

6 'Everyone is a little bit gay'

LGBTIQ activism in Finnish pop music of the 21st century

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Popular music as LGBTIQ activism

In the 21st century, the development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexual, and queer (LGBTIQ) rights has been remarkable in the Nordic countries, including Finland, where LGBTIQ legislation is among the most progressive in the world (e.g. Waaldjik 2009). Same-sex marriage and joint adoption by same-sex couples, for instance, are legal, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender is illegal. Since the turn of the millennium, LGBTIQ people have become normalised and visible in many (if not all) areas of the Finnish society, culture, and professional life, from politicians to priests, and from talk show hosts to musicians. Queer imagery has also become trendy in a new way in popular culture and the media, as the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identification has come to be associated with general humanist and liberal values. It has been more profoundly understood, for example, by the mainstream media and cultural institutions, that sexual-orientation and gender minorities are not a small or marginal group, since some 5% to 15% of the population of Finland belong to these minorities (Seta 2016).¹

Manifold cultural phenomena have emerged in the wake of this general development of LGBTIQ rights. Though gender play and queering have always been central aspects of pop music (see e.g. Brett et al. 1993; Hawkins 2002, 2009, 2016; Whiteley & Rycenga 2006; Hawkins 2017), music that deals explicitly with LGBTIQ issues has reached a new phase in societal development in the 21st century, at least in those parts of the world that embrace queer people.² In Finnish music, several artists representing sexual-orientation or gender minorities are open about their identity, whether they think of themselves as engaging in identity-based music-making or not.³ Simultaneously, queer imagery has progressed from the closet aesthetics characterised by silence, censorship, and suppression to visible and openly queer aesthetics. Identity-based queer music-making seems to be blooming in both underground practices and mainstream culture, in all genres of popular music (cf. Leibetseder 2012; Taylor 2012; Jennex & Murphy 2017; Välimäki 2017). Recently, several songs dealing explicitly with queer life, written by queer-identified artists and allies, have made the Finnish mainstream pop music charts.

Though the progress of LGBTIQ rights in Finland during the 2000s has been remarkable, it is a relatively recent phenomenon. Homosexuality was illegal until 1971, and the health care administration did not remove homosexuality from its list of illnesses until 1981. Even after this, the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ was a criminal offence until 1999. This prohibition meant for example that the Finnish Broadcasting Company (FBC) could not broadcast radio or television programmes – or music – that dealt matter-of-factly with homosexuality, because that might have led to legal action against the company. Although by the 1980s and 1990s reports of such offences against journalists or artists were probably not being filed any more, the law nevertheless fostered self-censorship among media companies, cautious about presenting a positive image of homosexuality (e.g. Mustola 2007, 27).⁴ Even if queer communities were able to distribute information and art in their own publications, especially in those published by SETA (a non-governmental organisation promoting LGBTIQ rights in Finland)⁵ or its predecessors, these were marginal and circulated mainly inside the queer community. Thus, the public at large in Finland did not have access to factual knowledge about sexual and gender minorities until the 2000s (ibid.), nor was openly LGBTIQ-themed music produced by the music industry, broadcast on the radio or circulated in the consumer market.⁶

In this chapter, I will explore four examples of Finnish contemporary mainstream pop that deal specifically with the experiences of LGBTIQ people and that can be seen as LGBTIQ activist music (cf. Taylor 2012). LGBTIQ or queer activism is not a simple thing; there are differing and even conflicting views among queer communities, organisations and theorists about what kind of politics queer communities should practice (see e.g. Yeakani et al. 2013). For the purposes of this chapter, I will delimit the term ‘LGBTIQ politics and activism’ to mean *basic human and civil rights politics and activism that focus on the rights of sexual-orientation and gender-identity minorities*. This means activism that aims for an equal society and individual welfare for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. This activism is practiced, for example, through legislative initiatives that aim for changes in legislation and through education, dissemination of information, and cultural and artistic work aiming to change attitudes (cf. Seta 2018). The boundary between traditional politics and civil activism is vague (e.g. Martin 2007), but activism can be understood as going beyond conventional political arenas and forms of action. In this chapter, I define LGBTIQ activist music as music that explicitly and unambiguously challenges the heteronormative bias in mainstream culture, gives visibility and advocacy to LGBTIQ people, and prompts public debate. In addition to making and performing music, LGBTIQ activist artists talk and act publicly in support of LGBTIQ rights.

