the media and public in Taiwan. It means a bunch of people who cannot take much pressure, frustration and difficulty due to lack of exposure to hard times. Therefore, the term 'Wild Strawberries' shows they have a strength of their own by being 'wild', instead of 'farm-grown'.

<sup>314</sup>The original words were: '換言之，在台灣藍綠分裂的格局下，在認同政治莫大的驅力之下，這場新世代的運動，在公開訴求上始終沒有背離這個社會的最大公約數，也就是關於民主價值的追求與實踐。同樣重要的是，所有參與的民眾，也對於這個公開訴求是尊重的。這樣的自我節制，我認為是非常值得珍惜的。'.

While the three quoted postings read as defining the posters' work, relationships and self-esteem, they can however, also refer to the unlimited uncertainties of meaning when it is employed in different contexts. Then, in this sense, most specifically about the kind of textualised records the online participants collectively produce, the postings may be suggested as concrete traces of life trajectories and scraps of autobiography in forms that may be characterised as colloquial, dialogic and informal. Moreover, this renders what has been defined as 'history' by Jean-François Lyotard as highly relevant. Lyotard makes the comment that:

History is made up of wisps of narratives, stories that one tells, that one hears, that one acts out; the people do not exist as a subject but as a mass of millions of insignificant and serious little stories that sometimes let themselves be collected together to constitute big stories and sometimes disperse into digressive elements. (Lyotard 1977: 39)

In this postmodern definition of Lyotard's, history is far from the authoritative, univocal and linear narrative of a nation. It hardly follows the single-minded proposition that, serving as an arrow of progression, makes history coherent, honourable and seamless. Rather, history is not about the past, but what is chosen to be remembered and represented. It is close to what is typed in the Spiteful Tots community: the heterogeneous and fragmentary first-hand accounts presented from many different and contestable perspectives, where the narratives are multiple and complex, at times contradictory or even illogical.

To be able to handle all the scraps of accounts and broken narratives in one group, or in a society for that matter, requires a plethora of ideas which cater to protean flexibility, multiplicity and conformity to the ever-changing and non-conclusive present. Such a proposal reveals that a reliance upon the familiar distinction between public and the private is no longer possible, a revelation that

fundamentally upsets the markers of domestic affairs and political business in each domain of life. It also transfers the power to the less powerful— those who are not endowed with a position whereby they can interfere with the mainstream representation of a sexual minority. They can now write about themselves, not in a way that is bent on pleasing others, or drawing attention to themselves, but as a means of socialising, as a method that allow sthem to become immersed in an atmosphere both friendly and fun. While this turn of (electronic) writing necessarily characterises the everyday life as a genre that is apt to change, flow and transition, it also marks a breakthrough that subverts both the understanding and writing of one’s own history, especially in its texture as anti-generic and counter-discourse. The alternative writing of autobiographical history poses a challenge to dominant socio-political, heteronormative structures of textual authority and generic conventions traditionally associated with the writing of national, or other presentable histories.<sup>315</sup>

Examining the online textuality of the Spiteful Tots community, I think it is also useful to look at the way the postings are conditioned by a kind of ‘typing style’ that serves as an embodiment of the human-technological as both ‘subject rich in potential subjectivity’ and ‘object of social organisation’. ‘Typing style’ differs from offline ‘writing style’ in that, at least in the case of the Spiteful Tots community<sup>316</sup>, it involves emoticons and actions in brackets (‘stage directions’) which indicate one’s facial expressions or mental status. It also tends to present itself in the form of colloquialisms<sup>317</sup> that do not appear so often in written conversations. Also, some

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<sup>315</sup> In this case, I am thinking more towards a textbook history of the nation, such as that in Taiwan.

<sup>316</sup> The Spiteful Tots participants’ preferences in choices of emoticons, word order, employment of symbols and their mutual influences upon one another in these regards situate this community as something unique and interesting.

<sup>317</sup> For example, in Mandarin people say: ni shi go le mei a ni (你是夠了沒啊你, perhaps similar to ‘that’s enough’ or ‘you cut it out’). The first and last character ‘ni’ (you) repeats twice in the same sentence, expressing the tone of the sentence. In writing it is usually considered redundant and does not tend to appear in the main content of an essay, article, or journal. But this is seen relatively often in posts as they are symbols that are treated as extensions of daily dialogue.

creative juxtaposition of different signs and symbols<sup>318</sup> may well be deployed to create new ways of online articulation that go on to become a fad amongst online participants.<sup>319</sup> In other words, typing styles enable a more enriched form of expression that sits between the conventions of both speaking and writing; typing styles come from both offline speaking and writing experiences, and yet its interpretation must be informed by the ability of the composer and receiver to utilise the graphic/visual in the process of communication. The way ideas and opinions are articulated via online typing is constituted by a special tone of voice that cannot be heard but is only possible through the keyboard and the BBS program.<sup>320</sup>

As a result, I argue that, in between these online endeavours to frame and connect one's own life to the social, cultural, national, or international, meticulous attention needs to be paid to the conspicuous element of emotion or feelings that are revealed in between the typed lines. I put emphasis on the emotional in online textuality because it can best invoke both the reader and poster's memory, reaction and sympathy – the latter resulting from an identification with a similar kind of previous experience or feeling. An emotionally charged piece of typed text usually provokes many readers to respond, as it gives out something that can be easily recognised as well as felt. It is more than usual, that, while articulating the cause and

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<sup>318</sup> The employment of signs and symbols can, for example, be used to highlight some part of a sentence, or function as a new way to express an idea more fully than that of the traditionally spoken or written forms.

<sup>319</sup> I have noticed that many of the Spiteful Tots participants were born from round the same era, one which makes Japanese comics books part of their childhood everyday. Many would be familiar with the names of contemporary Japanese comic artists, appreciate Japanese popular culture by typing song lyrics in Japanese (texts which are omitted in this thesis due to irrelevance), and would also be able to discuss the plots from some long-lasting, famous Japanese comic series. I think that the way Japanese comics have developed to express ideas and stories is in many ways similar to the way the Spiteful Tots participants express themselves. Many comic books from the late 1980s and 1990s incorporate what are now called emoticons and stage directions in their pages. I do suspect that the typing style of the Spiteful Tots participants is heavily influenced by this shared interest in reading comic books.

<sup>320</sup> Brenda Danet has written a book called *CyberPI@y: Communicating Online* about the utilisation of signs and symbols to achieve a kind of playfulness. The way I am approaching this communication style is not based on the idea of playfulness, though it is certainly a part of it, but works outwards from the concept of the everyday. I see many new possibilities where communication is another communication tool or style that helps and facilitates understanding of people's everyday lives.

effect structure of any experience in life, the Spiteful Tots participants would also naturally add in emotionally-related textures of everyday life in the form of worry, anxiety, joy, doubt and annoyance. I believe it is precisely this emotionally charged sense of self-writing/typing that occurs in personal histories related by homosexual people themselves that gives critical significance to their everyday textual representations and conversations. It can be understood as a source of 'raw humanmaterial' and a way into re-envisioning their contemporary lives from the root— from the everyday feeling of being homosexual in contemporary Taiwan.

### **Space and Place**

So far I have tried to align the Spiteful Tots participants and their textuality in an everyday Lefebvrian sense, maintaining that the everyday is a conceptual tool that increases understanding of the community's daily postings. I have also tried to theorise this kind of posted message as a significant source of life material for the contemporary networked Taiwanese male homosexual. However, I have not yet looked into how existing heteronormative politics in everyday life is viewed by these participants in the community, and how they respond to those politics. Response to the mainstream society, after all, is ultimately why this everydayness interests me, as it provides another site of resistance that is not claimed by the institution. For this purpose, I want to introduce two boards - 'Black Box' and 'Qiaojia' - to investigate how the participants carve out different kinds of online space in resistance to everyday lives shaped by heteronormative systems.

The Black Box board is, I argue, a kind of temporary space created in response to the 'normal' place. To explain this, I need to clarify the difference between space and place. As Wood and Smith (2005: 181) argue, 'Places constrain and affect the movements of people who construct spaces in response'. They further contend that space occurs within a place that constrains and affects people, since that space tends



to be constructed as a response to those very constraints and affects, which from the outset, define a place. Accordingly, space does not exist alone, and is always already mediated by and attached to place. It thus may be viable to designate the heteronormative world outside of the Spiteful Tots community as a large terrain that contains many places which constrain and affect people. In this understanding then, the somewhat poetic, text-mediated spaces of bulletin boards that exist inside the community become the centre of study. In the instance of the Spiteful Tots community, it is obvious that one of the most prominent ways to construct space is by online textuality that marks how these participants actively interact and respond to the many places organised by heteronormativity. My examination and interpretation of homespun texts read against the participants' daily realities is therefore in reference to their idea of 'the home' as one of the most vital places they associate with; a place that involves an emotional and experiential connection between community life and everyday life. To facilitate analyses of the postings, I strongly argue that it becomes much clearer when my understanding of the postings can be framed by the constraints and affects of the family home. I theorise the postings as constituted by the typing spaces made available as alternatives to the family home that has always been perceived as permanent. Thus the textuality may best be thought of as a kind of poetics or creative writing which functions as a resistant response to the power and politics of the everyday.

### **Black Box**

On the entry page, the bulletin board 'Black Box' invitation reads:

This board is for contemplating the universe as a big black box. Inside it live animals and their black boxes: dance culture, pop culture, music, an elevator, a closet, a cinema, Pandora, a pub, a box in the theatre, a basement, a jailer's room, a body, a church, a window, an aircraft, a car, an universe.

All the serious and non-serious living life principles are put in boxes.

The last box is about mutual comforting or warming, opening or closing.  
Open minds in a closed space. Petal-tearing as a moral or immoral act.  
Fawn. Spatial. Closed. Last. Ecstatic. Botanic. Mental. Open. First. Sad.

The rule for this board: All talks must be focused on a closed space. In titles you have to start your post with [□□].

↑↑

This is where you type the place you want to talk about. ^^;

This invitation elicits particular kinds of post which transform the electronic board into a space of imagination. For instance, it says that inside the board ‘live animals and their black boxes: dance culture, pop culture, music, an elevator, a closet, a cinema, Pandora, a pub, a box in the theatre, a basement, a jailer’s room, a body, a church, a window, an aircraft, a car, a universe’ . All such things obviously cannot really ‘live’ inside the Black Box board, but they can be represented by typed text. Behind the text exists a manifestation of the poster/typer’s imagination, or simply some random thoughts about life. The difference is perhaps that, by textually representing one’s imagination (or random thoughts), one becomes concentrated on that typing space. In this following message, the writer focuses on the imagination/thought/text situated inside the typing space of the board, and finishes a post about his family that comes out rather poetically. In a post entitled ‘My room: a hidden place’, a participant types:

Title: [My room] My room: a hidden place<sup>321</sup>

Board: Black Box

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<sup>321</sup> The author of this post deleted the ‘title’, ‘time’ and ‘author’ items; the title can only be viewed from the discussion thread list. Complete anonymity in this board is not a requirement, but is certainly not uncommon. From the way that I read this post, I guessed the poster to be s a male homosexual. This is not based on clear evidence, but is what makes sense to me when I read this piece of text.

Nobody else usually comes in my room.  
Actually I shouldn't say usually; I should say nobody comes in my room.  
Only some ex-boyfriend and a couple of other people come in for a night.  
Even at the time of his visiting, he was already my ex.

I wish my room will always be black.  
I wish my room will never be quiet.  
I wish my mother will never come in.

I wish I won't die in my own room.  
I wish someday my room can be a hidden place.  
Since it can't be a secret place.<sup>322</sup>

In this poem-like post, it seems to me that this is a room that belongs to a participant where, although nobody usually comes in, his mother one day might. The fact that 'nobody else usually comes in my room' shows that there are people around who might actually enter, despite very few actually doing so. The rare exception is a one-time partner, who has been in the room before. This could be because the poster refuses the intervention of others, or because he is rejected by others. Either way, the exceptions are well remembered including details at the time ('he was already my ex'). While the poster acts like an aloof loner, he is still hoping for company (for example, hoping that the room shall never be quiet, and that s/he will not die there). He occupies an ambivalent position, both hoping to be accompanied (and thus accepting others) and wanting a space (and thus rejecting others). The last few lines are especially intriguing. He wants his mother never to enter this room, and that (or so that?) this room can be a hidden, albeit not a secret, place. It seems to me that this person wishes to hide in the room from their mother, and that whatever it is that he wants to hide is not a quite secret; it can be something people all know about, but still needs to be hidden, or at least not talked about. Although not clearly referenced, I

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<sup>322</sup> The punctuation of this post is arranged according to the original post, in the hope of illustrating its tone.

think this post applies to a man, yearning for companionship, who is keeping his sexuality to himself, although it might already have been guessed at or found out by his mother. If this reading is valid, then it can be inferred that the protagonist 'I' is situated in a family where his sexuality has been learned about by the mother but where she still pretends she does not know, or simply does not talk about it. So whether this room of the person is in the family home or not, it may still read as a symbol of that which is known but cannot be articulated. In this case, it is surely the poster's sexuality that is hidden in the room, leading him simultaneously accepting and rejecting other people's presence, company and possible probing.

The second post taken is written in a narrative style despite being short in length:

Title: [Island 6]<sup>323</sup> A Place Far From Home

Author: Rick

Time: Wed Sep 10 01:27:45 2003

—————[←Leave] [PgUp] [PgDn]

He put down the luggage.

He seldom talked about this thing with other people. He just wanted to go away, but he chose a stupid method. He was not stupid, but he always chose unwisely. He chose to leave, disappear from this disappointing island. There was a person who loved him but he did not believe in, there were several ex-boyfriends, and their boyfriends. And several friends he hadn't seen much. He slept with them one by one. He bade goodbye afterwards one by one.

He put the things they gave him into the suitcase after all these.

