

Queer intersubjective processes in David Leavitt's *The Lost Language of Cranes*

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Abstract

Written in the 1980's in the USA and dealing with sexual taboos, the novel chosen has received unanimous international praise. The present research work analyzes the construction of identity and recognition as a process that goes on only when in relationship with others and the impact of the queer political agenda in the 80's on the intersubjective processes constructed between LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexuals, trans) characters in David Leavitt's *The Lost Language of Cranes*. Besides, we shall concentrate on how his novel brings to light the cultural world of homosexuality to communicate an ideological and artistic view of societies in which LGBT individuals permanently strive for social recognition.

Keywords: sexuality; gender; coming out; identity; intersubjective processes.

Resumen

Escrita en Estados Unidos durante la década de los ochenta y a pesar de centrarse en temas sexuales tabú para la época, la novela seleccionada fue acogida a nivel mundial de manera unánime. El presente trabajo aborda además de la construcción de la identidad y el reconocimiento de las personas mediante un proceso que tiene sólo lugar en relación con otros, el impacto que tuvo la política homosexual de los ochenta en los procesos interrelacionales que tienen lugar en la población LGBT (lesbianas, gays, bisexuales y travestis) de la novela *El lenguaje perdido de las grúas* del escritor estadounidense David Leavitt. Por otro lado, nos concentraremos en los modos en que dicha novela da a conocer el mundo cultural de la homosexualidad para comunicar una visión ideológica y artística de las sociedades en las que los individuos LGBT se encuentran en permanente lucha para ser reconocidos socialmente como tales.

Palabras clave: sexualidad; género; salir del armario; identidad; procesos interrelacionales.

ACCORDING TO STEPHEN Whittle (2000, p. 117), Queer Theory is about the deconstruction and the refusal of labels of personal sexual activity and gendered behavior. It concerns *gender fuck*, which is a full-frontal theoretical and practical attack on the diphormism of gender—and sex—roles. In this way, Whittle has offered an oppositional standpoint to the assumed “naturalism” of sexual diphormism. To him, the transgendered community is now facing up a “new category crisis” which, to a certain extent, has not yet been addressed in issues of race, sex and class but in terms of gender in its most complete and fullest sense.

To discuss *the queer* in the context the novel was written means to discuss the queer in two divergent ways. On the one hand, the word queer, as it appears in the dictionary, has a primary meaning of *peculiar, odd, strange, out of the ordinary*. By extension, we can assert that Queer Theory concerns itself with any and all forms of sexuality that are considered queer. As theory, on the other hand, it critically challenges and deconstructs normality in terms of identity as well as analyzes social dynamics and power structures regarding sexual identity and social power.

Though research on queer studies was tackled later in time, the rise of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) liberation movement dates back to the 1970’s as the result of multiple riots in Stonewall Club in New York. The Stonewall riots were a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by members of the gay community against a police raid that took place in the early morning hours of June 28 1969, at a gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, in Greenwich Village. Several hundred incensed patrons, tired of harassment, resisted by throwing bottles, cans, stones and other objects at the police. In the aftermath of this historical resistance of queer people, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed in New York and similar groups sprang up across the United States and the world. The modern LGBT movement was born. Instead of pleas for tolerance, the demand of queer people was unconditional acceptance. Under the slogan *Gay is good*, thousands of queer citizens came out.

The Stonewall era is often recalled as a critical turning point because it marked the qualitative development of a mass movement in that country. With the rise of the LGBT liberation movement in the post-Stonewall era, overtly gay and lesbian perspectives, after a long period of silence, began to be put forward in politics, in philosophy, in art. This particular period represents the moving out of a closeted time of homosexuality into a time of expression, identity, and representation—a cultural explosion of sorts.

Literature written by and about LGBT people has been highly visible and has attracted considerable critical attention since the 1970’s. As we shall see later in the present research work, whether through fiction, drama, poetry or autobiography, homosexual literature typically explores issues of gender and identity as well as the influences of ethnicity and social class on the individual (Crompton, 2006).

Within the realm of literary criticism, for a long time, same-sex relationship issues were considered taboo by many scholars and, consequently, not much research was carried out until the 1990's, when intense research work around gender and sexuality was produced. Given the origins of gender studies in social and political realms and the continued inequalities in society and culture based on gender, questions and issues about sex and gender are likely to remain at the center of debates in each particular field (literature, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and the like). The scholar who is usually identified as first using the term *queer* is Teresa De Lauretis (1991) in her Feminist Studies book entitled *Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities*. Besides Teresa de Lauretis, other scholars such as Judith Butler, Laurent Berlant, Judith Halberstam and David Holperin were also interested in queer studies (Hubbard, 2007). However, the texts that are considered most responsible for influencing and developing the principles of queer studies are Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985). Thus, to develop the concepts of the main categories involved in the analysis of the novel chosen, we shall tackle the theoretical background delineated by Foucault and Sedgwick.