The four songs and accompanying music videos that I include in my analysis all advocate an equal society and a safer world for LGBTIQ people. Released between 2007 and 2018, these songs represent contemporary Finnish-language pop that circulates in mainstream markets. All the artists have

been outspoken in their aim as musicians to advance the rights and the social status of LGBTIQ people in Finland. By combining queer musicology (e.g. Jarman-Ivens 2011; Leibetseder 2012; Välimäki 2015; Hawkins 2016) with societally activist music research that considers music as politics (e.g. Välimäki et al. 2018), my aim is to analyse how these songs and music videos communicate LGBTIQ activist messages in order to demonstrate how popular music is implicated in the advancement of public agenda and debate related to this topic.⁷

Being lesbian, unapologetically

The first example is probably the best-known and best-selling queer-themed mainstream pop song in Finnish history: 'Ihmisten edessä' [In front of everyone], the title track on the début album of Jenni Vartiainen (b. 1983) released in 2007 (2007a). Vartiainen is among the most popular and commercially successful pop artists, female singers and songwriters in 21st-century Finland. This stylised electro-pop song by composer-author-musician Teemu Brunila (b. 1976) depicts two women, a couple who struggle to show their love publicly in a society that disapproves of it. The lyrics of the refrain (B) describe this as follows:

Sanot: Tämä ilta kävellään, käsi kädessä	<i>You say: This night we'll walk, hand in hand</i>
ihmisten edessä	<i>in front of everyone</i>
Älä sinä muiden katseista välitä	<i>Don't care about the glances of other people</i>
sillä me ollaan yhdessä	<i>because we are together</i>
Ne ei tiedä mitään, ne ei kuulu tähän tarinaan	<i>They don't know anything, they aren't part of this story</i>
joka harvoille luetaan	<i>that is read only to a few</i> ⁸

The verses (A) describe places and streets in the city where the couple meet and walk together and where they become objects of stares and yelling. As is often the case in pop songs that follow the standard verse-refrain pattern, the verses (A) describe narratively what has happened to the lyrical narrator in the song, while the refrain (B) expresses how the narrator feels about this, affectively reacts to this, or decides to think about this (e.g. Fabbri 2012). In the refrain in this instance, the couple find strength in their togetherness, their love, and their consciousness about the continuation of queer (lesbian) history to overcome grim situations. The structure of the song follows the verse-refrain pattern (AB), with an intro, a coda, and interludes:⁹

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Intro	8	
A ¹	12	Kadut täyttyy ihmisistä... [Streets are filled with people]
Interlude	4	
B ¹	12	Sanot: Tämä ilta kävellään, käsi kädessä... [You say: This night we'll walk, hand in hand]
Interlude	8	
A ²	16	Kadut täyttyy äänistä... [Streets are filled with sound]
Interlude	4	
B ²	12	Sanot: Tämä ilta kävellään, käsi kädessä... [You say: This night we'll walk, hand in hand]
Interlude	8	... Joka harvoille luetaan [that is read only to a few]
Coda		
B	4	Ne ei tiedä mitään, ne ei kuulu tähän tarinaan... [They don't know anything, they aren't part of this story]
Interl.	21	

The key of the song is C#-minor, and there is only one chord progression that is repeated throughout the verses and refrain, and also in the intro, coda, and interludes. This chord progression is in its simplest form in the refrain: **A/H/C#m/G#m7**. In the verses, intro, and interludes, suspensions and added notes make the harmony more sensual and compelling (Aadd9 / Hsus4 / C#m7 / E/G# G#m), contributing to the overall affect of the song.

The piece has a relatively brisk tempo (about 121 bpm), and the disco beat sounds nostalgic, reminiscent of retro style synthesiser pop. Yet the monotonously circulating harmony in C#-minor makes the overall atmosphere somewhat wistful, dark, and aching – an image of night, as also portrayed visually in the music video. The sensual voice features occasional hoarseness, moans, and guttural sounds, emphasising the body as a source of both pleasure and pain.