This post depicts a significant departure that is about to happen. The island which the protagonist is leaving, possibly Taiwan, contains many unfinished relationships which the protagonist needs to respond to. While leaving is a choice of one's own, it also

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<sup>323</sup> Island 6 is the sixth post in the series about an island. This series of island posts are written as fictional narratives, reading like a small part (usually a passage or two) of a longer story. They seem to be some kind of writing practice by the author, and there are some sentiments expressed in the passages which might linger on in the reader's mind after reading them.

presumes some reasons— leaving may occur due to some mishap, the experience of exclusion, some deep disappointment, or pure incompatibility with where this protagonist first come from. I think that the ‘stupid method’ mentioned in the passage, particularly, is not necessarily about the leaving itself, but perhaps relates to the unmentioned reason for leaving, and/or the ceremonial gestures the poster makes before leaving: sleeping with men, bidding each of them farewell, receiving gifts and putting these in a suitcase to be carried away with him. This short passage describes an imagined, private leaving party, perhaps held in the hope of experiencing the sentiments evoked in the preparation of leaving home for someplace afar; it seems to me that it is written by someone who, in reality, may not be able to go away and live elsewhere.

The two posts show different scenes and situations, and hint at the possible reason behind the textual typing. Although neither of them is in any way clear about what exactly the situation or the issue was when the authors posted, both messages still, in a way, invite the reader to concentrate on the temporary space inside each post-reading on the Black Box board. Typing out what one wants to express, albeit appearing rather ambiguous and unclear, becomes as good as recording significant moments of both life experiences and thoughts. In practice, concentrating on this ‘black box’ may well become a short journey for exploring the inner self. The Black Box board can be seen as a special public discussion forum on which replies are uncommon. Rather, each message tends to exist as independent and self-sufficient. The texts are as they are, rather than to be further discussed, and they are certainly not to be questioned or challenged. While every single posted message on the Black Box board reads like a private self-journey of one’s own imaginations and thoughts, the board itself functions as a place where public and private boundaries become necessarily blurred. It is as though everyone involved with this board chooses only to

stand, read and think, without recognising the most recognised function of a bulletin board— that is as an agora. In this, it functions in a similar way to a quiet gallery where inner thoughts are displayed like paintings on a wall, ready for individual user’s viewing and appreciation, but not for commentaries directly attached to the paintings.

The chance to pause and think is precious, for it allows for thoughts and feelings which are usually scattered and caught up in the more familiar responses of reaction, interaction and protection (of oneself), to be solely directed towards a particular moment. Based on personal understandings and individual perspectives, the posts on the Black Box board are not debatable and do not require the response of others. In the texts, the space in each black box (demarcated by the independent posts) is made meaningful via the effort of message-composing, as it reveals people’s more settled, digested ideas and awareness. The ideas and awareness are given depth through each participant’s feelings and memories with no disguise. In this scenario, what comes to be known as political or is in close relation to issues of power, such as the notions of ‘peripheral’, ‘central’, ‘marginal’ and ‘metropolitan’ (terms useful in understanding the physical places of daily life) are no longer helpful for describing the cartography of their own experienced lives. Black-box spaces are not as readily related to issues of power when typed textuality is used metaphorically and poetically. Since the board helps to address lived sentiment by evoking spatial associations of a black box for the purpose of concentration, the typed textuality on this board demands the Spiteful Tots community be a place that contains a winding path, a quiet corner, and a hiding spot that, though still visited, exist peacefully and free from noise.

Typing reflexively and sometimes imaginatively crystallises a product that, I argue, can be treated as a kind of response to the typer’s everyday by constructing another kinds of everyday scenarios that are concretised via each typed word and

symbol. This proves that participants feel safe enough to be visible in a highly textual and subjective manner, and that they also consider themselves mutually respected by the reader and replier, based on the way the community is organised and operated. Refusing to be assimilated into hetero-normative socio-familial systems, the Spiteful Tots community renders their textuality as a product of resistance to repeated daily encounters, connections and visits. Despite being fragmented and non-coherent, typed textuality helps those, in this example, make sense of their own position in the home. It also assists in displaying the participant's thoughts inside the 'Black Box', which is situated away from familial criticism or judgment about their sexuality. Therefore, Black Box serves as an alternative space that encourages daily production and re-connection to past events, daily items, unexpressed sentiment and touching memories. Black Box also functions as a way of making oneself more comfortable with the politics and permanence of one's family home, where the values, ideologies and beliefs reject homosexuality.

### **Qiaojia**

It is not only the 'Black Box' board that invites posts that resist the heteronormativity that is most clearly represented at the family home, discussions on home and family are also proposed for community boards in their own right. For instance, the Qiaojia (leaving home) board began from a small textual exchange on a participant's personal board.<sup>324</sup> Someone asked the Board Master why he had not been seen around the community, and some days later he appeared and replied that he had left his home for several days because he had a 'cold-war' fight<sup>325</sup> with his father. This admission resulted in many more follow-up posts, and the discussion was so active that a board

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<sup>324</sup> Although I thought it was a personal board, it is however a public board accessible for all BBS participants whose online modes are either *tongzhi* or adult.

<sup>325</sup> This is a literal translation from Mandarin 冷戰, which means two people having a fight without actually talking and/or seeing each other.

dedicated to the topic of *qiaojia* was created. This was one of the few cases in the community where a public discussion board did not have to go through the usual application procedure in order to be launched.

In this section, I will further argue, based on the quoted texts, that heteronormativity, as sustained everywhere in societies generally, is not a cultural and social ideology that one can battle and live without, but has been treated as a given that these participants must culturally, socially and economically live with. I will offer three quotes from the Qiaojia board. In each instance, contextualisation is given according to my knowledge at the time of reading the messages. Each example is assumed to be an indicator of the participants' awareness, formed from a fixed point in time and space— a firm position from which the participant 'proceeds' with her or his life. The purpose of exhibiting these examples for further discussion is to accentuate the fact that the online community associates, connects and embeds by '[introducing] an additional dimension of reflexivity, a voice that symbolically renders events, objects and processes so that they become visible, knowable, and shareable in a new way' (Zuboff, 1988: 9). My intention is also to put the participants, who are based in everyday venues such as the home, in dialogue with the more public, heteronormative worlds of an (offline) unit or community which exists alongside their (national and cultural) citizenship. The following illustration does so in ways whereby these public worlds constitute places where they can formulate a new perspective and thinking.

Excerpts of the discussions are quoted in translation as follows, since later, the whole dialogue that gave rise to the birth of this board was then re-posted on the *Qiaojia* board after it had been initiated. Here, I use the name of each poster at the front of each line, so as to distinguish different ones, making it look more like a dialogue between many different people. Although this loses the original format of the



posts and may give the wrong impression of showing a long real-time conversation rather than a asynchronous post-and-reply, I chose this to avoid too many or too long posts jeopardising the flow of reading:

Dolly<sup>326</sup>: I've been avoiding going home. That's why you haven't seen me

for quite a while.

Sam: Ah, I see. I've been actually doing the same thing these days (shake hands)

Holly: Ha. Is *qiaoja* the new trend or what? We should totally have a board named *qiaoja* here at Spiteful Tots. I remember the first time when I *qiaojaed*, I went to a friend's place in Tainan. I took \$2400 NTD<sup>327</sup> from my younger brother. It was shameful to 'borrow' money from him so that I could *qiaoja*.

Ian: Oh I agree. We should initiate a board for *qiaoja*! But these days, you can't practically do anything without some capitals.<sup>328</sup>

Mark: That's true. But that day when I *qiaojaed*, I just grabbed a couple of jackets, socks and underwear. Plus eye cream, lotion, facial masks and toner. The rest I just let them be.

Dolly: When I read this I must say I admire you! No wonder you look like twenty something. This time I took two underpants and two socks, and a book called *Brownies* by a moviemaker.<sup>329</sup> It's a nice read. In my bag are a diary, a notebook, a purse, a diet coke and a pack of cookies. Feels like I went on a picnic, instead of *qiaoja*.

Cen: I envy those who can *qiaoja*. Really! Even though I don't have any reason to *qiaoja*, I still yearn for it. After graduation and taking on a job, I don't live at home, so nobody would know any difference if I *qiaoja*. The price of being too free: you lose the right to *qiaoja*. That's why I started to think about raising a cat (What a sappy twat I am turning into!)

Ian: Have anyone read a book called *Into the Wild*?

Dolly: I read it and felt I was not alone. I felt a satisfaction of being

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<sup>326</sup> Dolly was the Board Master of the board to which the original messages were posted and where replies were made. The discussion took place in 2003. Most of the discussants here are in their mid-twenties. A couple of them (those who live alone and had to go to work) may be in their late twenties.

<sup>327</sup> NTD means New Taiwan Dollars.

<sup>328</sup> The original text did use the equivalence of 'capitals' in Chinese, *ziben*.

<sup>329</sup> This book title 'brownies' is a fictional name used to avoid recognition of the poster.

understood.

Kenny: I've always wondered if I leave this book at the table in the living room for my parents to look at while I go away and *qiaojia*, how will they react? Extremely panicked?

Dolly: They will send an international team to search you, with rescuing dogs. Of course a Satellite News Gathering team will also follow. Loads of people going forward with strength and vigour to look for 'the child' who went astray. And then the movie industry won't be idling; they give you a film based on this true story, right out from the oven, still fresh and hot. At the end you discover that, even if you are now rescued back by the world, you're still completely forgotten.

Rick: Or perhaps they just think that you didn't put your book back to your shelf, and feel annoyed that they always have to do it for you.

Dan: Right. On the way putting it back on the shelf, they will also murmur while thumbing it through: 'This kid doesn't read textbooks; just spend every day and night reading nonsense. I don't know what my money is really paying for'.<sup>330</sup>

In between the typed conversations, home (*jia*) is depicted as a place towards which the participants demonstrate some level of cynicism. In between the lines, I read this indicated their isolation, loneliness, and feelings of being uncared for and misunderstood. Although the people who joined the conversation are clearly from among different life situations, they do seem to share similar experiences of being distrusted and often targeted as trouble makers in their own homes. For example, Mark formulates a routine list of 'the things to carry when I skip going back home'; he says: 'when I *qiaojiaed*, I just grabbed a couple of jackets, socks and underwear.

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<sup>330</sup> As the reader might have noticed, the kind of posts that the board attracts usually tends to be those describing something about his or her own home and family, instead of commenting on the home and family of other people. In other words, post respondents simply provide similar or related stories or experiences in return, instead of asking direct questions or engaging critically with the original post. This is possibly due to the fact that the intricacy and complexity involved in one's familial and home experience is comprehended as beyond criticism; it becomes an area difficult for others to judge or comment upon. Such posts and the kind of textuality they represent are like exhibits for post viewers to appreciate and consider in their own minds only.

Plus eye cream, lotion, facial masks and toner'. Or, Dan mimics the way his parents talk about him: 'This kid doesn't read textbooks; just spends every day and night reading nonsense. I don't know what my money is really paying for'.

There is also another perspective to be gained from the discussion, and it comes from those who work and possibly live alone in an independent unit. They can be both alone and free at home, but they nevertheless miss the choice of being able to *qiaojia* and want to be noticed when they are gone from the house. In this light, *qiaojia* is almost a kind of privilege that is no longer available to them, and *qiaojia* also becomes a kind of nostalgic gesture that belongs to the past, when they were still accompanied in a home setting.

Home, therefore, is depicted as that which is problematic when these participants are drawn near to, yet still something a person longs for when he or she is away from it. The mental distance is created due to the fact that family members do not (want to) understand each other, and/or that the parents demonstrate little incentive to think positively about their sons and/or daughters. What can be inferred, then, is that the participants do want to be cared about, known more about and better understood as (perhaps bright, sensitive, philosophical) individuals. Their experiences of avoiding returning home may be, in my guess, an attempt to stay away from the frustration of being emotionally rejected by their family. While there may certainly be other possibilities and complications at home which they would wish to temporarily escape from, at least from these online dialogues, their absence mostly appears to result from an unsatisfied eagerness to be treated as another human being worthy of deeper respect – that is, perhaps in forms of sincere communication and understanding, rather than what they have so far been shown. But since this wish remains unfulfilled, their coping strategy, as it were, may be to avoid going back at all. Instead of being bothered by frustrations with their family, they choose to distract themselves, as in

this list above shows, preferring to read books, meet up with friends, and make funny and bitter comments about their *qiaojia*.

Teasing out the shared sentiments about being left emotionally alone, the participants in the Spiteful Tots community re-establish the order of their homes by providing details of what has been experienced in this particular place. The re-established order of home, then, solidifies its sense of being fixed in their lives, remaining the practices of these participants—sons and daughters— being distrusted, blamed at, or uncared for. Their similar experiences of being ignored and disapproved of at home thus contribute to the online participants' ready connection in this particular online community, despite their dispersed locations and ultimately very different household politics. The authoritative tendencies of the heterosexual family however seem to be represented identically, especially in aspects related to insufficient emotional expression and lack of mutual bonding between parents and children. Miscommunication or even non-communication is taken for granted in such places as families and homes, making 'not going home' almost as recurrent as a kind of 'hobby' that one has some kind of passion for.

From this excerpt, it is clear that the Spiteful Tots community is made up of people who live with the effects of being controlled at home, whether they are physically in it on a daily basis or not. At home, they take it for granted that they will neither be responded to with sufficient attention, nor will they be warmly understood or positively or trustingly thought of. This is to say, places such as home and family are places of control. As homosexual sons and daughters, they cannot but be disciplined by such social powers as are inherent in the order of home and family, as their home is a place they can never totally remove themselves from. So *qiaojia* allows an illusion of quitting home at intervals, as if going on a picnic ('cookies', 'books', 'diet coke') or a fancy night out (lotions and moisturisers to prepare oneself

for, perhaps, possible romantic encounters). After the passing of some years, *qiaojia* may no longer be considered *qiaojia*, but simply living elsewhere for a good reason (e.g. for work or study), or having a normal social life (such as taking time out to visit friends). So even though the emotional reason for *qiaojia* may not have changed much, its social meaning does change, with the growing recognition on the part of the parents that their ‘kids’ are now grown-ups. This change whittles away the fact that they, the grown-up kids, are still unhappy and resisting, as their perception of *qiaojia* is rendered as a cynical way of saying ‘a night spent outside’. However, a night spent elsewhere cannot be appropriately rendered as *qiaojia*, because, when they are in their thirties, *qiaojia* has become a nostalgic gesture that they cannot quite make any more. This is especially true because the state of not being understood appears rather adolescent to a thirty-year-old. In common perceptions, it seems less ‘allowed’ or ‘valid’ for a person in his or her thirties to be bothered about not being understood by his or her family.