Same-sex relationships result from homosexuality, the sexual attraction or behavior between people of the same gender or sex. The most common terms for homosexual people are *lesbian* for females and *gay* for males, though *gay* is also used to refer generally to both homosexual males and females (Leap, 1995). Same gender-loving refers to those sexual engagements between individuals, regardless of their perceived sexual orientation, marked by same-sex desire and physical sexual acts accompanied by sexual fidelity, commitment, and/or romantic love (Melancon, 2008, p. 64).

David Leavitt's *The Lost Language of Cranes* (1986) deals with the way in which people come to grips with their sexuality in a society which only lately came to understand that not being heterosexual is not a disease but a sexual choice to be respected and integrated to the fabric of culture through which the construction of identity and recognition can be appreciated. Set in Manhattan in the 80's, the novel deals with the pain and agony of two protagonists (Philip and his father, Owen), who are stoned simply because their familial and social contexts do not accept they are queer and behave and think in a different way. Apart from that, Leavitt's novel allows us to appreciate the mystical side of life as it pictures the pursuit of communion as well as the identity or awareness of an ultimate reality through direct experience or instinct.

The aim of the present work is to analyze the construction of identity and recognition as a process that goes on only when in relationship with others and the impact of the queer political agenda in the 80's on the intersubjective processes constructed between LGBT characters in *The Lost Language of the Cranes*. Besides, we shall concentrate on

how the novel brings to light that cultural world of homosexuality to communicate an ideological and artistic view of societies in which LGBT individuals permanently strive for social recognition.

Approaches to Queer Studies: A Literature Review

As an academic movement, Queer Theory is typically associated with the 1990's but its earliest articulations can be traced to the 1970's in the first works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault as an investigator on sexuality (1978). As a forerunner of Queer Theory, he interrogated the way in which Western social orders deploy rigid standards of gender and sexual intelligibility as a method of social regulation. In his book *Politics, Philosophy and Culture: Interviews and other writings 1977-1984*, Michel Foucault (1988, p. 85) states that in fact, from the 1970's onwards, a new political, economic and technical incitement to talk about sex in the form of analysis, contextualization, specification, classification became visible and based on this theoretical approach to queer issues, a diversity of discourses on sexuality in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, pedagogy, philosophy, sociology, and social work emerged (Foucault, 1988, p. 89).

After the episodes of Stonewall in the United States, community organizers and writers in different fields have won major legislative and cultural victories for gays and lesbians, moving them from the margins to the mainstream, forcing recognition of the problems they usually face and bringing to the fore their need for equal rights and protection for all sexual orientations. Today, gay and lesbian communities are a visible, vibrant part of the political and cultural landscape. Since the 1970's onwards, some groups formed networks for support and socialization, including student groups at universities, the Gay Community Center, and the like. Some organizations used public forums to express LGBT issues and engage audiences creatively and intellectually, such as the Gay Community News (Duberman, 1997, p. 174).

The queer movement grew throughout a historical period in the last half of the twentieth century known as neoliberalism. In the USA the last twenty years have seen important social, economic and political shifts in society. Consumerism was expanded, multiple international markets arose, and therefore a new capitalist world developed. In this restructuralization at social levels, LGBT organizations shaped by neoliberal citizenship practices began to claim for equality rights for LGBT people through the mechanisms of public policy and legal change.

Major Categories

Sexuality and Gender

Sexuality is a complex term and spans human experiences including family relationships, sexual behavior, physical development, sensuality and so on. Broadly speaking, it is

an area of study related to an individual's sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation and the impact of prejudice and discrimination on those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (Schoene, 2006).

Gender describes the characteristics that a society or culture delineates as masculine, feminine or LGBT, whereas a male or female sex is a biological fact. Traditionally speaking, what it means to be a "real man" in any culture requires male sex plus what our various cultures define as masculine characteristics and behaviors. Likewise, a "real woman" needs female sex and feminine characteristics. Consequently, the traditional standard view is one in which heterosexuality, bifurcated between male and female, is the only acceptable type of sexuality at all; thus, anyone outside this form is marginalized into silence (Butler 1991, p. 13).

