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Introduction of Michel Dorais, Ph. D.

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Our third and final speaker for this session is Mr. Michel Dorais, professor of social intervention at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Université Laval and sociologist of sexuality. He holds a bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in social work and has completed postdoctoral studies in sociology and anthropology at the Université Lumière, Lyon 2. The title of his conference today is "The Decriminalization of Homosexuality: A Sociological Revolution. »

Mr. Dorais teaches psychosocial intervention, research popularization and the diversity of human sexuality. He was also involved in the creation of a sexology program at Laval University. During the 1980s, Mr. Dorais pioneered psychosocial support for young prostitutes, sexually assaulted boys and youth in the LGBTQ+ community. He then worked on the prevention of HIV/AIDS and youth crime.

Mr. Dorais is a renowned researcher and lecturer. He has several ongoing research projects, including one for the *Centre de recherche sur l'adaptation des jeunes et des familles à risque*. It should also be noted that Mr. Dorais and Ms. Chamberland are co-investigators in projects, including *Digging beneath the surface: An Intersectional Investigation of The Diversity of Trans Youth Experience* and also in *Savoirs sur l'inclusion et l'exclusion des personnes LGBTQ*.

Mr. Dorais has given numerous conferences in the French-speaking world and is

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recognized as an expert by many Canadian and European media. In addition to being a consultant in film and television series scriptwriting, he has been an occasional columnist for *Le nouvel observateur*, *Le Plus* and also for the program *Le Sportnographe*. His *Explorateur de l'intime* conference was recently broadcast on the Savoir channel. He has written some twenty books, the most recent of which, *Nouvel éloge de la diversité sexuelle*, was published by VLB editor in 2019.

**THE DECRIMINALIZATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY:  
A SOCIOLOGICAL REVOLUTION**

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Thank you again for the invitation, Mr. Doyon, I was very honoured, and I am very happy to be here this morning to take part in this conference. As you may know, I am not a lawyer, I have a background in social work and sociology.

I will speak about the research implications of this evolution, or even this revolution - you will understand why - of what has been called since the decriminalization of homosexuality. We must put ourselves in the sociological and social context of the time. It was the time of the Vietnam war protest, the new wave of feminism, the Flower Power. Then, on a global scale and certainly in America, there was a very large protest movement, and this law comes at that time through a government that is Liberal in every sense of the word, we could say.

If I thought I shared with you the impacts and repercussions, in four successive waves, that this has subsequently produced on studies and research on sexual and gender diversity, it is because sometimes some colleagues and I have been called upon as experts in cases of discrimination, police harassment, etc. Research generated by changes in attitudes towards homosexuality and then more generally towards sexual and gender diversity has, in turn, brought new insights.

At the time of the Bill Omnibus, LGBT+ studies and research did not exist, for all intents and purposes. There was a notable doctoral thesis at McGill University in the 1950s on Montreal's homosexual culture, but studies and research on such subjects before 1970 can literally be counted on the fingers of one's hand.

There were several reasons for this. The first was that students saw no advantage in taking an interest in these topics, let alone declaring themselves LGBTQ+, as we now call them, because they were then seen at best as marginal, at worst as possible criminals or unbalanced people. When I was studying social work at the Université de Montréal in the early 1970s, it was said, including by professors, that if students turned out to be homosexual or lesbian, they should be kicked out because we could not tolerate people called upon to enter into a helping relationship suffering from mental illness themselves. Let us remember that homosexuality was struck off the list of mental illnesses in December 1973, but before that was known, it took a while (we didn't have the Web at the time...). By the way, the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, which will *depathologize* homosexuality, was held in Montreal.

Four successive waves of LGBT studies and research could be identified. Militant knowledge is the first wave, which began in the 1970s and ended in 1989, a period of almost 20 years.

As soon as you are no longer considered as potential criminals for society, as soon as you are no longer considered as mentally ill at university, this gives you a little more leeway both intellectually and socially and community-wise. It was then, in the early 1970s, that many LGBT associations were created in the academic world. McGill University will be the very first with Gay McGill, which will soon become Gay Montreal, because there were students from other universities who went there to learn about advocacy. Gay McGill and Gay Montreal will have a big social impact, since their activists will be

founding the Androgyne bookstore, the only place in Montreal at the time where books and studies on LGBT realities could be found. At first, this bookstore was in a small basement on Crescent Street. At last, it provided, for those interested in this topic, an opportunity to gather information, to note that there were already emerging studies and research, many of which came from the United States and England at the time, which would give people here a taste for eventually collaborating in this movement of ideas.

It must be said that LGBT realities are not very visible. It should not be forgotten that television and cinema were, until 1967, under the Hays code in the United States. Mr. Hays was the censor of homosexuality, and of all similar "depravity", as it was called at the time. It was not allowed to show the realities of sexual and gender diversity in a positive light. In fact, homosexuality, lesbianism, or bisexuality, could be shown but it always ended in murder or frightening things. In short, these stories always ended very badly...