In the texts, confrontation or objection do not present themselves as viable options. This may imply that such oppositional measures may not, in their epistemological understanding, work; or at least not work any better than temporary disappearance and non-participation in the original family. Or it may be that they have tried the measure of upfront conflict but are now no longer using that method. At any rate, home for the Spiteful Tots participants justifies an ideology, by attaching a sense of permanence to the institutions of family and home, reinforcing a kind of identity that is conventionally considered as self-sufficient, legitimate and even compulsory, but is sadly extremely ill-fitting for them. The kind of permanence behind the ideology of the family home is aligned with the participants’ assigned social roles as sons and daughters. However, they find it impossible to be contained within the permanent identities traditionally expected of them: heterosexual, obedient, successful,

stable, eventually married and having their own family, but to name a few.

There is a need here to pull in some demographic data. As far as the Spiteful Tots community is concerned at this time of writing, most of the participants who live and work in Taipei come from other cities in Taiwan.<sup>331</sup> They usually visit their parents' homes periodically, mostly during festivals or series of holidays.<sup>332</sup> This is to say, they are currently in the position of being legally *qiaojia* without needing to explain themselves or borrow money from siblings and friends in order to stay away. It is particularly intriguing that, at this life stage, I still come across several posts, though not many, in relation to *qiaojia*. Despite their having gained more control over their lives, or having made the concrete decision to move out, postings about *qiaojia* still appear and receive a response. What motivated the Spiteful Tots participants to discuss their experiences of *qiaojia* is perhaps beyond the scope of this discussion, but it may be related to a sense of nostalgia, and/or previously unleashed emotions and feelings. Inside their willingness to exchange ideas and experiences about *qiaojia* is I think located a struggle to find meaning and position within (and despite) the control of their homes. Their online textual records of life, when carried out in this way, may be argued as simultaneously about the past and present<sup>333</sup>, about re-living as well as re-experiencing, textually, what has once been and what it is now. I suspect that it is also about negotiating their personal, interactive and fluid understanding of the past and present, which might one day covert these lasting feelings of frustration and unhappiness into acceptance and peace.

For those who can be roughly put as 'the LGBT population' as described in the introductory chapter, the kind of heterosexual order, value system and permanence

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<sup>331</sup> This fact has been known by reading their posts mentioning their hometowns as well as by conversing with them both online and offline.

<sup>332</sup> My understanding of this is based on the fact that, over the years, posts expressing the anxieties or sentiments resulting from going back home (or back to work) increase significantly when the holidays approach or end.

<sup>333</sup> The 'present' is the time of posting.

that is established as natural and legitimate has certainly been experienced by many as oppressive. The postings composed and responded to by the Spiteful Tots participants are just examples of much evidence relating to this oppressive heteronormative matrix. Yet what cannot be left unmentioned is that such a heteronormative order and hierarchy is also very closely associated with the Spiteful Tots participants' everyday lives, usually in terms of their own homes and families, where they have been bred and obtained resources from. This, again, is why, as I have previously argued, amongst the busyness of the internet, many sexually non-normative sons and daughters may find a sense of confidentiality and secrecy that is crucial for a more wholesome construction of their identity, as this kind of online privacy allows them to become significantly more expressive and communicative about the kind of 'being *with* the heteronormative' that they constantly face.<sup>334</sup>

### **Banality**

From the compilation of posted messages I also notice that there emerges a tendency of rendering *qiaojia* banal, especially in the sense that 'it is too banal to feel sad or hurt about leaving home'. I think, from the postings, there is some evidence to this discourse of banality about *qiaojia*. In the quoted postings, participants respond in an exaggerated way that shows they know their parents would not notice and understand, even if the whole world made money from reporting this (imagined) incident of *qiaojia* and adapted it into a film. The clue that the participants in this imagined scenario leave— which is placing *Into the Wild* on the table— would only let their parents think that their own money is being spent on trashy, useless light reading (rather than on useful textbooks). Articulating their disappointment at their family

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<sup>334</sup> Championing privacy and discretion, online queer communities in cyberspace are like gay-friendly bars, associations and organisations, for example, in the city of Taipei. Here, anonymity and confidentiality is essential; especially in the early stages of making contact with people. This analogy is made extra-meaningful in the context of queer portrayal by the media, a portrayal which paints a pessimistic view of how the speedy growth of information technologies will exacerbate deterioration in civic life and community.

without directly disclosing their feelings, the Spiteful Tots participants utilise dark humour in their posts and treat painful issues as being laughable and ridiculous. In the end, such rendering makes their parents' negligence quite unimportant, as 'it is just how life is'. I find it interesting that although the posts were typed in these particular ways which encourage a funny-banal rendering, what the textuality reveals about their comments on their original family is not at all banal and boring, but rather energetically cynical. If I am right to pick up on the Spiteful Tots participants' rendering their troubles and frustration with home as banal, then perhaps in essence such postings make their complex feelings of frustration, negligence and alienation readable, visible or even prominent, but in a vitally resistant way. This resistance, as analysed, may well be due to the Spiteful Tots participants' difference from what has been routinely expected of them (i.e., marriage and family). So as a result of their everyday confrontation with the heteronormative powers embodied in various aspects of their interaction with the family home, their online posts constitute a special way of responding to such power in their everyday lives. As detailed on this community's specific platform, posts are used as a form of resistance through a creative 'transcription' of the dominant code. This can be used as a means of letting 'the other of the family' speak through a more dispersed form of resistance, and a shift from praxis. This involves one or several creative individual(s) forming a collective creative practice that shows a distinct poststructuralist turn in the study of everyday life. Postings provide 'tactics' as opposed to more proactive 'strategies' of resistance, whilst also showing some interesting affinities with somewhat inertial forms of social resistance.<sup>335</sup>

With regard to the postings which gave rise to the Qiaojia board, and of the post

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<sup>335</sup> Let us not forget, however, that such resistance is only possible when it concerns a group, a platform or a forum that helps to formulate a friendly environment where participants express their intimate feelings and experiences.



from Black Box showing how the room of a son or a daughter becomes the black box of a family home, I argue that they are expressions of an issue that shows the participant's privacy has to be disconnected from the domestic sphere. In other words, the Spiteful Tots participants, as people with same-sex desire, not only have to deal with the threat of public exposure and its ensuing stigmatisation (as discussed in the previous chapter), but they also need to tackle the problem of representing and negotiating themselves within the confines of a heteronormative place such as the home. While their homosexuality is very likely to be known about, it is how their family and they respond to such sexuality that matters. As much as it remains unclear how their heteronormatively constructed family addresses this issue, it can be quite certain that the Spiteful Tots participants' ways of reacting to this has been in managing their feelings via interesting postings to the Spiteful Tots community. The frustration of not being understood, cared for and/or respected are to a certain extent diluted through the action of making fun of it— in a way this deconstructs the frustration, allowing it become less hurtful. This involves a move from conventional totalising perspectives (the underlying thoughts of postings such as 'parents are negligent', 'family is a flawed institution', or 'I will die alone') to micro-level creative approaches. The postings explore a less deterministic view of everyday life in favour of an account that is more creative and aware of the constitutive contradictions that structure the experiences of everyday life.

### **What kind of resistance?**

In arguing for the everyday quality of the Spiteful Tots community, an obvious critique is that such a perspective erases its potential for the extraordinary— which in this case is what I understand as making resistance felt in an antagonistic, activist way via an online place. I have already attempted to show how the online articulation of the everyday is able to present the specifics of dailyness rather than just self-reflect on

their resistance. But does that mean there is nothing in the Spiteful Tots community that enables change for the participants? For a Spiteful-Tots-affirmative stance, I would certainly wish to counter this doubt and argue that a different possibility for resistance does exist and that this is a concern, not for criticism and protest, but rather, for becoming more steady, understanding and reflexive as a subject. Instead of using head-on objections, the Spiteful Tots significantly apply the rhetorical and dialogical space of online textuality created by both the Black Box and Qiaojia boards. The more I read and take part in the community, the more persuasive I find the processes of describing, posting, reading, replying and contemplating full of strengths. Instead, whilst being excluded or targeted as trouble at home, or captured by a desire to avoid contact with family members, the Spiteful Tots participants are prompted, not only to deal with these intense feelings, they also to find a language where they better express themselves, make sense of their feelings, and present it in a way that is both intelligible and full of sarcastic charm. The postings are therefore meaningful in the sense that they record (however partially or fleetingly) the feeling of the moment, as well as demonstrate how certain experiences and ideas have been made, understood, formulated and represented. While such moments are experienced as difficult, the participants still frame them as part of the everyday, as that which is banal and normal. Without ever being able to re-order the hierarchy of home and their everyday lives via their electronic articulations, these typed texts nevertheless recognise multiple intersecting practices and are capable of transforming a materialist perspective experiences into flexible and responsive approaches to life.

It is not only the 'Black Box' board that keeps away from anything that may lead to criticism and judgment, discussions about home and family on the Qiaojia board are also made without much comment or challenge from the other participants. Even though the discussions orbit around the topic of family and home, home itself can be

said to be talked about less, as fewer replies actually address their own household politics in-depth. The way a participant responds to complaints about family and home is usually to describe something about his or her own home and family. In other words, respondents simply provide similar experiences or thoughts in return, instead of asking direct questions or engaging critically with the original post. The Spiteful Tots participants, in this way, seem not so much interested in finding political leverage or engaging in activism-oriented critiques when it comes to discussions on heteronormativity as exhibited in the family home. Without resorting to the theories of sexuality and gender hierarchy, the participants are more motivated to offer care and support to each other by providing their own experiences and thoughts.

### **Political correctness**

Via the electronic textuality of the Spiteful Tots community, I am going to address this interactive textual tendency of the participants, and develop my argument in response to the previously mentioned tension between what needs to be deemed as private and everyday and what I see as the academic intervention of sexuality politics. The posting below (actually a combination of two posts) shows participants' attitudes towards politics, or more precisely, towards political correctness, a notion that has given homosexual people a sense of justification in the public arena and other spheres of discussion.

Author: Rick

Board: PC

Title: Re: So.....

Time: Wed Sep 20 21:58:34 2000

—————[←Leave] [PgUp] [PgDn]

>> Is it right that in this board [of political correctness] we cannot say  
>> things like homosexuals are sissies and feminists are unwanted women  
>> [by men]?

Of course not! Under the leadership of political correctness, we have to say:

‘This “tongzhi” does not know how to raise his finger and do a lotus hand gesture’. ‘You fascist! Homophobic! You think I am raising my finger to do a peach blossom gesture’?!

By ‘this board’ the poster refers to the public discussion board called ‘PC’,<sup>336</sup> an abbreviation of political correctness. To fully understand this short chatlog and its humour, I need to offer some explanation. First, *tongzhi* is used in a double-bind meaning, which is both as a way of addressing comrades in a Communist context, whilst also being an identity for gay and lesbian people. So reading the message makes one realise that the meanings of *tongzhi* are simultaneously challenged, as well as exposed, as pretentious and unnatural in this fictional dialogue. Secondly, ‘lotus hand gesture’ mimics the gesture of *Kwan Yin*, a deity from Chinese Buddhism, who has been mythologised as a woman in a white robe. This was once an elegant gesture used by ladies of noble origin in ancient China. Nowadays in Taiwan, it is understood that only pretentious men, women or gays would make such a gesture, and most of the time it is done only for the sake of poking fun at these people (who are pretentious, gay or both). The lotus hand gesture has thus become a way of exaggerating one’s ‘gay/pretentious essence’ – as if to make a statement that says, ‘just watch to see if he uses the lotus gesture and picks up the vibe’.<sup>337</sup> Lastly, a ‘peach blossom gesture’ is an improvisation (as opposed to the lotus gesture) which is given for fun; there is no such ‘official’ gesture.

The kind of rigor revealed to me in this reply message by Rick is both amazing and intriguing, and this is, I think, because I operate within the same kind of social

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<sup>336</sup> The tenets of political correctness on the discussion board were stated as follows: ‘Everyone likes to be politically correct, so we need a board to discuss political correctness, saying politically correct words in the politically correct language and accent’. The mocking tone manifests itself in the repetition of ‘politically correct’, thus also mocking one of its characteristics.

<sup>337</sup> The ‘rosy lad’ (玫瑰少年) Yeh Jong-zi (葉永誌), a junior high school student who was suspected of being killed in the toilet on campus due to his ‘sissyness’, was also depicted by his teacher as constantly using ‘the lotus hand gesture’ when he talked. For more information (in Mandarin), please see [http://theroad.myweb.hinet.net/new\\_page\\_192.htm](http://theroad.myweb.hinet.net/new_page_192.htm) and [http://www.bp.ntu.edu.tw/WebUsers/hdbih/new\\_page\\_47.htm](http://www.bp.ntu.edu.tw/WebUsers/hdbih/new_page_47.htm).

and political context from which this post emerged. What this dialogue intends to oppose and ridicule is the assumption of a politically correct way of being, speaking, addressing and expressing same-sex sexuality. The exaggerations are easily recognised, but it still evokes a familiar (as well as likely) scenario where it is ‘demanded’ that gay and lesbian people are ordered, by such a language, including the logic of political correctness, to live and act in certain ways.<sup>338</sup> This further confirms that such correctness does not really help anyone who is in a less socially and politically favoured position, but rather reinforces a myth about what is correct or not – that is, by setting up some kind of ‘right’ ways of addressing and dealing with the world. Gay and lesbian people now have to wear their ‘queerness’ on their sleeve, so to speak, in order to legitimate themselves as gay and lesbian.