In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978, p. 75) describes the emergences of new political technology, one marked by power's investment in life, in the control and management of human beings as productive entities. Discourses on sexuality are coterminous for him with the displacement of centralized power by diffuse forms of discipline and control that saturated all dimensions of the life-world. Foucault describes the new ideologies as entailing "power over life". He states that power over life may take different forms and that its primary focus is on the values imparted within the familial realm in European modernity. His studies on sexuality have laid the grounds for a renewed theory of the importance of ritual in the constitution of sexual and gendered difference.

Sedgwick (1990, p. 81) claims that the categories through which identity is understood are all socially constructed rather than given to us by nature and opens up a number of analytical possibilities. Also examined are medical categories which are themselves socially constructed such as AIDS, the relationship between homosexuality and drug consumption, and the like. She also examines how language and especially divisions between what is said and what is not said, corresponding to the dichotomy between "closeted" and "out", especially in regards to the modern division of heterosexual/homosexual, structure much of modern thought. That is, she argues that when looking at dichotomies such as natural/artificial, or masculine/feminine, we find in the background an implicit reliance upon a very recent and arbitrary understanding of the sexual world as split into two species. The fluidity of categories created through Queer Theory even opens the possibility of new sorts of histories that examine previously silent types of affections and relationships.

Since most anti-gay and lesbian arguments rely upon the alleged naturalness of heterosexuality, another critical perspective opened up by queer theorists attempts to show how these categories are themselves deeply social constructs. Since "heterosexuality" is the "natural" condition, it is a place that is spoken from but not inquired into. In

contrast, homosexuality is the “aberration” and hence it needs to be studied but it is not an authoritative place from which one can speak (Greenberg, 1998, p. 119).

Though Foucault and Sedgwick gave rise to subsequent theoretical investigations on queer studies, the area of investigation seems still unexplored because Queer Theory and the story of LGBT people with their drawbacks, contexts, sufferings, social intersubjective processes, familial relationships, coming out and open recognition and acceptance by society have been and still are a taboo that many scholars do not dare to tackle.

These two outstanding researchers in the field of Queer Studies provide deep insights into questions of gender, identity, miscommunication, coming out, social intersubjective processes, and language issues. Their proposals allow us to approach how identity is constructed and recognized as a process that is only possible in relation to others, starting from the very moment of these LGBT people’s coming out and going on with their lives, in their relationships, in their social contexts, in their own families. Queer Theory will help us explore and problematize the sexual identity of the main characters in the novel (Philip and his father Owen), highlighting the intersections of sexuality with social construction, familial relationships, culture, and power.

Coming Out

Coming out is a personal journey. It is a gradual process of recognizing, accepting and sharing our sexual identity with others. The phrase *coming out* derives from the general expression *coming out of the closet*. *Coming out of the closet* marks the rite of passage to a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity. When an LGBT person admits, acknowledges, or reveals they are homosexual, then they have “come out of the closet”. In other words, they are no longer trying to hide the fact that they are queer.

In a queer culture, often referred to as LGBT culture, when people identify themselves as *homosexual*, they start to cope with a sequence of conflicts taking place in their surrounding context. One of the first contexts to face is their own family. In traditional families, homosexuality is considered harmful, pernicious, bad and strange. Consequently, homosexual youngsters suffer outright rejection from their families and are often literally thrown away as dishonored human beings (Brownmiller, 1993, p. 84).

The coming out process is a complex one and not everyone will understand or accept it. Finally, friends or coworkers may be shocked, confused, or even hostile; some relationships might permanently change; an individual may experience harassment or discrimination; LGBT people may be fired from their jobs, denied housing or denied insurance; people under 18 years of age may be thrown out of their homes or lose financial support from their parents. Many factors affect the coming out process; for example, gender, age, self-recognition as *different*, feelings, moods. As people’s

perception of themselves alters, they are likely to feel confused about their identity.

Sedgwick (1990) indicates that the epistemology of the closet has given a solid consistency to gay culture and identity throughout this century since the episodes of Stonewall in June 1969. From then on more and more LGBT people started to find consequential changes around and outside the closet. Sedgwick (1990) says that the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century. The closet door has never seemed secure for LGBT people's protection. Everyone must come out individually for their own sake.

As far as coming out is concerned, Michel Foucault (1978) asserts that even if the categories of heterosexual and homosexual are entirely socially constructed, that does not mean they are not real categories of thought that shape the way we live our lives (Foucault, 1978, p. 97). In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault examines the complicated space represented by *the closet* and the multiple effects *coming out* has on the larger social structure. He says that our social structure is based on insides and outsides; that is "any identity is always connected with an exterior or outside that defines the subject's own interior boundaries and corporeal surfaces" (Foucault, 1978, p. 100).