The video mixes shadowy images of a nocturnal Helsinki with shots of the artist singing and dancing. The singer is stylised as expressing a conventional conception of feminine beauty. Her costume includes a pink bell-shaped long dress, a kind of ballet tutu, with matching ‘ballet’ make-up, suggesting ‘a pink-and-black Odette/Odile’ from *Swan Lake*.¹⁰ This points to the theatrical performativity of gender (cf. Butler 1990), a masquerade that has queer and ‘femme’ undertones. A same-sex female couple is seen towards the end of the video, when the extensive coda begins after the second (and last) refrain (B²). This is the only sequence in the video in which the focus is on people other than the singer herself. The female couple is seen in stylised and erotic silhouettes against a ‘flaming’ red and yellow background. Simultaneously, strings play an accompanying texture on long notes, enhancing the sense of romanticism and sensuality. Compared to the singer, the female couple communicates a less normative gender expression with shorter hair and an androgynous look, trousers, black leather accessories, and so on. The couple conspicuously –



Figure 6.1 Jenni Vartiainen's music video *Ihmisten edessä* [In front of everyone] (2007b, screenshots): Vartiainen as a 'pink swan' and a sensual female couple 'in flames' and high heels.

rather than ambiguously – represents a same-sex female couple, which is important to the LGBTIQ activist message of the song. The 'high heels' mentioned in the lyrics and sung with a pronounced sensuous female voice ('you are beautiful, like always, in your high heels') are seen in this romantic shot. These words became important for the lesbian reception of the piece. Though lyrics here, as always in pop music, are open to many interpretations, the fact that a woman – a famous female pop star – sings about her beloved one who is 'beautiful in [her] high heels', confirms to the lesbian audience that the piece is about lesbian love (see Figure 6.1).

One of the most distinctive elements in the song is a piano riff (marked as 'interlude' in the structural scheme above): a bouncing and monotonous melodic figure in C#-minor, sounding something like a children's taunting rhyme in a gloomy minor mode. It is first heard in the intro, and it is repeated after every verse and refrain. It also concludes the song. Though the song follows the conventional verse-refrain pattern, the lengths of the verses and refrains are less conventional. The verses and refrains end after 12 measures, as if unfinished, and the piano riff takes over and concludes the section (the piano riff is four measures long after the verses and eight measures long after the refrains). This feature has a meditative effect, as if the narration is interrupted and the listener asked to reflect on what was just said. Never does the music go straight from the verse to the refrain or straight from the refrain back to verse; instead, the peculiar piano melody is interpolated at every section boundary in the piece. In its obsessiveness and repetitiveness, the piano riff can be heard as echoing the prejudices of the hostile environment or the fear of other people's reactions that are described in the lyrics. On the other hand, as the song evolves, the riff seems to grow into a gesture of empowerment.

The piano riff bears some similarity to a piano figure heard in the Italo disco hit 'I Like Chopin' by Gazebo (1983), which fittingly begins with the line 'Remember, that piano'. The obscure lyrics of this song revolve around rain, desire, Chopin, and a complex relationship. The music video adds lesbian decadence to the mix: the video portrays a triangle drama in which a 'lesbian

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black widow' seduces the male singer's girlfriend, who consequently dies. Though lesbianism is thus depicted negatively as fatal in the video, this portrayal also has campy and transgressive undertones: lesbians are extremely powerful. My feeling is that the piano riff in 'Ihmisten edessä' can be heard as an intertextual wink to the historical continuum of – often disguised and strange – lesbian imagery in popular culture.

Immediately after its release, 'Ihmisten edessä' became a big hit, and it received a whole string of music prizes, such as a gold disc and the Emma Prize¹¹ for best song of the year (2007). Moreover, it received a merit award from SETA – LGBTIQ Rights in Finland NGO. This award, called *Asiallisen tiedon omena* [The apple of objective information], is given annually to a person or a community who has improved the status of sexual orientation or gender minorities or who has distributed factual information about the diversity of gender and sexual orientation in Finland. It was noted in the justifications for the award that 'the song had deeply touched people belonging to sexual-orientation and gender minorities, their close ones and their friends' and that the song described in an apposite way how much courage many everyday things, such as walking hand in hand, demand from sexual-orientation and gender minority people (HS 2008). The song became a queer anthem for mainstream radio stations, a lesbian classic, and one of the best-known LGBTIQ themed songs in the history of Finnish music.

Friends or lovers?

More lesbian music followed Vartiainen's mainstream hit. Sini Yasemin (b. 1991) is a young singer-songwriter who is exceptionally outspoken in her identity-based and queer activist music-making. She has publicly talked about her lesbian identity and LGBTIQ issues in the media (see e.g. Wetterstrand 2016). In addition to being mainstream pop, her music also represents 'lesbian music'. By this, I mean openly lesbian singer-songwriters, who in the pop and rock genres have an image as strong and independent women. These artists, such as the Canadian indie duo Tegan and Sara, present powerful role models for queer people to identify with (Dhoest et al. 2015, 217; cf. Feigenbaum 2010; Taylor 2012, Chapter 6).