To elaborate, I argue that this dialogue on the PC board reveals multi-levelled critiques of the kind of practice political correctness encourages in a contemporary Taiwanese context. One is that everyone seems to be watching everyone else, checking from time to time to see if they are acting and speaking correctly (i.e., paying attention as well as debating the ‘right’ way of doing a lotus gesture, as if there were a ‘right’ way of being gay). Mutual surveillance, under the rubric of *tongzhi*, or comradeship, which is a recurrent theme in Communist Chinese society, is patently suggested in this dialogue. It is also appropriated to critique the sort of political correctness that functions as a ‘soft power’<sup>339</sup>, governing gay and lesbian groups and communities. Another issue is how *tongzhi*, as an identity, easily leads to political quarrels where labelling and calling each other names (which would imply strong

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<sup>338</sup> For example, gay and lesbian people are much more likely than heterosexuals to be coerced into activist events, as if to prove that they care ‘enough’ about the gay liberation movement. The underlying thesis is that if heterosexual people are devoted to gay movements, then there is no reason for homosexual people not to be similarly attuned. And if they do not join in, then it is a blow to the heterosexual activists as well as bringing shame on those homosexuals who are inactive.

<sup>339</sup> As a soft power, political correctness as illustrated in the post becomes something like internal censorship for everyone who is considered ‘educated and informed’.

political incorrectness for the person being attacked) becomes a likely reaction (for example, naming the other as ‘fascist’ or ‘homophobic’). In other words, political wrestling and power tussles are far from unusual at activist and movements-related occasions; instead, sometimes in the worst case scenarios, they are *the* focus of activism and social movements. And last but not least, this fictional dialogue also demonstrates how the ‘lotus hand gesture’, as a stigmatisation of gay men, must be reversed and proudly assumed as a way of being ‘rightly’ gay. That is to say, the theoretical basis of Western ‘queer’ is seriously ridiculed and criticised.<sup>340</sup>

From this posting, it is clear that the Spiteful Tots participants are critical of the power of political correctness as a regulating force (or, ‘thought police’) that alerts people to what kind of speech they may make in public. Even though political correctness has been one of the most useful concepts in making LGBT issues worthy of public attention and recognition, as part of a sexual minority, the Spiteful Tots are still not fully convinced by this mobilising notion. To further illustrate my point about participants of the Spiteful Tots having an interesting relationship with the kind of politics that is not drained of political force, I shall provide several more examples. To do this I will once again turn to a discussion of political correctness to consider how they mock such a stance. The topic of political correctness inspired the following two posts regarding ‘the most PC identity’ and ‘the most PC music’. One participant initiated the topic and it was extended by the many contributions subsequently received. I summarise from the postings in translation below:

The most PC identity

(For human beings)

You’d better be aboriginal.

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<sup>340</sup> While queer may be argued as not just a pre-emptive attempt to claim back the actual term queer, or not even about pride but shame (Sedgwick 1990; Halberstam 2005), I find this reading still valid as the way queer has been translated and made known in Taiwan is highly relevant to such a kind of discourse.

You'd better be Hakka.  
You'd better be Taiwanese.<sup>341</sup>  
You'd better be homosexual.  
You'd better be an elder person living alone.  
You'd better be HIV positive.  
(For animals)  
You'd better be Formosan landlocked salmon.  
You'd better be Taiwan black bear.  
If you're none of the above, you'd better be a stray dog as it is more PC  
than a pet dog. And you may be reported on TV.

#### The most PC music

Cuban music

Aboriginal music (which must be stylistically different from mainstream popular music; otherwise will be termed as 'the best Han-Chinese-deprived aboriginal music')

Hakka folk songs

Any album that has Che Guevara on its cover

Bands that have something to do with NGOs

Maybe in the future there will be Formosan landlocked salmon CDs,  
Taiwan black bear CDs, or Grey-faced Buzzard-Eagle CDs?

The two lists of 'the most PC' function as extreme irony, highlighting those who are endorsed as part of a 'minority' and are thus worthy of extra care, attention and assistance. It suggests that there are identities more likely to be legitimised for resources than others, and that people can in fact try to become categorised as minorities in order to secure good treatment. These lists simply foreground the stupidity of political correctness, since in practice, as Rey Chow (1993) points out, 'the conscious representation of the "minor" as such also leads to a situation in which it is locked in opposition to the "hegemonic" in a permanent bind. The "minor" cannot rid itself of its "minority" status because it is that status that gives it its only legitimacy' (1993: 104). In this way, as soon as something or someone is thought of as

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<sup>341</sup> Having a Taiwanese identity, 本省人, may now be more politically correct due to the fact of the 228 massacre in 1947.

derived from, or related to, minority groups, it immediately confirms the power of the centre, and does nothing but reiterate the power of the existing structure.

Consequently, the listing of the most PC identities and music echoes the widespread criticism on political correctness which cites it as facilitating radical discourses in daily life conversations, whilst paying relatively sparse attention to the problematics of such hierarchies themselves. So-called PC identities are constituted by the kind of daily realities that surround these subjects. This necessarily means that designating them as the 'most politically correct' is an uncalled-for and rather redundant act. It is perhaps the environment and the circumstances which give rise to this kind of identity, that should really be exposed, studied and improved. The lack of attention to increasing infrastructural support renders intact the dichotomy of periphery and centre. The collective effort involved in listing the most PC identity and music thus represents a keen sarcasm that 'awards' the prize of being the 'most PC'. By disclosing the way political correctness can be as cheaply purchased and consumed as a CD or T-shirt in today's endless capitalist transactions, the spiteful tots have actually accomplished two lists which are effectively political agendas; through the sardonic location of these typed texts we can experience the fullness and vigour of their critical voice.

### **Everyday non-tongzhi**

From the above discussions, it can be understood that, though promotion of political correctness contributes to a better social acceptance and visibility of homosexuality (along with other kinds of minority issues), the Spiteful Tots participants remain very critical of it. The texts show that the participants are all quite familiar with how this discourse of political correctness works. And even if they themselves benefit from political correctness discourses, they still oppose the kind of manipulation it results in within the realms of public speech and behaviour. It therefore becomes clear to me



that their critique of political correctness is grounded in their own experience, perspective and observation. It also makes me realise why the identity of *tongzhi*, instead of *tonxinglian*, as a politically correct term (as *tongzhi* is, without *tongxinglian*'s pathological implication) is a label they also refuse.

At this point, I want to discuss the intriguing fact that the Spiteful Tots community does not position itself as a *tongzhi* community. Ever since the community was launched, the site's home page has carried the sentence: 'The Spiteful Tots community is not a *tongzhi* community'. On other (mostly admin-related) boards, it can be read that there have actually been attempts made to locate this community as one that supports and relates to a sexual minority, but refuses to be labelled as *tongzhi*:

[. . .] we never advertise ourselves to be a *tongzhi* community; we have never intended to give homosexuals an Eden in which homosexuals can complain, ridicule, tease and fight against heterosexuals. What is at stake is that we need not attract homosexuals who are not spiteful tots themselves to come to this community.

Or:

1. ST is not a gay [original words: *nantong*] community, not even a *tongzhi* community. Although most of the online users may be of this identity, it is still not treated as an emphasis. It is a request that participants should not limit themselves in this way.
2. Public discussion boards are always to be more than personal boards in number. This is because this community is a playground for spiteful tots, as well as for other friendly participants. Please do not confine yourselves in your own rooms and forget about the large public space created for playing with other people, which has been intended so in the original design. (While we do recognise that this good intention has been complicated with the increasing number of players. . .)
3. The birth of ST was an accident. We have never expected it to be

developed to its current size, but we can only go with the flow. One principle is however not going to be changed: This community is a private club with no intention to grow into a well-known, comprehensive site, though we do not refuse new comers to join.<sup>342</sup>

My reading of this desire to be set aside from *tongzhi* is that the Spiteful Tots participants do not wish issues of sexuality to be politicised in their community. I do not think this is because they want to disavow their homosexuality but rather because *tongzhi*, as a sexual identity, a form of address and a socio-cultural marker signifies identification based on a certain logic and manipulation of sexual politics. They resist and avoid being associated with this particular politics whilst hoping that their community will not be determined by, or forced under its influence. Therefore, what can be noticed is a differentiation between *tongzhi* and *tongxinglian* (homosexual). The fact that in the postings participants are more comfortable with the term ‘*tongxinglian*’, despite of its pathologic genealogy, shows that homosexual may be considered more neutral in representing same-sex sexuality and less clumsy or pedantic sounding.

In Lin Xian-xiu’s (1997) *Watching the Homosexuals*<sup>343</sup>, *tongzhi* has been understood as a euphemism of homosexual(ity). At the time of the book was written, *tongzhi* was considered a more neutral, politically committed and modern way of addressing homosexual or homosexuality (Lin, 1997: 28-34). In his commentary, Lin expresses the idea that *tongzhi* is a term that is not radical enough to assert a critical difference from heteronormativity. On the contrary, according to Lin, *tongxinglian*

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<sup>342</sup> Both posts were made in 2000. However, due to the nature of declaration in such posts, I consider their validity as much more lasting than previous ones. Also, the fact that since then there has not been a single post contending these two posts also helps explain why I have taken these two into account here.

<sup>343</sup> In Fran Martin’s book *Situating Sexualities*, she translates the book title 看見同性戀 as *Seeing Homosexuality*; however, in my reading and understanding of this book, I prefer the translation of *Watching the Homosexuals*, as it better gives the idea of watching people who are thought of as in some way strange.

represents a more ‘queer’ identity for people of same-sex sexuality. It does not smother the sharpness of queer sexuality with euphemism like *tongzhi*, and therefore Lin prefers the term *tongxinglian* over *tongzhi*. In the Spiteful Tots community, however, there is a different story. From the two clusters of postings above, *tongzhi* is read to assume a dichotomous, if oppositional, position in relation to heterosexuality, or the heteronormative. The reason for the Spiteful Tots participants’ not approving of this binarism might be, on the one hand, that they find such a binary facile,, and on the other, that they recognise the heteronormative as a readily integrated part of everyday life. Heteronormativity is not something they can simply resist or combat, but have to live with day-in-and-day-out. It thus can be inferred that perhaps the Spiteful Tots participants feel more comfortable being known as ordinary and banal homosexuals, as those who are part of a mainstream way of life, even though this sounds intuitively contrary to the name ‘Spiteful Tots’. I suspect that *tongzhi* may be deemed to be too radical, too politically correct and too non-heteronormative for them - to the point of missing out the fact that they are attaching themselves to heteronormative structures on a daily basis. Although today’s *tongzhi* has been reclaimed from the taint of political progressiveness, and has even started to show a tendency to be represented by the mainstream media in connection with drug abuse, AIDS and promiscuity, around 2000, *tongzhi* was still a ‘cool’ and ‘fashionable’ way of referring to homosexual(ity) (He, 2007b). So in a way Lin’s interpretation captures the kind of *tongzhi* that was enabled to enter the public sphere with some kind of political leverage around 2000, and his understanding of *tongzhi* thus neglects the idea that *tongzhi* was also used on both popular and academic occasions as the local equivalence of queer (Chen, 2005a, 2005b).<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Here, there is the issue of theorising how *tongzhi* has come into play and what *tongzhi* really means in different social contexts such as in the media, on paper, in conferences or in everyday conversation. The usage and understanding of *tongzhi* may vary across different contexts; therefore, it presents a very

Whether *tongzhi* is set against the backdrop of 2000 or 2009, the postings in the Spiteful Tots community steadily reflect an intentional breaking away from *tongzhi*, as well as the commitment to stay away from this name. Returning to my overall impression of the Spiteful Tots community (as result of my everyday reading experience over the past 9 years), I try to contemplate the meaning of the spiteful tots. Why ‘Spiteful’? Why ‘Tots’? The idea of being spiteful implies being different in a negative way and immediately sets the participants apart from the mainstream perception of what is usually accepted and encouraged in society. On this level, I find it helpful to contextualise this naming in the social structure of expected ways of interacting in Taiwan. Claiming ‘Spiteful’ implies that the participants demonstrate little intention of being nice and kind to other people. While this may appear to imply they have a rather negative image of themselves, I argue that it is really meant as a revelation of what they *really* feel and think and is therefore a rejection of *false* courteousness and socialised manners. Such contrived politeness does not quite count as authentic kind-heartedness and, in the end, may just be a sense of false affection or even hypocrisy. It may even eventually hurt people, even though it is a way of being that continues to be used widely in Taiwanese life. On the flip side, then, the naming of the community as Spiteful Tots simultaneously suggests a sense of frustration in the process of adaption and socialisation. For the participants, their mutual experiences of society show that earnestness cannot be detected if they do not comply with the socialised fashions of acting. Despite their earnestness, they may still be misunderstood and eventually excluded for not having treated others in some of the ‘nice’ ways that people generally recognise as polite or socialised.

Secondly, it is a shared belief among the participants that they have always

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messy and highly contextual formulation of *tongzhi*. While such theorisation of *tongzhi* is indeed necessary, it is considered beyond the intention of my discussion of the Spiteful Tots community’s everydayness carried out here.

enjoyed making cynical comments, both about others and about things that happen to them. ‘Spiteful’ thus becomes a way to feel both ‘in’ within the group and ‘out’ within social scenarios and settings elsewhere. It becomes a way of making themselves distinct from others, and thereby producing a sense of identification in the community. There is also a kind of ambivalent sentiment attached to this enjoyment of being spiteful, which manifests itself as a feeling of home, reinforcing a sense of identification in the community.

Whilst negotiating a form of identification that is different from *tongzhi*, I am led to wonder if there is a possibility that those participants who do not plan to enter the institution of marriage, may instead forge a shared sexual identity,, one that operates outside the existing heteronormative realm. This is certainly a point worthy of further exploration and contextualisation. However, as being a Spiteful Tot remains an essentially vague identity for people outside the community, this can only function as a thought rather than any sort of well-organised theorisation. In particular, I personally do not think that many unmarried self-identified heterosexuals in Taiwan would be happy to be counted as members of a sexual minority, or would be willing to be allied with homosexual people.