The secretive space that *the closet* provides problematized the binary structure (interior/exterior; homosexuality/heterosexuality). The closet, Foucault claims, is a site where it is possible to be homosexual inside and heterosexual outside all the time. The possibility that anyone can spring out of the closet at any time and declare his/her sexual condition destabilizes the boundary between inside and outside.

On the other hand, it is also possible to interpret the closet as a reinforcer of inside/outside categories. Foucault remarks that the closet is a space of secrecy (Foucault, 1978, p. 103). If someone is in the closet, he/she is pretending to be something he/she is not. The closet also reinforces the places designated for these two identities. The real identity which is kept in the closet is *private*, whereas the presumed identity that one displays out of the closet is *public*. Besides, both binaries represent two opposing hierarchies. The hidden identity implies shamefulness and inferiority to the opposing, public identity.

In Leavitt's novel, the characters who decide to come out are grownups. In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick (1990, p. 90) claims that adulthood is the stage when we begin to learn more about our sexuality and identity. The novelist clearly depicts how coming to terms with sexual feelings can take a long time, and that many people do not come out until later in life, as we can see in Philip's father. We think that the concept of *coming out of the closet* is essential to our analysis because in the novel the process of coming out structures the narrative and provides the context for the development of language and for the enactment of communicative situations.

Identity and Gender

Identity is related to one's nature and self and may be presented in two linked senses, which may be termed "social" and "personal". In the former sense, an "identity" refers to the characteristics of a set of people that label and distinguish them from others. In the second sense, an "identity" is a set of some distinguishing characteristic(s) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially constructed and which that person thinks defines him/her as part of a group and as different from others.

In the present work, we shall use "identity" to refer to personal characteristics or attributes people associate with their selves in dialogue with the social groups of which they are part, and which emerge in discursive practices. What Foucault claims in reference to identity and gender is that the conception of identity is not a question concerned with the subject proper but rather a theory of discursive practice (1978). Identity emerges in an examination of how discursive practices can create differing notions of the subject and subjectivity. Foucault suggests that if subjects, and therefore identities, are created through discourse, then they must be produced through historically constituted acts of performance, through conditions, and this makes identity a historically constituted creation, which is actually different across both time and space. Though the concept of identity is still under process, it is rather far from that of the essentialists (Plato, for example). For essentialists, there exists some detectible and objective core quality of particular groups of people that is inherent, eternal, and unalterable; according to their perspective, groupings can be categorized bearing in mind these qualities of essence, which are based on such problematic criteria as gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, and class (Calhoun, 1994).

For Foucault, power is the ultimate goal for any social and political movement and the idea of transcendent principles to guide political action is a residue of essentialist politics that will ultimately serve only to hinder the possibility of successful social transformation (Foucault, 1978, p. 122). Besides, for Foucault and anti-essentialists, the task of progressive social change is to reconstruct society and to overturn existing forms of oppression. Hence, as Foucault says, power is the key. Once individuals exercise it, society can be transformed and reconstructed.

In *The Lost Language of Cranes*, identities are constructed and involve the commitments and identifications of the characters in relation to others. Personal identity in Leavitt's novel can be consequently glossed as the aspects or attributes of a certain character in the novel that form the basis for his or her dignity or self-respect. In this sense, a character's identity can be closely associated with their gaining of dignity, honour, and pride once they come to accept and share their sexual preferences.

Gender and Literature

We recognize with Lizbeth Goodman (1996) that if we, the readers, open our minds to the texts of those who have been raised or behave quite differently from ourselves, if we take interest in a wide range of multicultural, sexually distinctive voices as they “fight against social contexts to have a place and the right to be heard”, we more fully enjoy the “richness and depth in the great world of literature” (Goodman, 1996, p. 7) through the use of words.

In the United States, the gaining of visibility of the LGBT community in the 90’s also brought to light their literature, from poems and novels to fantastic journalism. On the whole, LGBT literature deals with the pain, the social oppression people have to go through when coming out, the taboo of living and having sexual relationships with someone of your same sex. Moreover, LGBT literature also deals with issues other than romantic or sexual relationships, such as drug consumption as well as the use of pornography. Among the LGBT novelists that deal with such topics in their novels are Michael Cunningham (*The Hours* 1998, *By Nightfall* 2010), Steve Berman (*So Fey: Queer Fairy Fiction* 2009, *Boys of Summer* 2012), Sarah Waters (*Affinity* 2002), Shamim Sarif (*I Can’t Think Straight* 2008), Andrew Holleran (*Nights in Aruba* 1983, *The Beauty of Men* 1997), to cite some.