In terms of knowledge, we were really starting from ground. There was not much, let alone in French. But it developed gradually. Starting in the 1970s, CEGEPs will gradually expand the pool of future researchers in Quebec, as the university opens to new populations. There will also, and above all, be the adoption of the first charters of rights. Sexual orientation was intended to be included in the first Quebec charter introduced by the Liberal government in 1975, but this provision was removed from the voted version. It was the Parti Québécois that finally amended the Charter in 1977 to include sexual orientation, in the circumstances that I will explain later. Later, there was a broadening of gender expression and other characteristics that were initially, consciously or unconsciously, set aside.

I would like to pay tribute here to the person who was responsible for the amendment of the first Charter (and who had also campaigned for the first version to contain this

element): Roger Bellemare, a law student at the Université de Montréal, who had also been an activist at McGill and who, unfortunately, was prematurely swept away by the epidemic when HIV was at its worst. It would eventually be necessary to create a prize in his name because he trained many activists of the time and was very active with elected officials to make them aware of the importance of sexual minority rights. In fact, the texts that were read in the House by ministers and members were often written by him because he was extremely well documented and very convincing. And God knows that documentation was needed to justify the gains that seem self-evident today, but which seemed very innovative at the time.

Little by little, we saw the emergence of authors who wrote on the subject of homosexuality and then sexual diversity in Quebec. Jean LeDerff, an activist from France, psychologist Alain Bouchard, Jean Basile, journalist at *Le Devoir* in the 1970s, who published *Sortir*, a collective work that provides a brief overview of the gay issue here. We were beginning to see texts; we were beginning to see people who agreed to put their names under pioneering texts. There was a new paradigm that suddenly emerges. Homosexuality was no longer spoken of as a crime, or as a mental illness, but as a positive reality. This was completely new. I remember being asked to change the title of one of my first texts because it was too positive. I was told at the time that this title might shock...

At the same time, still in the 1970s, there was another organization that would play a major role in the development of LGBT studies and research. *Centre de Services Sociaux Ville-Marie*, where a social worker, Myriam Boghen, developed services for LGBT people, many of whom live in self-loathing produced by the prevailing homophobia and in a family or social ostracism that can lead to depressive or even suicidal ideas.

It is 1973 and we are still not far from criminalization and mental illness when we talk

about homosexuality or lesbianism... Ms. Boghen, whose family suffered greatly from anti-Semitism during the Second World War, is a great ally of marginalized or ostracized people. She is therefore setting up a very successful Montreal psychosocial support service for LGBT people. I had the opportunity to do an internship at this place, where I learned a lot; many people who will learn their trade there will then continue, more determined than ever, their work as a practitioner, or as researchers. It was really an incubator, for English-speaking people at first, before becoming bilingual, quite quickly. And it served as a model for other public or community services.

Let me go back to university groups a little bit because, even if the first groups came from this community, activists from university groups created the first viable community and advocacy groups outside the universities. The ADGQ, the first community organization to have a certain duration, was founded almost exclusively by people from the Université de Montréal, UQÀM and McGill. This first organization was very demanding and organized the first demonstrations for LGBT rights, particularly against harassment and police violence.

In the fall of 1976, a Montreal gay bar, the TRUXX, was declared a bawdy house and all the clients who were there, nearly 200 people, were arrested and charged accordingly. The big demonstration that followed in Montreal attracted two thousand people; the Journal de Montréal made the headline "Homosexual riot in downtown Montreal". In truth, there were about two hundred to three hundred demonstrators, but since at least two thousand people were watching the demonstration and encouraging it, it was believed that all these people were actively demonstrating...

This was certainly a turning point, since it resulted in the famous 1977 amendment to the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms on sexual orientation: moved by the consequences of these arrests, which were as violent as they seemed arbitrary - there

were job losses, even suicides, it is said, the list of those arrested being public - elected officials and ministers decided that it was high time to add sexual orientation to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination.

Although it has trained activists without even knowing it, the university has been slow to see or believe that this is a legitimate and promising field of study and research.

However, following the immense tragedy of the AIDS epidemic, research grants will become available, especially from the 1990s onwards. We want to know more about the underestimated populations that are among the most affected. Knowledge on sexual diversity, to which gender diversity will be added, is thus developed under the impetus of pioneers such as Viviane Namaste of Concordia, for example, who focused on trans realities and HIV, or Johanne Otis and her team at UQAM, who studied the situation of gay or bisexual men.

At last, knowledge of LGBT populations and realities is being further developed through grants from research organizations and ministries. The devastating AIDS epidemic is producing this impact: we want to better understand in order to act and prevent. We suddenly realize that we know nothing about these populations, so we gladly fund research on them. And in 1989, thanks to the creation of the *Centre québécois de coordination sur le sida*, continuing education was developed to make up for the lack of training for health and social services professionals not only in regards of HIV but also in regards of the populations most affected, who suffer not only from the epidemic but also from prejudice and discrimination. These trainings are to date among the most given in Quebec in this network. Almost thirty thousand people have received training on sexual and gender diversity since the 1990s.