The other dimension to this probing of ‘the Spiteful Tots’ which needs to be clearly developed and argued is the previously mentioned idea of doing everydayness in the community. If everydayness can serve as a kind of political proposal for an online community such as the Spiteful Tots, then what does it have to offer if there is nothing about it that can be rendered trendy, catchy or attractive for the media or is not even remotely activist-oriented. As simply a reflection of their life choices, what is left in terms of identification for the Spiteful Tots community? What remains, in this case, seems to be the daily life of the participants, a life constructed from their everyday ordinariness, despite their diverse sexualities and sexual orientations. From

the above discussion, I think the participants have, from the outset, endeavoured to achieve an online textual life that reflects their 'true colours': whereby they incline towards quick wit, creativity, inspiration, randomness, grumbling, complaints and languor, which can be summarised as a collectivity of everyday ordinariness. The reason for arguing for such a seemingly featureless characteristic is that everydayness has actually not been seen, represented or recognised often or seriously enough. The stress of *tongzhi* and *ku'er* (酷兒) has always been the opposite: emphasising distinctiveness, extraordinariness, the celebration of difference and the strategic essentialising of queerness. Therefore, I propose to look at the networked textuality of the Spiteful Tots community as implementing a collective scheme in which the participants supplement what has been left out of media coverage and the public representation of gay and lesbian people. This is less their exotic 'other' appeal, and more their familiar, ordinary and routine lives, shaped by both wonderfulness and weakness.

### **Reloading the theoretical power of the everyday**

I am aware that this proposal may lead on to dangerous territory as it legitimises a view rendering gay and lesbian people 'not so special, but everyday and ordinary like everyone else'. It may seem like that I am downplaying the difference between their erotic desires and those of heterosexuals in order to trivialise their lives as part of a sexual minority situated in the hetero-normative society of Taiwan. But this is certainly not my point. What I am really arguing here is that there are, for people of all sexualities, concrete elements constituted by materialities which could make reality much more malleable than is the current range of that which has been generally known through our mainstream perception and media representation. Stevi Jackson, Liu Jieyu and Woo Juhyun (2008) have, for example, argued in their edited book *East Asian Sexualities* that:

Even where it is hidden, however, sexuality is embedded in wider social relations and in non-sexual aspects of social life; in particular, it is enmeshed with relations. Feminists in the East, as in the West, are finding themselves caught between the polarized priorities of those pursuing anti-violence and anti-exploitation agendas, on the one hand, and defenders of pleasure and diversity on the other [ . . . ]. There is, [ . . . ] as Chen Mei-Hua [ . . . ] points out, a less explored space between these polarities where ordinary, everyday unconventional *and* conventional sexual lives go on. In order to avoid the potential traps of a polarized sexual politics it is essential to be aware of the ways in which sexual expression, whether highly normative or extravagantly transgressive, is always embedded in wider patterns of sociality. (2008: 18-19)

Everydayness, and hence ordinariness, is part of everyone's life, no matter how extraordinary that life may appear to others who are not living it. In other words, for gay and lesbian communities similar to that of the Spiteful Tots, it appears to me that they may find it of critical importance to be known and seen as people who 'simply' relate to same-sex sexual desire in this online playground, without being associated with various political, activist or academic terms and vocabulary. Ordinariness<sup>345</sup> in this everyday context is not about downplaying difference or smoothing the surface so that homosexuality no longer looks so intimidating. This is not going back to the old and familiar route of seeking sympathy or tolerance, as in the writing strategy

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<sup>345</sup> 'Ordinariness' is arguably the first attempt of cultural studies to call attention to particular political goals. As Hartley commented in 1999 'Cultural studies in the 1990s begun to forget its commitment to ordinariness as a positive civic goal' (p. 16). In British cultural studies of the 1950s and 1960s, Richard Hoggart (1957), E. P. Thompson (1963) and Raymond Williams (1950, 1958), among many other New Left cultural critics, historians and sociologists, fashioned ordinariness into a conceptual object that was not only to be studied but also to serve as a great source of inspiration and knowledge. It was also to serve as the embodiment of the concreteness which make up the lived experiences of everyday life. In particular, such studies produced a concrete sense of working-class people's culture and their resources for survival (Hoggart, 1957). However, later on, 'ordinariness' experienced a crisis in that it was recognised as not big enough to handle issues such as marginality, the extraordinary and many different forms of dislocation (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). 'Ordinariness' instead was thought to place pressure on minority status groups by maintaining a self-evident connection between the working-class and their ordinariness. Therefore, as Hartley observed, ordinariness became a parental ideology in crisis.

proposed in *Zhongguoren de Tongxinglian* (Chinese People's Homosexuality; 中國人的同性戀) (1990), which is simply about recognising homosexuality as an existent part of life for sexual minorities and worthy of sympathy. My argument about the Spiteful Tots community's search for an everyday representation of themselves is far from a plea to be considered 'normal', but is instead asking for more coverage of the everyday side of stories of sexual minorities, and calling for a need to be seen as who they already are: as daughters, sons, neighbours, workers, housewives, fathers and others from the everyday and the ordinary.

In her essay 'Extraordinary homosexuals and the fear of being ordinary', Bidy Martin (1997) discloses the inherent stereotype and danger in being viewed as ordinary. She suggests this is a feminine masquerade that would fit in with a misogynist frame of mind. Martin writes:

Given the culture in which we live, it is no surprise that queer theorists, too, would repeat the age-old gesture of figuring lesbian desire in phallic terms in order to distinguish it from what then appears to be the fixed ground or material swamp of woman-identification. But making 'lesbian' signify desire and difference between women too often leaves femininity's traditional association with attachment, enmeshment, and home intact, fails to reconceptualize homosocial relations among women, and damages feminist and queer projects. (1997: 109)

Although the Spiteful Tots participants are obviously situated in a different place, culture and age from that addressed by Martin's essay, their community contains a similar operating logic behind both objections to ordinariness. In Martin's case, it is solely based on the issue of gender meeting sexuality. The move from being a woman to a 'third sex' promises that women can resemble heterosexual men who 'actively seek discussion and debate with these women only to disavow the difference, in particular the specifically sexual difference, that these women represent' (1997: 126).



This is to say that lesbian desire is identified exclusively by proving that women can be no less than men, and that, for this purpose, what has been understood as a display of femininity must be regarded as weakness and thus deserted. This nevertheless ignores the existing feminine tendency of both lesbian and straight women, and falls short of empowering women in terms of seeing their femininity as part of who they already are. In comparison, the spiteful tots are able to shape a relationship between sexuality and humanity. They dislike the fact that somehow when local theorists and activists advocate acceptance and visibility for them, the gay and lesbian people they speak for seem to stop being ordinary; instead, these people often come across as proud of being ‘special’ and ‘different’ (see for example Zhuang, 1991, Liu, 2000 and Chao, 2001b).

This can also be taken to be a countering attempt at writing back from those who have been depicted as ‘silent, good and normal’ homosexuals (Chu, 2003; 2008: 229-230). While there are certainly further marginalised homosexuals and other sexual minorities who cannot enjoy the fun of the internet, be highly educated and lead an urban life, there are still homosexuals similar to the spiteful tots who may not be too uninteresting to be studied, or too normal to be critiqued. Stevi Jackson (2008) has noticed this lack of scholarly attention and academic validation herself in a recent short piece in *Sexualities*. She says:

This political history left a legacy of polarized priorities between those pursuing anti-violence and exploitation agendas and those defending pleasure and diversity. Not only have I found myself uneasily positioned between these two poles, but what has always interested me most is what is left out by these competing priorities: the ongoing negotiation of everyday, mundane, conventional sexual lives. This is not to say I am unconcerned about sexual life beyond the unremarkable. [. . .] We need, however, to understand more about the ordinary day-to-day patterns of sexual relations through/in which most people live their lives – not only to elucidate the

taken-for-granted and habitual but also to appreciate why some forms of sexual diversity are tolerated, even celebrated, and others are not. An ethically informed defence of diversity, moreover, requires a critical stance on both normative *and* transgressive sexualities. (2008: 34; italics in original)

Jackson addresses and emphasises that now is an appropriate time to carefully look at what has for too long been missed out and neglected. Just as many of us think that normativity is the enemy and should be gravely challenged, so we must also give recognition to the fact that normativity itself is being expanded and stretched across terrains which have never before been validated or officially formed. What has long been termed as 'normative' may require more attention and sensitivity on the academics' part so as to fully provide a more complete and informed understanding of both ends of the spectrum of sexualities.

This importance of taking on board an in-depth understanding of a sexual minority's everyday life roots itself, too, in the human rights discourse where every human being is respected and entitled to dignity and freedom. When Diana Fuss (1989: 112) asks: 'What does it mean to be a citizen in a state which programmatically denies citizenship on the basis of sexual preference?' it brings the issue and politics of sexuality onto the level of citizenship, as it asks the state to take responsibility for its people. This question is also inspiring, compelling me to ask: 'what does it mean to be a *tongzhi* in a political and social movement that denies their everydayness on the basis of promoting sexual equality?' Although seemingly gay-affirmative, the mainstream discourse about sexual politics in Taiwan has so far shown a tendency to ignore gays and lesbians' everyday ordinariness. If we continue to seek equality without examining the way this search has been formulated as complicit with other social structures and parameters, then it is no surprise that these pursuits only reach a limited number of people.

Here, I want to re-include Biddy Martin's analysis on the normalisation of gender:

I [. . .] challenge the false alternatives to which we are so often treated—rigid gender differences or androgynous indifference. Over against both of those possibilities, some queer theory [. . .] has embraced the notion that gender is infinitely changeable and/or irrelevant to the far greater mobility of our desires. Such notions are often tied, however loosely and problematically, to the Foucauldian argument that power in the modern world operates primarily by way of the normalization, discipline, and regulation of sexuality, by way of norms that are internalized and then begin to appear to be the truth of our selves or subjectivities. [. . .] But neither the psyche nor the body are direct or simple effects of internalized norms. They are also irreducible to their conceptualization as inevitable failures to replicate those norms. They are, at any given moment, rich, densely overdetermined, and open sites that exert their own pressures, not primarily through conscious will, but by virtue of the agency of a never static givenness, and its convergences and interactions with what it encounters, internally, and in the world thought to be outside itself. (1997: 128-9)

By resorting to ordinariness, Martin is able to unpack the way psyche and body function in terms of one's gender, as well as discount the conceptual model of normalisation. This helps immensely in terms of the theoretical development of my own argument for participants' ordinariness in the Spiteful Tots community. I think that, according to Martin, gender is an issue much more complex than can be accounted for by social normalisation theories. While it is certainly about others' disapproval as well as our own self-policing, it is also about rights, about what has been available, provided, and allowed, and that, once resources such as education and job are offered, what kind of new issue, order and arrangement of public and private spheres will arise? It is the same with the spiteful tots. The participants act out their ordinariness by reacting in their typed texts against anything that cannot be related to their lives, thoughts, and likes and dislikes. Making clear that they are not a *tongzhi*

community and ridiculing political correctness, the spiteful tots show that their underlying beliefs revolve around the wish to stay as ordinary, common place and next-door as possible, without fussing too much about political stances and beliefs. The adoption and consequent actions of this wish seems to mean setting themselves outside discourses of defensive policing, as well as distancing themselves from disciplinary mechanisms and normalising power. Instead, they make their own choices and assert their right to doing so: they want to exempt themselves from always being scrutinised as politically correct and to assume an organic identity that is not *tongzhi*-related. Whilst the Spiteful Tots' identity is relatively vague, in terms of what that identity may be, they are, conversely certain of what it is not. From this case study of the Spiteful Tots community, the way *tongzhi* movement and contemporary politics of sexuality has been developed and promoted may not have been able to be connected to many sexual minority people in Taiwan.

## Chapter Seven | Research Limitation and Future Direction of the Research

I began the thesis by remarking that Spiteful Tots participants (2000-present) do not want to treat their community as one that is gay or *tongzhi*, despite the group being largely populated by non-heterosexual people. In attempting to understand this situation I asked the following: ‘When a group of friends who are of non-normative sexuality build a social internet community for themselves, do they always have to specify the community as gay, lesbian, transgender or queer for others?’ On the one hand, I argued, there is a desire among participants to increase queer visibility and represent non-normative sexuality, in the hope of improving or challenging heteronormative people’s knowledge of their gay or queer peers. In this sense, the labelling of the Spiteful Tots community as *tongzhi* would add to queer visibility. On the other hand, I suggest, it is incorrect to assume that LGBT people will always use the internet as a place for ‘coming out’, an assumption implicit or explicit in much research on western LGBT use of the net (Alexander 2002; Munt et al., 2004; Bond et al., 2009). My attempt has been to wrest away LGBT people from their immediate association with coming out in the Taiwanese context. I wish to do so not because LGBT people in Taiwan necessarily construct sexual identities without some forms of self-awakening or coming out, but because coming out has been constructed by the media as succumbing to public pressure and judgement. In this situation, I find it imperative that we stop and question: why is LGBT people’s use of the internet in comparison so readily connected to coming out? Can they instead enjoy a corner that is free from the politics of coming out where they do not need to come out as any identity, but get along with other participants? The main argument of this thesis is that the Spiteful Tots’ refusal neither to assert nor to downplay their non-normative

sexuality is a way of objecting to the default assumption of heterosexuality as the norm. On the one hand, it is true that the Spiteful Tots' enacting privacy and everydayness seems individualistic, as it benefits the continuation and operation of the community itself, rather than engages vigorously with the outsiders. On the other, I however think that such a strategy of resorting back to their privacy and everyday life enables a friendlier and secured communal environment that enables better manifestation of their subjectivity.

Through my long-term participant observation of the group, and via detailed analysis of significant posts, I register the Spiteful Tots' simple desire to have an online socialising space for themselves. While it may appear to be a retrograde step to focus on the fun and pleasure of socialising as the foundation of the community (rather than political commitment to equalising sexual rights), I assert that their implicit strategy *is* concerned with the equality of sexual rights. When a community is more and more associated with idea of textual banter and funny exchanges, participants are more and more willing to come back and join in the discussions as a way of feeling connected and understood. This feeling helps the unification of the community, though not necessarily because participants agree with one another on every political issue or agenda, nor because they share similar goals in relation to sexual equality. The main reason for staying together online is that the participants enjoy each other's company. This reason is also related to the previous emphases of the thesis about the community—both privacy and everydayness interlocks with the idea of participant's valuing the friendship/relationship, which is fortified or strengthened by the long-time existence and maintenance of the online community. As long as these friendly sentiments and feelings continue, the community will go on, and the participants' willingness to cooperate with one another in times of political appeals, or pursuits of sexual equality, will also persist.