In *The Lost Language of Cranes*, David Leavitt communicates his ethical and aesthetic view of those aspects of society directly concerned with LGBT individuals, and which have been previously considered taboo in literature: sexual intercourse with partners of the same sex, frequent visits to bars and cinemas for queer people, references to pornographic movies and magazines, drug consumption, specific vocabulary related to pornography and sexual intercourse.

Lizbeth Goodman (1996, p. 21) asserts that when we refer to the study of literature and gender, we do not just mean literary analysis of texts with regard to the sex (male or female) or sexuality of authors, but the wider study of literary texts as they are written, read, and interpreted within cultures, by women and men. In the four decades since New York City’s Stonewall rebellion, gay literature has exploded as a distinctive form of cultural expression. In a variety of styles and genres, LGBT individuals have increasingly begun to articulate their sexual identities. At the same time, LGBT writers and scholars have begun in earnest the writing of a literary history long denied by the refusal to recognize homosexual love as an integral part of Western literature culture.

Communication and Intersubjective Processes

Language is important within a novel because it is responsible for the construction of the plot and the way characters express their thoughts and communicate among themselves. It also creates a character, describes a setting, and helps us to see life through different

eyes.

Furthermore, it plays an important role in intersubjective processes. Even though miscommunication is a problem for all people, it tends to be a major problem for most LGBT. The core of this lack of communication between family and queer individuals is related to the fact that most parents do not accept their children's sexual choice, setting up a barrier in between.

Much of the intricacies of language in social constructions of sexuality can be defined in terms of the theories that Michel Foucault espoused. In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault regards sex as something purely biological, and defines *sexuality* as a discursive construct (Foucault, 1978, p. 68-69). Foucauldian discourse tends to privilege the discourse of homosexuality over the physical sexual acts of LGBT people. Consequently, he urges modern societies to speak about it openly (Foucault, 1978, p. 35).

Foucault focuses on the discursive production of sexuality within regimes of power and knowledge—what is said about it, what relations it generates, how it is experienced, what functions it has historically played. In brief, he points out that “sexuality is a historical construct, a network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances are linked to one another according to a few major strategies of knowledge and power” (Foucault, 1978, p. 105-106). In *History of Sexuality, Vol. 2*, Foucault (1990, p. 49) introduces another important concept: “the use of pleasure”, where he begins to discuss how subjects practice on themselves and upon others a kind of self-desire. Following ancient Greek principles, Foucault asserts that there are three factors that affect the proper use of pleasures: need, timeliness, and social status. The first factor *needs* is related to the right amount of food, drink, and sex a human being needs to have provided that they are properly used. *Timeliness*, the second factor of the proper use of pleasure, is connected to the idea that there is always a time for everything and certain pleasures should be experienced only at certain instances. Finally, he states that the proper use of pleasure lies on one's *social status*, the role a person plays in society (a man, a woman, a child, a slave). And one's subjectivity is judged based on how one uses those pleasures. Those who use pleasure properly are better people and often hold positions of power over those who are ethically weak. To describe pleasure, Foucault (1990, p. 52) discusses the term *aphrodisia* (Roman version = venereal), which roughly translates as “things performed naturally” or “pleasures of love”, “sexual relations”, “carnal acts” or “sensual pleasures”.

The prism of Queer Theory and the employment of categories such as sexuality, gender, identity and coming out will allow us to see how a homosexual imagination can foreground LGBT experiences, among them those related to the intersubjective relationships among the characters.

Some Interesting Facts about the Author

Born in Pittsburg (Pennsylvania, USA) in 1961, David Leavitt is a graduate of Yale University. After graduating, he started his career as a writer, analyzing the world of homosexuality in his novels. At present, he is a well-known writer of LGBT novels as well as a professor at the University of Florida, where he addresses different workshops on LGBT literature.

Apart from the repercussions of gay identity for family and society, Leavitt also brings to the fore the most prominent stereotypes of LGBT individuals, depicting them as a group which is socially and emotionally isolated, unhappy, and with low social self-acceptance. His stereotypes further portray LGBT people as being oversexed, but their sex lives are unsatisfactory; and, as they are unable to form lasting relationships, most of their encounters with others are transient. In *The Lost Language of Cranes*, the writer presents a sort of relationship between Philip and his lover Eliot embedded with such characteristics as the ones cited previously. Eliot is a young person who started to make out with boys at the age of twelve. At the age of seventeen he had his first lover, with whom he spent a semester living in Florence, Italy. After that, he met and fell in love with Philip Benjamin, a relationship that would not last quite long. Finally, he travelled to Paris, where he fell in love with Thierry, a young Frenchman student.