During the 1990s, French-speaking universities finally opened to the issue of sexual and gender diversity. First, there is the foundation, at the beginning of the 1990s, at UQAM,

of the GIREF, which will start giving courses outside the department, and therefore quite accessible. Then, little by little, McGill, UQÀM and Université de Montréal and a little later Université Laval understood that there was a field to be developed. However, it was not until the turn of the 2000s that this interest became clearer (under pressure from students and the most militant teachers, however).

In 2009, the Government of Quebec introduced its first policy to combat homophobia, an extraordinary achievement to say the least, since Quebec is becoming one of the few places in the world where a government decides that all aspects of social life can unfortunately be affected by homophobia or transphobia and that it must be addressed. This marks a turning point. First, we had a knowledge that was a counter-discourse, militant knowledge, then academic and academic knowledge. From 2010, in a third wave, we saw the emergence of knowledge that is both expert and militant. This is because research organizations are now making it clear that they want to better understand and know LGBT communities while requiring researchers to be aware that it will no longer be possible to obtain grants if they do not work in collaboration with the communities concerned.

In 2011, a detailed plan to combat homophobia was presented in Quebec, which led to the creation of the Research Chair on Homophobia. I would like to pay tribute to my colleague Line Chamberland. Thanks to its dynamism and that of its team, the Chair plays a leading role in LGBT research not only in Quebec but also in Canada and beyond. This team has succeeded in putting this type of study and research on the top of list, and in legitimizing critical discourses that were not always welcome before in a sexology department.

It can now be said that rigorous and socially engaged LGBT research is developing. At the beginning, forty years ago, everyone who worked on the LGBT issue in the Francophonie knew each other. Now, there are hundreds of people working in Quebec

alone on LGBT themes at the advanced studies, master's and doctoral levels, or in research. At Université Laval, in the social sciences, this is one of the subjects that interests students the most. It's a giant step, this evolution in such a short time.

When I first taught my diversity course at Université Laval, I had students, especially guys, come to me and say, "I'd like to take the course, but I'm not because if it's on my transcript that I'm interested in sexual diversity, it's going to hurt me professionally..." I would say, "Look at this: do you think it hurts me to give this class? I'm not sure it's going to hurt me, nor you, by the way..." Today such apprehensions seem far away. Because now it is seen as a plus this type of interest in people who are or will be doing social intervention or research.

At this point in my lecture, allow me to tell you about this upcoming generation, especially since I recognize people in this room who are part of it. Now they are told, "Yes, you have to know these realities and you do well to take an interest in them. It is very important for academics to work with community groups that tell us about their reality. They expect research to be useful to them in concrete terms. Engaged research connects researchers and community people to better understand, help or contribute to the evolution of society.

Finally, the fourth and final wave I would like to talk about is the wave of reflexive knowledge. I think that after forty or forty-five years of developing militant knowledge, expert knowledge and then meeting the two, we can now begin to take a critical look at this field of study, which concerns many people. One example is the acronym LGBTQQIP2SAA, which expands the umbrella of sexual and gender diversity. We can see that there are many minorities in the LGBT minority+. All recent sociological studies show that young people are more likely to identify themselves as LGBT+ than previous generations. It's probably not because there's more homosexuality or bisexuality or

transidentity, for example. This is probably because young people are more aware of the exact words, the right words to describe what they are experiencing. Moreover, with the Internet there is the possibility of seeing that you are not alone.

I remember when I started working at the DPJ in Montreal in 1980, there were young people telling us, "I'm the only one who goes through this in my high school. "Young people came from the countryside to consult us because they did not dare to consult someone from their community. "I am alone in my village or town... »

Now, with the Internet, you know that you are no longer alone, you know that there are virtual communities, trans people, for example, in all environments and regions. I have just finished researching the experiences of trans people. They sometimes experience great isolation. Being trans or non-binary people in the regions is sometimes difficult. My research was on sexual assault. If you are LGBT in Montreal or Quebec City and you are a victim of sexual assault, you will have services. In the regions, you may be told "we are sorry, but we have no idea what to do because we have nothing for boys, nothing for trans people, either, every other time". Or your may be told, "Well, look, we're thinking about it, but we don't know. You're a trans, we haven't thought about that, but we'll think about it. Call us back in a year..." Yet, the person needs help; he or she is in post-traumatic stress disorder!

If I suffer a head injury as a result of an accident when I leave here, I will not be asked about my sex, gender or sexual orientation before I am admitted to hospital. I'm going to be treated. It should be the same for any other type of trauma. There are still subtle forms of discrimination. We are working on this issue and there is hope, but it is sometimes discouraging to see how we still have to fight to make things happen...

The next generation of LGBT+ studies and research are very promising, as I mentioned,

but it gives us a great challenge. It renews our own vocabulary and concepts on sexual and gender diversity, by completely moving away from the binary model, by being creative in content and form. I myself am still learning. I published a book in which I think I have made two hundred versions of the LGBT+ vocabulary, advised in this by my best students and young colleagues.

This generation will be the one who will write and describe LGBT+ realities over the next forty-five or fifty years. There are people in law, there are people in the social sciences, from various backgrounds in fact, and the challenge will not only be to build on what has been done but to go beyond it now, anticipating tomorrow's revolutions.

Thank you for your attention.