Taking a case study approach, I selected and analysed texts based on my knowledge and understanding of their socio-cultural contexts, including, of course, knowledge and understanding from outside of the online community. I visited and explored almost all the outer sites— both online and offline— of the community, which are either textually mentioned or hypertextually linked in the community (see chapter 4).<sup>346</sup> Along the way, I discovered that the Spiteful Tots participants' negotiation with the politics of sexuality also exposes some rejection to orientalist assumptions about sexuality. Their non-disclosure of their faces in the Pride parades, for example, while can be easily construed as a sign of being afraid of coming out, is however rationalised by the community participants' collective choices of role play for politically meaningful representations. As Chris Berry (2001) observes from his research on East Asian cinema, film and video, the images of '[East Asian] gay identity are somewhat different from the dominant Anglo-Saxon post-Stonewall tropes that construct gay identity as something that involves "coming-out" of the blood family and joining other, alternative communities' (2001: 213). This, as Berry argues, indicates that 'the Western model of gay identity and its re-writing into established local [. . .] narrative patterns [. . .] counter both local and neo-colonial forces and discourses that objectify, oppress, or are simply blind to the existence and specificity of East Asian gay identities and cultures' (2001: 212-3). Berry's critique suggests that there is an orientalist assumption about East Asian gayness as more confined and constrained. As it appears difficult for gay and queer subjects to come out in the Asian societies, these non-western subjects are more likely to be labelled with the closeted images of gays and lesbians as backward or self-hating. However, I agree with Berry and argue it is both useful and more ethical to understand this situation from the angle of how the gay, lesbian and queer subjects themselves

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<sup>346</sup> Other than participants' own homes or their partners' places, of course.

comprehend this situation within their own contexts, such as in this case, in the contemporary Taiwan society. This care and attention to detail in a different cultural context offers helpful clues, as well as evidence, towards an ethics of recognition that may be helpful in reducing stigmatism in society.

As I hope is clear from preceding chapters, the Spiteful Tots community is viewed by me as a publicly private place where interesting textual exchanges between friends, or at least people who try to be amiable with each other. Their amicability does not stop them from discussing controversial topics, but does help in the sense of handling difficult issues with a touch of humour and sarcasm. By dint of the participants' collective efforts to produce interesting comments in their textual interaction, the nine-year-old Spiteful Tots community remains popular, as evidenced by posts still being made daily. Although the numbers of daily posts are not as high as in the hay-day of the community, when more than a hundred new posts were made each day, and participants were online almost all the time. But since most of the participants left universities and entered into the life stage of holding a job, the community's popularity should be measured on a different scale. It is perhaps good enough to be able to read some new posts every or every other day, which means that people still come back and read frequently. I have noticed that participants return from time to time even when they are *not* actively involved in the ongoing dialogues. The durability of the online community hints at the possibility of keeping alive a community, and in this circumstance, it is expected that the community is here to stay for some more years to come.

The role of politics is therefore suggestive in the case of the Spiteful Tots community: it is clear that the participants neither specifically assume a political stance nor hold a specific sexual identity (such as *tongzhi*) to facilitate bonding. Despite its seemingly light-hearted atmosphere, the community have nevertheless



achieved a goal that was never quite set when the community was created,<sup>347</sup> which was to endow its participants with an online place where they could feel relaxed and safe. Over the years, the participants have dealt with the issue of public and private in the community, shared many stories of their lives, and joined in the annual Pride parade in Taipei up to 6 times.<sup>348</sup>

Or, perhaps it is precisely due to the community's non-political stance and non-coming-out that the participants are able to develop their autonomy. As Helen Nissenbaum (2004) has considered, '[t]ypically associated with the liberal political vision, autonomy is the mark of thoughtful citizens whose lives and choices are guided by principles they have adopted as a result of critical reflection. Thoughtful works on privacy by Ruth Gavison, Jeffrey Reiman, Julie Cohen, and others have demonstrated a rich array of associations between autonomy and privacy' (2004: 148). There are, therefore, reasons to believe that privacy grants people an important sense of autonomy and freedom. Since the Spiteful Tots community is quite determined to maintain its privacy (by not coming out as a *tongzhi* community) as well as emphasising its everydayness (rather than focussing on overtly political statements and discussion), I think it is appropriate to say that the Spiteful Tots asserted freedom from scrutiny and created a zone of 'relative insularity' (Cohen 2000). In this situation, they are able to experiment, act, play, decide and formulate value and conceptions of themselves and the community. Without needing to give account to or be judged by others outside of the community, the Spiteful Tots are uninhibited by what others might say or how they would react. This may well result in the Spiteful Tots' defending robust protections that enable the sense of privacy in the online community.

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<sup>347</sup> When the Spiteful Tots community was built, it was more like a trying out, or an experiment of 'wait and see' if the participants will like or become comfortable with the settings of KKcity.

<sup>348</sup> At the time of writing this, the Spiteful Tots participants are planning for their look and choice of character for 2009 Pride events on October 31.

I argued in the Introduction that coming out is far from a universal paradigm. In the participants' management of the community, coming out is unhelpful, or even irrelevant, in their online communication, interaction and association with one another. To my mind, what is most fascinating is that the Spiteful Tots enact privacy and everydayness in a way that is not about being consciously queer. The idea, in particular, that the community is open to the public helps me develop this notion of the Spiteful Tots community as a kind of threat: there will always be the potentiality of heterosexual readers coming into the community, and yet the postings and textual conversations in the community, while remaining interesting and issue-oriented, do not however shun away from topics or mentioning of homosexuality. The Spiteful Tots do not avoid such discussion, and nor do they come out in such postings; they simply incorporate scraps and parts of their lives in their typing, therefore creating a quiet announcement that homosexuality or queerness need not be the guarantee of hiding or having hid in the closet. So while they pose a threat to heteronormativity by such a long-term enactment, this was in fact never the intention of the participants. The kind of ordinariness they have been doing for years represents, I would suggest, a powerful blow to heteronormativity precisely because they have not seem to have intended it.

The Spiteful Tots community, as a living entity mediated by typed textuality, therefore gives rise to something extraordinary from the ordinary; by manifesting everyday experiences below the surface of ideology and political events they constitute a critical engagement. This evokes mood and atmosphere, and concerns itself with the accounts of the 'nameless mass'— those who, whilst being a sexually minority, go to work, pay bills and worry about trivial matters in life. My exploration of the Spiteful Tots community offers a form of 'rediscovery' of ordinary people's experiences. I analyse their texts as a way to understand the complexly textured

realities of their everyday lives, an intricacy that resonates deeply with their objective of rejecting any sexual politics and theories that would render them unordinary. This thus establishes the Spiteful Tots community as a significant, collective notion of a textual site that is about those who exist outside of the mainstream of political, social, and sexual ‘progress’ and whose life experiences have for so long been left out of the narrative and discourse of Taiwanese sexuality development.

Finally, my thesis has achieved some theoretical innovations by concluding that ordinary for these Spiteful Tots participants becomes the new ‘queer’,<sup>349</sup> rendering the sexual minority in the Spiteful Tots community more marginalised than those who are self-identified as gay, *tongzhi*, *ku’er* or queer. This is because being radical, liberal or progressive about sexuality is far from what interests the Spiteful Tots, and yet such ways have been academically and politically regarded as vital to being considered a non-normative sexual subject. The online community thus functions as an effective form of resistance, precisely because it grows ‘organically’ within Taiwanese culture, while still maintaining a strong sense of itself as a place for ‘sexual minorities’. This is to say, as Mark McLelland (2000) observes based on Valentine’s (1997) remark of contemporary Japanese sexual culture, the ‘representation of homosexual men who have somehow insinuated themselves into “ordinary” domains such as the office or the school, are often treated as figures of fear’ (2000: 56). A similar idea, I believe, circulates within Taiwan. There, those gay men and lesbian women who ‘pass’ as ‘ordinary’ while managing to stay committed to same-sex relationships, or keep a distance from heteronormative culture. These men and women may eventually risk making others feel anxious and intimidated; thus they, once exposed, can easily become figures to be feared and despised. Blatantly forming a sexual association or

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<sup>349</sup> This queer word, while ambiguous, is used here more in its ‘slur’ sense than in its ‘queer theory’ sense.

creating an official group within a public area (such as residential and business districts), then becomes a privilege for the Taiwanese. This, as suggested in the Introduction, further contributes to the prosperity of online communities of sexual minorities.

The problematic construction of gay or *tongzhi* subjects in contemporary Taiwan in which non-normative sexuality is always already positioned in relation to either activism or the politics of sexuality derives its cogency from the paradigm of ‘coming out of the closet’ that perhaps every member of sexual minority experiences as the limit of his or her cultural existence as gay. If *tongzhi* people’s coming out of the closet is the major support of sexual liberation and gay activism, it is not surprising that, during a period of massive social transformation in the late 1990s, the LGBT-related social movements of Taiwan were considered to have slowed due to most people’s not coming out (Qitian Xiaosheng 1997, Chu 2000). In this way, a radical recount and (re)theorisation of ‘*tongzhi*’ must not simply amount to a new type of content for today’s sexual politics, but, more so, to a new possibility of agency that forms a dialect of resistance in Taiwan that is constitutive of this non-Western but Westernised context. While this context is subject to my articulation of socio-cultural contexts of both the local and global, it is also highly pertinent to the constant production of (online) writing of the LGBT people like the Spiteful Tots.

### **Limitation of Research**

One of the limitations – and also the possibilities – of this thesis is the online focus. It has been both restrictive *and* expanding for the research to merely focus on the online community without attempting to interview the majority of the online participants. By excluding interviews, I am able to explore the community as a whole more thoroughly and deeply, becoming, in the process of research, much more focused on the entire entity of the community as set against the backdrop of contemporary Taiwan. Without

setting up dichotomy, moreover, this also enables the emphasis shifted onto the community as well as the participants, rather than just on the participants and the partiality of interviews.

The fact that the research is solely about the online is further complicated by the simple reality that nothing online is entirely separated from the offline. Therefore, the way my research is conducted involves an extensive monitoring the development and relevant issues of sexuality in public through a variety of media (e.g., TV broadcasting, online data and video, news forums, academic and cultural seminars, speeches and talks). While it could be argued that there is a fragmentary nature to the way this research has been constructed, this method does help me tell a rich, embedded story. In particular, I reflect on the oppositional pulls of diverse vested interests in Taiwan in both maintaining the order and hierarchy of sexuality and transforming Taipei into a progressive international metropolis. I also point out the ambivalence of unsettled intuitions of mundane phenomena such as everyday routine in relation to sexuality where the Spiteful Tots participants wake up, eat meals, get online, and find a sexual partner. This thesis, which extends previous work on the problematics of coming out as well as (online) privacy in public, indicates why more attention and emphasis should be put to LGBT people's right of privacy and of leading an ordinary everyday life. The fact that this thesis does not stop at the verge of the Spiteful Tots online community enables a relatively contextual examination of the issues of privacy and everydayness for non-normative sexual subjects.

Nevertheless, I think this research may have sacrificed the dimension of the perspective of the participants which may have been achieved by, for instance, more one-on-one online chats, or by emphasising the participants online and perhaps offline interpretations of messages. While adding in this factor would change immensely the design and disciplinary concerns of this study, I think it is true that, although to some

extent I can also be counted as a participant, I cannot possibly represent the necessarily diverse viewpoints and readings of the textuality in the community. As noted in my Introduction, participants are of diverse sexuality, in spite of the majority being gay males. The community could have been represented in a way that let the more marginalised participants' texts be read and heard. Via typed textuality and other methods such as email interviews, this study could, in other words, show the differences among the Spiteful Tots participants themselves, instead of representing them as some kind of congruity.

However, for one, I must be honest in admitting that it was difficult enough dealing with East and West differences both in this thesis as well as in my writing of the thesis, and so I made the decision to focus in the way I did. For the other, as I have clarified in Chapter 4, 'The Methods and Methodologies', I have indeed explored into the possibility of conducting email interviews, or interviews facilitated by real-time chatting programmes such as MSN or Skype. However, the scarce response<sup>350</sup> to my interview request at the time made me realise that my hunch about the community was correct: participants were fine with having a researcher around the community who read posts and make notes, but this did not follow that they would be as willing to be studied as research subjects. While within the context of my thesis, these online participants can certainly be viewed as research subjects (though I mostly refer to them as either Spiteful Tots or participants), it still presents a very different case if they should accept my interviews and become interviewees, or the research subjects. The one-on-one interviews put them directly as the subjects, and it might have felt intrusive to be interviewed for academic purpose—as if there were something so

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<sup>350</sup> As explained in Chapter 4, only one person responded to my request and was happy to take part in the interview. The other two were people who made contact for an electronic copy of my MA thesis were later persuaded by me into accepting interviews. In total, only three people were recruited, and the rest of the community stay silent.

extraordinary about the Spiteful Tots that required individual interviews to find out. Of course, I could have used my relationship with them and made them believe that it would not be intrusive or probing in my interviews with them, but I strongly felt, and still feel now, that this will violate my attempt at endorsing the community's insistence upon its privacy. If I had chose to press a little in order to do interviews anyway, it would make me think that I did not truly respect the Spiteful Tots' hope of keeping intact their privacy, and that I did not understand deeply enough their preference to stay ordinary and everyday about what they do in the community.