The Plot of the Novel: A General Overview

The novel is a multilayered work of sensibility and semiotics, quite delicate on the surface, making the reader discover that the title refers not to long-legged birds but to machines employed in lifting materials.

Hence, the name of the novel might bring to the fore two different interpretations. On the one hand, the topics that keep Jerene (Philip and Eliot's friend) tied to investigation for seven years: *The Phenomenon of Invented Languages*. Her first dissertation would be on a couple of young little female twins, who have never been taught an established language, and hence, create one of their own. Her other dissertation would lie upon a neglected child whose only company is the view it has of a building site with several large cranes from the window. The child begins to imitate the movements and noises given off by these machines in an attempt to communicate with them. We can assert that the interpretation of the name of the novel would rest upon Owen and Philip Benjamin.

Owen has lived on a lie his whole life. He has kept his own homosexuality in silence throughout his marriage. He always wanted to repent but he never could. Philip, his son, is also a homosexual and, in a way, he also looks like the child-crane by following Owen's tracks and repeating what his father has silenced all through his life.

The Lost Language of Cranes deals with a New York family in crisis, the Benjamins. Owen is a well-known grown man with a Ph.D. in comparative literature, who has

prepared and addressed interesting dissertations. Unhappy with his job as a researcher and a lecturer, he becomes the director of admissions at Harte School, a school only attended by male children belonging to wealthy families. When he starts working at Harte's, the Benjamins' son Philip is twelve years old. When Philip is allowed to enter Harte school, he immediately becomes attracted to boys.

As the novel develops, Owen's growing sexual appetite starts to threaten his marriage. He has maintained twenty-seven years of marriage, being routinely unfaithful to his wife. His secret sexual appetite makes Owen walk in the dark for long hours at night, go into gay bars, drink heavily, browse pornographic magazines at stores, and become addicted to casual sexual intercourse with same-sex citizens he falls in love with in his outings. The same routine has been repeated so frequently that Rose starts to suspect something is wrong between them.

As well as his father, Philip also leads an LGBT life. He lives with his lover Eliot, he frequently goes to gay bars and he usually makes love with his flatmate and lover. But, determined to reveal himself openly as a homosexual, he takes courage and one night he comes to dinner to his parents' home where he definitely comes out to his parents. They are taken aback by the news. Philip's mother is a little puzzled for a while as she does reject same-sex relationships. However, this revelation has a greater impact on Owen, who seems to accept his son's open confession, as he is also a secretly gay man that has kept his secret for his nearly twenty-seven years of marriage. Philip's coming out will help his father reveal his sexual orientation as well.

Analysis and Discussion of the Categories

Identity and Gender

In *The Lost Language of Cranes*, David Leavitt deconstructs the idealized structure of the family and reveals the instabilities involved in it as the result of the creation of identities through the control of sexuality. It is true that Owen kept an unrevealed secret to his wife Rose, but also his wife to him. She never told him she had had sex with the husband of a friend of hers when the Benjamins were invited to spend a weekend at their friends' villa. To make matters worse, she had also been silent about a secret love affair she had with Nick, one of her co-workers.

Faded and gray like their surroundings in Manhattan, the Benjamins look empty, passionless, devoid of emotion, painfully repressed. Though Rose and Owen have been in the same house for several years, they seem to have led separate lives, barely talking to each other, even to their son. Owen maintains emotional distance with Philip, afraid to get close in case homosexuality somehow rubs off, that his love would be interpreted as something sick and perverse.

The way in which the different gay characters are made to discover their homosexuality

varies, which speaks about the immense richness of experience surrounding the discourses of sexuality. The catalyst between Philip's coming out and his family is his lover Eliot, a young boy who has been raised and brought up in an LGBT family because his parents had died in a car accident and he was completely alone. Abbie Goldberg (2013) states that children raised by LGBT parents are more likely to depart from traditional gender roles and enter in a same-sex relationship themselves. Children born to and raised by homosexuals tend to play, dress, and behave differently than children raised in heterosexual households. In the novel, Eliot, a boy brought up by a homosexual couple (Derek-Geoffrey), soon begins to explore his body and to feel sexual appetite for men.

As for Philip, the exploration of his sexuality and personal identity started much earlier than his sex relationships with Eliot. Though individuals may become aware at different points in their lives of their sexual identity, in the novel it is in his childhood when Philip came across with homosexual comics, which he secretly collected and kept in his bedroom.