What I might have also missed may be a more intimate-relationship-based life represented in textuality in the Spiteful Tots community. As discussed earlier, due to different gender and sexual interests, I admit that I must have not been entirely included in the Spiteful Tots' discussion of eroticism and practices of sexuality. Though I certainly have read numerous postings in the past nine years about this aspect of the Spiteful Tots' life, I have instead, as shown in Chapter 6, paid more attention to the participants' accounts of their experiences living with their original family and at home. However, it might be interesting to probe further into the intimate relationship if, as the course of time elapsed, the participants move into new phases of life, establishing relatively long-term relationships with others who are not part of their original family. Textuality as such may provide concrete material to conceptualise contemporary alternative forms of family, or, for that matter, new ways of doing private union. Will their feelings of being neglected, misunderstood or excluded in the original family be resolved in their own enacting of family? This research inclusion may also be taken as a way to locate local response to the global (Western) pleas of sexual citizenship and same-sex marriage, and it may also stand for a chance to *queer*, or change radically, the existing practices and notions of kinship (for related discussion of queer kinship, please see Phelan 2001: 139-62). However,

due to the private, or even intimate, nature of discussing ‘doing relationships’, I must admit that, at least in the Spiteful Tots community, such content is still quite rarely seen. As the community facilitates public interaction rather than private life journals, moreover, participants are not generally in the habit of posting thoughts or ideas about their relationships, or even recounting new or ending affairs. In terms of these concerns, I believe it may also somehow reflect the insufficiency of existing literatures, since as a student I have not been feeling that existing literatures have quite addressed how such an issue that is simultaneously so public (ensuing political and heated debates) and private (sexuality-related) should be concretely and ethically researched online. But, in time, I do hope that there will be future research that takes on the direction and develop advanced work on the issue of how the online facilitate (or not) the enacting of alternative forms of familial union.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The limitations of my research have pointed to future directions of research. Outside of its current setting, this research design could also be carried on in many different locations and cultures in the various non-Western (but perhaps also Westernised) cultures and societies. As can be seen in earlier work on sexuality and modernity, much current scholarship has pointed out that sexuality has not been widely studied in the intersection of the non-white and non-Western, and rather, there has been a silence (Kuntsman and Miyake 2008) or invisibility (Reid-Pharr 2002; Somerville 2000; Lee 2007). To this aim, I hope my research here will be able to provide some germ for such works to fill up the silence with noise or cacophony, paint such invisibility with local colours. My attempt here is to make visible these Spiteful Tots participants as a local, evolving and organic identity for contemporary exploration into sexual minority in Taiwan. I need to recognise that their typed textuality serves as a genre that is apt to change, flow and transition, as befits humans as social, cultural and natural beings. If



we may continue to look at textuality in transition as an alternative history that is made up of 'wisps of narratives, stories that one tells, that one hears, that one acts out' (Lyotard 1977: 39), then to study a local online community participated by a sexual minority lets the researcher examine as well as value the textualised accounts of people's everyday life. If my thesis may be taken to mark a shift into representing the sexual minority as counter-discourse and anti-political, while it is not at all devoid of political power, then let the 'restless palimpsest' (Martin 2003b: 251) of many other still underrepresented or even unrepresented geo-cultural locations be done critical justice to the sexual minorities.

## Appendix

The full record below is the document I saved with a real-time chatting program named Messenger (MSN), for the purpose of research for my MA dissertation in Linköping Universitet, Sweden. This online interview with N.T. was conducted on March, 7th 2004. I was at KTH in Stockholm, Sweden, N.T. in her own place in Taipei, Taiwan. The interview went from one o'clock to four o'clock in the afternoon (European time GMT+1). Originally in Chinese, the chatlog has now been translated into English. I am termed as "T" (Terri), and the "Queen" of Spiteful Tots is termed as N.T.

T

Hi.

T

Hi, I'm Terri.

N.T.

Hihi

N.T.

Sorry I am late.

T

That's OK.

T

Are you free now?

N.T.

Yes.

T

Oh, great.

N.T.

I am ready.

T

OK. Terrific. Let's get started.

T

I intend to have our dialogues recorded down and saved as a file.

T

Are you all right with that?

N.T.

OK.

T

Let's start from how ST was created. (my note: ST— Spiteful Tots)

N.T.

Hmmm, do you know why we have ST as it is now?

T

My knowledge began from Net-globe (my note: pseudonym, meant to refer to yet another BBS site where ST previously was at).

N.T.

That's right.

T

Net-globe was said to be closed down, so users went to KKcity for new cyberspace.

N.T.

Yeah. Rumor had it that Net-globe would be gone soon.

T

Yes. But was ST already so structured as it is now when ST was still in Net-globe?

N.T.

No. At that time, it was just a small union in Net-globe, one union of a number of personal boards. So we had that name "ST club" already then to show that it was joined up by limited members.

N.T.

I was only a friend who would visit their personal boards, having fun together by posting and replying messages.

T

Was it through the Internet that you got to know them?

N.T.

Yes. But to be more precisely, I should put it this way: as soon as I start to incorporate the Internet in my life, the channels of meeting and knowing people have been changed.

N.T.

My relations to homosexual people were tightened because of the Internet.

N.T.

In the beginning I met some gay friends who were in my university through the BBS site of Feminism, and then we had more interactions in real life with each other.

In the end, they told me other gay and lesbian online sites and so I was in the habit of going to those BBS sites and met even more friends there.

T

I see. So it was all from the Internet.

T

Were you using N.T. as your login-ID name at that time?

N.T.

Yes. It was N.T.

N.T.

When I was in Kkcity in the beginning, N.T. was already registered by someone else. So I used AgnesTan (My note: Tan may be N.T.'s last name in Chinese).

T

I see.

T

So, as long as people knew about your ID, they would be able to recognize you if they found themselves in a BBS site that came with a color of homosexuality?

N.T.

I am not that famous. And N.T. is actually a popular ID name. It can be unavailable for me sometimes, so there shouldn't be such a strong link between me and N.T.

T

I have checked the old messages on your Joousama. N.T. means New Type, supposedly a comic series. Could you explain it for me?

N.T.

Sure. There's a cartoon called Gundam. (my note: Japanese popular and long-lasting cartoon series)

N.T.

In that cartoon, the story is about human beings enter a different stage of life, a stage where people live in the outer space. Under such circumstances, there is a new breed of human: they can communicate with one another by ESP, and sense their direction in the dark universe. In this story, they are the so-called "new type."

N.T.

The new type has a super strong intuition for the mechanics. So in that cartoon, it is from the new type that springs out the super warrior.

N.T.

I felt that was cool. And, when I was little, I had strong intuitions for some things in life. This made me feel that I was a bit close to the new type.

N.T.

So I chose N.T. as my ID.

T

You just said that a lot of people also use this ID name.

T

Do you mean that a lot of people also enjoy this comic series?

N.T.

I don't think so. I am not sure why people use it. Maybe it's because of the Operation System Windows NT?

T

Ha.

N.T.

I got email from someone asking me about some setup in Windows NT.

N.T.

Probably this person thought whoever uses this ID knows well about the Windows NT.

T

Haha. That's too much.

T

I've noticed that quite a few users in ST also enjoy comics and cartoons.

T

I am not sure if this features people in our generation or there's some reason for that as a gay man and a fan of comics.

T

Do you consider comics a thread that ties you and your homosexual friends together?

N.T.

I think this has more to do with generational factors. Nowadays the 20-something usually had comics as company since little.

N.T.

No, the connection between me and my gay friends has little to do with comics.

T

On a second thought, there are a lot of comic books dealing with homosexual relationships, aren't there? Although they are usually overtly sentimental...

T

I see...

N.T.

But then again, I guess it is a valid remark to say that comics enables a closer

relation between me and users in ST.

N.T.

I guess you're aware of it? I am much older than the majority of users in ST.

N.T.

I am going to be 35 this year. Senior to most users by 8 to 10 years.

T

Hmm, got it.

T

Yeah, that's right.

N.T.

Usually people in my age are far and away from the Internet and the comics. But I am always interested in both. I believe that is one of the reasons why I can get along with them without having generation gaps.

T

On the other hand, do you find yourself a mother-figure because of your age?

T

When you interact with ST users...

N.T.

Positive. To an extent.

N.T.

If you're just a lot older, naturally everyone starts to take you as the big sister.

N.T.

In dealing things in life, the experiences that come with aging are very practical.

N.T.

The Internet is still comparatively positioned as an innovation, and everyone is involved with it for similar periods of time. So your life experiences will bring in direct and significant influence on your dealings online.

T

Why do you spend so much time on the Internet and comic books? As you were saying, it's not common with people in your age.

N.T.

Comics are my personal favorite. I have been a fan for my whole life. Currently I am also working on criticisms on comic books.

N.T.

As for the Internet, I think the main reason is for my career plans. Normally people don't have the access and chance to know anything about BBS. But two years after my graduation from university, I went back for a Master's degree. It was when the promotion of TANet, and I was there to be part of it. (my note: TANet—Taiwan

Academic Network)

N.T.

In 1994, BBS interface was still the main interface for the Internet application. This kind of interface was and I suppose still is very ideal for a large amount of reading. And the categorization is also very definite and clear, easy for the users to find whatever that interests him or her.

T

How do you position the Internet and you now? (tool→ utilitarianism, toy→ entertainment, or necessity, like food and water?)

N.T.

Necessity. I am seriously an addict.

T

At the threshold of ST at KKcity, I remember that you were already said to be the “Queen” there. Do you know why it was so?

T

And how do you see yourself as a “Queen”?

N.T.

Hmmm, actually we didn't have the idea of “Queen.” It came into being after our first ST party joined by ST users.

N.T.

Before the first ST get-together party, there were some interpersonal problems between users in ST. The board masters and people involved were worried about it.

T

Was it related to xxxx? (an user who were expelled in the first few months of ST at KKcity. For this person's privacy, I decided to leave it out.)

N.T.

Yes. I hadn't been made a board master then. But I offered some opinion and the other board masters felt that it would be a good idea for me to be part of the crew.

T

ok

N.T.

After the first ST party, we had dinner together (my note: ST used to have annual party with the users for the first two years). We had lamb chops. Then somebody wrote about that night on a board, and a lot people found it funny. So they proposed to have a board for me as a Queen.

N.T.

Actually Queen, at the beginning, was just a game, totally for fun.

T

Could you elaborate on that?

N.T.

This can probably be found in one of the boards in ST. There were like a series of chats about this story. (my note: this message was posted in fille, and among a series of replies, users came up with the idea of getting N.T. a board for her as a Queen)

N.T.

To put it simply, there was one night when three of us who had dinner together and we all had lamb chops (my note: the other two friends here were also of the Spiteful Tots).

N.T.

A bone from my plate was dropped when I tried to cut the chop.

N.T.

I asked one the two guys to pick it up for me. He wouldn't. So I grabbed a bone from his plate, forcing him to pick it up (because it looked as if he had lost his bone).

N.T.

When I was doing all these actions, it looked like it was meant to be that way. I was confident and dictatorial. Everyone found me very like a queen because I stared askance at that guy, arrogantly and overbearingly.

T

So, if I put it this way: your membership in ST started from your good advice provided to them.

T

And after that, everyone needed and tried to find a position specifically for you, not in an administrative level, but a personal level, which turned out the Queen for ST. How do you think about this statement?

N.T.

If I agree that Queen actually gave me a position to be the lead of think tank or something similar to it?

T

Well, yeah.

N.T.

Well, I guess so. But it wasn't until later that this actually came in with much more significance and influence.

T

Do you have examples?



N.T.

I feel that “Queen” is a very intricate role.

N.T.

Well, initially it was purely for fun.

N.T.

But in that game of role play, people started to get involved and serious.

N.T.

In the end, even in real life scenarios, we also continued the role play. So it had real effects on life.

N.T.

Initially, we only played it when we were online, with words, you know, like “Her Majesty” and “Your Highness” that kind of stuff. But sometime later, we continued to do it even in real-life contacts. So, in the end what was on the Internet was staged in our life.

N.T.

In addition, I was like everyone’s big sister (my note: because of her age). I guess that probably worked in such a way that people unconsciously took my words into consideration.

T

We have chatted for almost an hour now. Do you need a break?

N.T.

No. That’s ok.

T

I still have quite a few questions. They needn’t to be answered today. It’s your call. It’s getting three in the afternoon now, but it’s almost ten there (my note: in the evening).

T

ok

T

How about Shizuka?

T

I thought Shizuka was a brilliant idea. I always find it interesting when talking about it with my professor and fellow classmates.

T

How did Shizuka come along?

N.T.

(my note: after a few minutes) I was on the phone just now.

T

No problem.

N.T.

In fact the idea of Shizuka wasn't mine in the beginning.

N.T.

Once ST were about to hold a get-together party and we were all thinking about the theme. In chats we mentioned Doraemon, and somebody said I should command everyone to be Shizuka.

N.T.

I felt it was a great idea right away, but everyone felt it was too ridiculous. So we didn't use this idea as the theme for that party.

N.T.

But that idea somehow stuck in my mind.

T

Your intuition about Shizuka was because ST is featured as a "girly community?" (my note: fille was the board that gave ST a distinct character in the first year of establishment)

N.T.

Yes, in one aspect. In the other, there are some strategic reasons.

T

Just as what you commented in Taipei Times?

N.T.

Well, playing Shizuka was favored by me personally, but those comments published there were submitted after profound thoughts given to this role.

N.T.

Specifically for that parade, I was primarily focused on what we ought to do to be noticed.

N.T.

And it comes in with a two-fold meaning.

N.T.

Being noticed—for one, noticed by the press, and for the other, our appeal would be able to be publicized.

N.T.

We chose to have masks partly because that's the only way people would look like Shizuka, partly because those who were worried about being exposed would feel secured with a mask and because mass reproduction of a same image (my note: N.T. used the word "image" in her own talk) would be impressive.

N.T.

But that day the effects were even better than I expected.

T

How did you know?

N.T.

I turned and looked back, and even I was startled.

T

Ha.

T

But you didn't put on costumes and mask that day right?

N.T.

Yes I did.

And that day on the TV news, there were only Shizukas and Water Boys on the screen(my note: Water Boys also come from another online community on Kkcity)

N.T.

Water Boys wore nothing but trunks, so you could expect them to be shown on the TV. It fitted right to what the media was looking for.

T

Huh? Really? I thought you were leading the group and didn't put on the mask.

Were the others who played as Shizuka all gay? I remember there was a straight guy as Shizuka too.

N.T.

Yes. The women Shizukas were me and yyy (my note: a female user in ST who seems bisexual). On straight guy there, and all the rest was gay. (my note: this straight guy was a friend and classmate with one of the gay people in ST. He was not so active but did post some messages after the parade day).

N.T.

In the parade there were a lot of groups and communities. If you want to be shot and shown by the media, you have to be distinguishable from the crowd. I learn it by heart as I have been working in the media before (my note: N.T. used to work in the United Times in Taiwan).

T

You're right.

N.T.

Usually people love to compete with each other for catchiness of looks in this kind of events.

N.T.

But, the thing is you may look catchy when you're all alone, while you will be left out if too many people like that are put together.

T

What do you mean? Could you explain that?

N.T.

It's like "we want to be noticed. But we just play it according to different tunes. So it's dissonance, and losing its focus, in the end nobody could possibly tell what was it all about."

T

Good strategy. So actually, the success of Shizuka resulted from your past experiences with media, and from your role and interaction with ST people, as the Queen coming alive from the Internet to the real life.

N.T.

Yes. At least people had to be willing to listen to me.

T

How would you describe your relation to ST?

T

What is ST to you?

T

And has that relation changed over the years?

N.T.

Well, at the outset ST was a group of friends with a fascinating taste.

T

Ha, me too. Maybe not really a group of friend right at the beginning, but I do share that observation of "a fascinating taste."

N.T.

And now, this part hasn't changed much. However, I now feel a sense of responsibility toward ST.

N.T.

I think that has to do with the fact that I have been positioned as one of the administratives for a while.

T

Are you saying that either in life or on the Internet, their sexuality hasn't created much difference or effects on your relation to ST?

N.T.

Well, I believe that is because I have been too close all along? Many years ago, those who had close relation to me were mostly homosexuals.

N.T.

I think now I am the so-called "straight homosexual."

T

So, does that imply that you seldom have interactions with people who are straight?

N.T.

My interactions with straight people are also frequent and intensive, but the homosexual friends have deeply changed my ways of thinking.

N.T.

I am still straight now. But my styles of thinking and behavior are basically very “homosexual.”

T

How so? Could you give me some examples?

N.T.

Well, for example, I will never ask people if they have “boyfriends or girlfriends,” instead, I will ask if they are seeing anyone, or if they are fond of anyone when I want to raise this kind of question.

T

Hmmm.

N.T.

Just a change of phrasing, but the thinking style is simply different and nuanced.

T

When you were saying that you’re now still a heterosexual, are you implying that you may have a different sexual orientation in the future?

N.T.

This is a very PC answer. (my note: in the her reply in Chinese, N.T. attached an expletive in the end of the sentence, which syntactically gave out the meaning “*because* this is a very PC answer”).

T

OK.

N.T.

Well, this way of reply is also the result of a changed thinking style.

T

I see. In English there is an idiomatic expression: fag hag.

T

Dictionary gives the meaning in Chinese as “the kind of women who accompany and hang out with gay people.”

T

What do you think about it? Do you find that expression very you?

N.T.

Haha. I probably do fit well. But so far I have never fallen in love with a gay. Does

that count?

T

I don't really know. When I did my presentation on the proposal, someone pointed it out. To tell the truth, I don't really understand the ideology or story of this term. If there's any.

N.T.

Well, I guess it depends on how you define it. I am not sure either.

N.T.

Even though I do hang out a lot with gay people, there is something that comes in as a stark difference between me and some other women: I didn't start the "sisterhood" with a gay guy because I couldn't get him as my own lover.

T

Hmmm. Before you made a remark on this point, the kind of plot hasn't really entered my mind. But of course it sounds very familiar.

N.T.

This wasn't discerned until I started to know some other women who also hang out a lot with gay people.

T

I see.

N.T.

These women usually fell for a guy, and then discovered that he was gay. Without any other options, they gave up and turned the love to friendship.

N.T.

But what happens to me is usually that (strangely speaking though) I can sense that a guy is gay, and then this guy starts to be aware that I know, so he makes friend with me.

T

Does that mean most of your homosexual friends are gay and not lesbian?

N.T.

Well, yeah. Mostly gay, some of them are les. (my note: in this Chinese-typed sentence, N.T. used "gay" and "les")

N.T.

In my les friends, most of them are tomboys and boths, the femmes are not so many.

T

And how do your other straight friends think about your many homosexual friends?

N.T.

They usually don't know about them.

T  
Your life is the overlapping area between the two?

N.T.  
Yeah. Usually my friends don't necessarily know each other. Of course I am not talking about the gay community, but the straight and the non-straight. My circles of Friends don't normally overlap with each other.

N.T.  
To my straight friends, I am pretty much a freak too.

T  
What do you mean?

N.T.  
Well, when it comes to the social standards, I am not the best example. And I am just far from these standards.

N.T.  
You know, how the society thinks how a 35-year-old woman should be. (my note: to avoid confusion, I believe N.T. is talking about a 35-year-old woman's life should be occupied with marriage, family, children and a husband.)

T  
If I want to do a metaphor here, comparing ST to a family, and you're the mother, what do you say?

N.T.  
Hmmm, it's actually quite close to the situation.

N.T.  
As a matter of fact, zzzzzzz (a gay user in ST, one from the founding group in the initial stage of ST) has described it that way before.

T  
Ha. Good.

N.T.  
He said that I was like everyone's mother.

T  
Interesting. According to your own experience, do you think that ST possesses some quality or style that is distinct as an online, gay community from the others?

N.T.  
Hmm... yes. There's some difference.

N.T.  
Users in ST have a very special tune.

N.T.

Very sensitive. Very indulgent in one's own feelings. And very insistent the way something is delivered in a text, like the wording or phrasing. On the whole, there are some thresholds for users who wish to be considered one of the Spiteful Tots. (my note: here the thresholds, while in Chinese it automatically contains meanings of "criteria," can be said to have been used in a figurative way in English, connoting a kind of preliminary requirement or qualification. In this sense I should have threshold with quotation marks because it's a metaphor, but in N.T.'s talk, it was not there. I thus leave it out).

N.T.

For example, the fright or panic they all have toward "passers-by" is quite scarce. (my note: the passers-by here refers to the unknown id names that appear in a discussion board or users' list in ST. It's one of the common phrases that we use in the Taiwanese Internet culture).

T

Yes! I have noticed it. The thing with such a threshold, or thresholds, keeps on coming back among board masters' concerns.

T

It hasn't been so prominent recently. But in the founding period, there were a lot of discussions on this. And I remember that was how they came up with "a private club" to refer to ST.

N.T.

Yes. This invisible threshold exists. If someone ignores it and tries to fit in anyhow, it will cause some users' strong reaction out of insecurity.

N.T.

ST is the kind of community if you actively join in and hold their hands saying that you want to be a friend to everyone, they will be terrified to death and try to hide up, or even throw things to attack and scare you away. . .

N.T.

That's how I describe it.

N.T.

This process of making friends with them resembles that with a cat.

T

So actually a lot of them are in the habit of being cold and at a distance, or express their emotions indirectly or elusively. Is that right?

N.T.

I feel that they are accustomed to coldness. It just takes a bit more time for them. If you force them to discard their familiar paces, they will resist.

N.T.



Just like a cat will not necessarily go to you once you call it to. And if you grab it near by force, it will scratch you with its claws.

N.T.

Usually puppies will go wagging its tail to play with you after you clap your hands.

T

Personally I don't know cats that well.

T

But it seems a matter of lack of security?

N.T.

I am not sure. But yeah, it looks like it.

N.T.

Moreover, I believe part of the reasons may also be that they are mysophobic in some sense.

N.T.

ST is generally on the guard towards users who appear "not of their league."

T

In your interactions with the other ST users, both in life and the net, have you found any recurrent situations that are annoying? I mean, nobody does it on purpose, but somehow you just feel uncomfortable?

N.T.

Well, I guess it's their tendency to be indulged excessively in the emotions. That gives me headaches.

T

Being sunk in some negative emotions and never try to get out?

T

Is it a common thing or just some personal trait? (my note: I am wondering if N.T. is referring to some individual case or a character of ST)

N.T.

Yes. Plus the kind of

"I-just-want-it-this-way-and-you-can't-do-anything-to-change-it" caprice: it's exhausting.

N.T.

Should be a personal trait.

T

Are you saying that only a few of them appear capricious?

N.T.

The reason for that is...caprice is a common thing and everyone feels like it from

time to time. And in this community actually all the users are very capricious.

T

Huh? So?

N.T.

But people know how to wrap themselves up in such a way that from some distance, you don't necessarily induce capricious deeds on the other party.

T

I see.

T

So basically you're saying that most people or users don't carry it away by being capricious too often or too much in front of other people. Though they do have this tendency.

T

Does this apply to most of the gay people you know? Or specifically to ST?

N.T.

Yes. Most of the ST users share an unvoiced pact, or an unspoken consensus about boundaries. It is there, without pointing it out. And users here can be as capricious or emotional or irresponsible as possible within the boundaries.

T

Is there any connection between the fact that caprice features ST, and the fact that most users are bottoms? (my note: bottoms are the receptive party in sexual intercourse.)

N.T.

Hahaha..... I don't know.

N.T.

I don't think there's a connection... I have never thought about it that way...

T

Because I am given the impression that the so-called didi usually needs and wants to be taken care of, they nag and demand and are usually very spoiled.

N.T.

Well, but it does not follow that didis are bottoms. (my note: in Chinese there is no need to have the noun inflectional when it is plural, but in the translation, to be clear, I add an s to show the plurality).

T

Really?!

T

-\_- (my note: one of the popular signs circulates in ST: this facial expression shows a feeling of being disappointed or sad, an implication of rolling eyes, and/or

a sense of “oh, pleeeeeease.”)

T

I seem to need a bit lecturing here-\_-

N.T.

And this can never be told from the outer appearances or behaviors... I have also spent some time to understand this.

T

I’ve always thought that tops are geges, and bottoms are didis.

N.T.

Nope. You have to treat them separately. There’s no equality or connection. And, some people look sissy, but in bed they are purely tops. It’s beyond our outsiders’ imagination. (my note: I think N.T. means “beyond comprehension” here in English, since in Chinese “imagination” also suggests “comprehension.”)

T

I see.

T

So if I say that most of the Spiteful Tots are didi, does that stand for some truth?

N.T.

It’s hard to tell.

N.T.

The roles of didis or geges are not fixed. Sometimes it really depends on who one is interacting with. Generally speaking there are more didis than geges. I think it’s due to human nature. Most people want to be taken care of, want to be loved and looked after, and feel that they are specially favored by someone. And on the contrary, less people want to be the one who always has to give, to care and to exert energy and strength.

T

Ok, so I had the wrong idea.-\_-

N.T.

This is a common mistake. I used to have the wrong idea too.

T

What do you think about the fact that the other gay users always love to describe you as “manly”? Why do you think it so happens?

T

At least now I know better.

N.T.

Sigh... I felt that I had no choice... but then it was kind of fun, so I took it.

N.T.

I can be termed as a woman who is masculine. I've been considered that way since little. So I am quite used to it.

N.T.

Also, being a biological woman means that you have a higher chance of being disturbed or even harassed sometimes, so I usually don't voluntarily tell people about my sex.

N.T.

The fact that Spiteful Tots describe me as manly is good in the sense that the outsiders can't easily figure out my real sex outside the Internet. So I took it that way as a protection.

T:

But do you think if they are the same thing: being termed as manly by heterosexual people and by homosexual ones?

N.T.

No. it's not the same.

N.T.

If the heterosexual women say that I am manly, I think there's a trace of secretive admiration. This is a very tricky, ever-lasting girly sentiment.

N.T.

There are two-fold meanings if the heterosexual man say that I am manly. One is that they treat me as a buddy, a friend, and the other implies that he does not enjoy my less feminine behaviors.

N.T.

As for homosexual people considering me manly or masculine, there's still difference between the gay people's and lesbians' views.

N.T.

Lesbain people usually say so to show that they think I am quite like a tomboy, or that I am straightforward, decisive and easy to get along with. But I seldom get that piece comment of being manly from lesbians.

N.T.

And lastly, it's most tricky and subtle when a gay man says that I am manly.

N.T.

Manliness is a very much favored trait among gay men. But when this trait is possessed by a biological woman whom he cannot love and she is not even a tomboy... it's like a person who cannot take spicy food praises how nice a chili paste is prepared. It's a very chicken-rib appreciation... (my note: in her original typed text, N.T.'s "chicken-rib appreciation" comes from an alluded Chinese usage of comparing chicken ribs to something that is tasteless when you have it and yet

wasteful when you throw it away as chicken ribs are not much of tastiness, and yet still a pity if you do throw away (chicken ribs may be ideal for soups, for example). There is a discussion board named “chickenRIB” in ST and I am the board master of it: this leads to ST users’ frequent use of “chicken rib” for describing the somehow unwanted and yet not fully disposable things/relationships/people/situations in life. )

T:

Yes. I also think that they are constantly after a kind of manliness, or a kind of masculinity.

T:

Do you think that they have masculinities themselves?

N.T.

Yes. More or less, yes.

T:

Is the kind of masculinity the same as heterosexual masculinity? Or are they different?

N.T.

Well, I believe that nobody can possibly escape from the process of social formation, which means that the ideal image imposed by the society must have left a trace on everyone at the very least.

T:

Yes. I agree.

N.T.

But I am thinking that it’s difficult to tell if the kind of masculinity Spiteful Tots possess is the same as the heterosexual masculinity...

N.T.

Actually, what most gay people long for is exactly the very heterosexual masculine image.

N.T.

So it’s difficult to tell.

T:

Yes, I think so.

T:

The manliness they are seeing in you is actually their own projection of the longings.

N.T.

Yes, more or less so.

T:

I found out that many of your own observations and thoughts are very helpful to my thesis. I'm very happy about that.

N.T.

Haha. I am honored.

T:

What I'd like to do, beside talking about the interactionally play among people, the Internet and the combined, is to submit a notion of encapsulated masculinity.

T:

The part of discussion we have just gone through is very helpful to my assumptions, further ideas and thoughts.

N.T.

Hmmm... I'll be looking forward to your result.

T:

Me too. Ha..

T:

Basically I am through with my prepared questions.

T:

If in the process of the interview you have felt uncomfortable or offended, please excuse me.

N.T.

No. I didn't feel anything like that.

N.T.

There's no question that I can't answer.

T:

This is my first "academic" interview. Before this, I have only interviewed people for school paper. Which was informal you know.

T:

So, thank you very much.

T:

But if I have any further questions, or some new thoughts during my writing

T:

Can I bother you again?

N.T.

No problem. If there's more, just ask me.

T:

Thanks a lot

N.T.

You're welcome.

T:

So I guess let's call it a day. Sorry for taking up some much time.

N.T.

Ok. Good luck.

T:

Thanks. Good night.

N.T.

Good night.

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