When Philip remembered the adolescence, he remembered the hidden parts. Hiding had been so important, so essential a part in his life, that even now—grown up, more or less, and living on his own—he kept every book with the word “homosexual” in the title hidden, even in his own apartment. (Chapter 1, p. 71)

In his adolescence, Philip meets Eliot Abrahams at a party and falls in love with him at first sight and from that moment, he starts to visit him. For a long time, they keep their queer relationship hidden. Philip feels an inner struggle for the sexual orientation he has opted for and does not dare to come out to his parents later in his teens. Miscommunication at home probably seems a hurdle for him to come out openly at first and he thinks Eliot might be not only his lover but also a support for his terrible sorrow and loneliness. Philip is convinced that his same-sex attraction feelings are inborn and accepts his gay identity, whose internal battle is finally exteriorized through his coming out at the age of twenty-five.

While Owen Benjamin's secret guilt portrays the conflicts of an older generation, Philip's relationships with various same-sex lovers look relatively free of guilt and focused on feelings bound to arise in any close relationship. Leavitt's novel is subtly biased in favor of Philip's outlook. Philip is determined to live life in his own terms as an out gay man and his struggle is to live openly and honestly while finding happiness.

Philip and Owen's Coming Out

In *The Lost Language of Cranes*, David Leavitt deals with the relationship between adults and their social context and describes how they become totally rejected after coming out. It was a gradual process for Philip to recognize and accept himself as a homosexual, a process that began in his childhood by browsing homosexual comics at home, followed by a sexual attraction to men at Harte's. When at Harte's he is discovered to be a homosexual, he experiences harsh discrimination and harassment by his teachers and classmates, which force him to change school at once. Afterwards he meets Eliot at a party and from that very moment, Philip falls in love with him and moves to live in his apartment.

In his twenties, Philip comes home to come out to his parents, which marks indeed his passage to an LGBT public identity:

“All right,” he said. “Here goes.” He looked away from them. “I’ve been meaning to tell you for a long time,” he said, “and I haven’t gotten around to it, because I guess I’ve been afraid—
(...) He closed his eyes. “I’m gay,” he said. Then again, as if they hadn’t heard. “I’m gay.” He opened his eyes, looked at them, but their faces were blank. (Chapter 2, p. 164)

After putting an end to his internal struggle, now he must face another conflict, his familial context. His mother considers homosexuality as something harmful as she correlates it with diseases like AIDS or drug consumption, something very pernicious for a twenty-five-year-old young man at those times.

As well as Philip, his father also has kept his homosexuality in silence for almost twenty-seven years of marriage. He always wanted to feel sorry but he never could. According to Sedgwick (1990), being in the closet like Owen for a long time is the defining structure for LGBT oppression. The closet door has never seemed secure for Owen's protection. Maybe the closet door, which according to Foucault (1978), is a shield that allows the individual to be a heterosexual outside and a homosexual inside, also creates certain internal complicated boundaries between the individual and his context. It would have been better then for Owen to come out individually for his own sake and not wait till his son's decision to reveal his homosexuality to the family, though springing out of the closet earlier would probably have destabilized that problematic boundary between inside and outside, mainly in his family where the relationships and communication did not appear to be good and fluent. It was clear that Owen's secret sexual orientation was that internal struggle that problematized his communication and paternal role within the familial context.

The vision the novel affords regarding intersubjective processes is based on the idea that social networks are essential for gay people to find their place in their contexts. Such networks may be made up of same-sex people or LGBT institutions and their main role is to provide support to both children and parents who permanently struggle to come to terms with their own homosexuality. In the novel, it is the Gay and Lesbian Campus of Coalition as well as the Gay Hotline (a radio programme) where Philip's father, for example, not only meets several helpful and kind LGBT friends but also finds the necessary help and advice he needs after coming out of the closet and consequently, being kicked out from home.

Communication and Intersubjective Processes

David Leavitt's *The Lost Language Of Cranes*, impacts on queer literature not only by problematizing what is normal and acceptable between LGBT individuals, but also by introducing specific vocabulary related to the homosexual realm. Community members can establish their affiliation with the group through shared ways of speaking, acting and thinking. The terminology used by these LGBT communities revolves heavily around sexual matters including terms for sexual organs, preferences and activities. The term used by linguists and coined by William Leap (1995) to describe the study of language as it is used by LGBT speakers is called *lavender linguistics*. Lavender Linguistics refers to any aspect of spoken or written linguistic practices, which include speech patterns, vocabulary, and the like, used within LGBT communities.

In the 80's conversations around these terms in particular became dominant in the discourse choices made by LGBT individuals (Cameron, 1997, p. 47). To talk about same-sex relationships and bring queer vocabulary to conversations was no longer taboo in those circles LGBT started to frequent. Leavitt resorts to this vocabulary to clearly depict pornography at home, in the streets or in the cinema and in human body contact with their same-sex lovers. The following scene shows Philip and Rob's first encounter at Upper West Side gay bar. They met by chance there and after introducing each other and chatting for a while, Rob invited Philip to his home:

They sat for a few moments drinking tea, and then Philip moved closer to Rob, put an arm around him, put a hand on his knee. Rob was shaking violently....

"I think I probably just had a little too much to drink," Rob said. "You know, when it's cold, alcohol thins the blood."

(...) "Lie down on your stomach and I'll give you a backrub," Philip said. Rob obliged. Philip rubbed his shoulders, pounded his back.... and reached under to touch warm skin. Rob's shaking subsided. He turned over and

Philip kissed him...

(...)Rob just lay there. When Philip's penis approached his mouth, he took it in, no questions asked. When Philip lifted Rob's hand and placed it where he wanted to caress, it caressed in a nervous circle, but never of its own volition.

(...)Rob was enormously excited, much more excited than Philip himself. Philip thought this to be impolite on his part. In his opinion, when one made love to someone for the first time, one was obliged to exhibit a healthy erection and at least feign great enthusiasm. But he had masturbated twice today and could probably do neither. When Rob came, it was with incredible force. A drop landed on his chin; the rest pooled on his chest. Philip brought himself, by furious and concentrated masturbation, to a climax of sorts about ten minutes later. (Chapter 4, p. 196-7)

The Lost Language of Cranes presents queer characters as natural and authentic, while heterosexual characters are shown to be bigots, secretive and perverse in their relationship with others. In the novel, being gay and lesbian is good and natural whereas heterosexuals are all "bad people." Philip is right to love whoever he wants as people should express that love in any way they feel like. There is nothing wrong with gay people, in his view. The fallacy usually lies with the heterosexual observers, whose attitudes and thought processes have been skewed by misinformation and prejudice in a period when LGBT issues were attempted to be introduced in society and literature.

By reading a novel whose plot centers not only on the relationship between a gay son, a closeted homosexual husband and their own family but also on the simplicity of the characters' life, (jobs, education, place of work, pastimes, and the like), the straight reader may come to understand that queer people are not bad, corrupt or perverse and that not being a heterosexual is not a disease but a sexual identity to be respected and integrated to the fabric of culture.

Conclusions

The main interest that led us to write this research work about the representation of queer intersubjective processes in Leavitt's *The Lost Language of Cranes* is to evaluate the role the novel assigns to interpersonal communication and relations in the search for alternative gender identities within the LGBT culture of the 80's. We intended to explore the way in which this novel throws light and evaluates the world of homosexuality within the political agenda of the 80's.

Foucault defies the essentialist view which suggests that sexuality and gender are inborn. Our analysis has shown that David Leavitt embraces the idea that sexuality and

gender are culturally and discursively constructed, and instead of a single sexuality, he points at the existence of a diversity of sexualities.

In *The Lost Language of Cranes*, Leavitt goes beyond essentialist binary organizations in order to artistically question the ideological categorizations of sexuality and gender. In the novel, Philip repudiates the dictates of the heterosexual community concerning sexuality, gender and intersubjectivity and ventures to discover his true self free from his parents and the community's restrictions.

Lack of communication between Philip and his family is for him a major problem. The fictional situations refract a very sad and harsh reality: some families may feel certain rejection towards their gay or lesbian children and want them to leave their homes.

In Leavitt's novel, being a homosexual is not evaluated as wicked or sinful but as an election; therefore, characters struggle for their own rights to be recognized and considered as any human being should be. Leavitt considers homosexuality an issue that still represents a taboo for a society that rarely accepts people's queer conditions. This treatment of homosexuality suggests a rather over-determined view of human behaviour in psychological terms. In a certain way, homosexuals (Philip and his gay/lesbian peers) are regarded as the voiceless, the minorities, the socially-deprived, the excluded. The novel advances the idea that attitudes towards same-sex love depend on culture, age and upbringing. The way in which Philip experiences his feelings differs greatly from the way his parents evaluate homosexuality, even in the case of Owen, a homosexual himself. This comments on the context of culture, since in the 80's and even now coming to terms with sexual elections can take a long time, and many people do not come out until later in life.

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