Sini Yasemin's second single, 'Kavereita' [Friends] (2016), is a pop ballad that depicts two women who are not sure whether they are friends or lovers, since they only have the courage to act romantically with each other when drunk. The verses (A) describe events in their lives and how comfortable it is to be together, to talk about favourite things, to dance together, and to sleep together. The refrain (B) reflects the dilemma of the romance, which takes place only at nights, after being in a bar, but which during daytime transforms to them being 'just friends':

Kun on yö, silloin me olla lähellä	<i>When it's night, then we're close</i>
Selvinpäin jätetään vähän enemmän turvaväliä	<i>When sober we keep a bit more distance</i>
[--]	[--]
Uskalletaan ennen baarin pilkkua Aamulla ollaan taas kavereita	<i>We have the courage in the bar before last orders, in the morning we're friends again</i>

The verse-refrain structure (AB) of the song is as follows:

Intro	8	
A ¹	16	Kello kymmenen sunnuntaiaamuna... [At 10 o'clock on Sunday morning]
B ¹	16	Kun on yö, silloin me olla lähellä... [When it's night, then we're close]
A ²	16	Eihän me edes tunneta kunnolla... [We don't even know each other well]
B ²	16	Kun on yö, silloin me olla lähellä... [When it's night, then we're close]
A ³	16	Mun täytyy myöntää etten oo yhtään pahoillaan... [I must admit I'm not sorry at all]
B ³	16	Kun on yö, silloin me olla lähellä... [When it's night, then we're close]
Coda	8	Ollaan taas kavereita... [We're friends again]

The tempo of the song is about 120 bpm, yet most of the time the song has a slow, ballad-like feeling. This is because large parts of the song (e.g. the first verse A¹ and refrain B¹) are sung against an austere background that consists of triad chords on the piano only on the first beat of each measure; no percussion or other instruments are heard, except for a few electric guitar or synthesiser tinkles. This brings the lyrics and vocals centre stage and create a sense of confession and sentimentality. The nasal and breathy voice sounds intimate, i.e. close to the listener (cf. Negus 2011, 623–624; Hawkins 2016, 172; Moore 2012, 186–187). This intimate corporeality of the voice combined with the employment of 'I-you' mode of address is a prominent feature in lesbian musical imagery (Mockus 1994; Välimäki 2005, 301–318). Yasemin's voice has a folkish (country) character, which also contributes to the sense of a singer-songwriter's credibility in drawing on her personal life (Moore 2012, 186–187; Negus 2011, 623–624). The coda keeps repeating the line 'we are friends again' (the last words in the refrain), as if emphasising that this pattern of behaviour is difficult to change. The same effect is constructed with an insistent, zurna-like wind instrument gesture,¹² and a repetitive chord pattern throughout the song (B/F#/G#m/E).

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In the video we see the singer (Yasemin) singing alone, looking straight into the camera (at the audience) or in a profile silhouette. Many of her postures signify classical gestures of melancholy and reflection. For example, she stares at the floor, with her chin resting on her hand, or pulls her hair. She wears black clothes, a hoodie, a biker leather jacket or a vest, trousers, and a nose ring; compared to Vartiainen in the video discussed above, Yasemin's image comes over as more non-normative, 'queer', in the subcultural sense. Another narrative thread in the video shows the singer herself with another woman in a romantic situation, caressing each other. This emphasises the identity-based and confessional nature of the music. From time to time, the screen turns for a moment into the grey static of blank videotape, as if illustrating the act of 'wiping out' the lesbian romance in the morning, as described in the lyrics.

The lesbian romantic imagery is seen in the video from the very beginning, which makes it very different compared to Vartiainen's video, where explicit lesbian visual content is seen only at the very end of the video and then in a more fleeting and hazy way. Yasemin's video features self-identified and straightforward lesbian cultural imagery, catering more clearly to lesbian audiences and the lesbian gaze than Vartiainen's video, which is perhaps more mainstream-oriented.

Yasemin, being a singer-songwriter, emphasises through the video that her music draws on her own experiences. She was 25 years old when she released this single and music video; her stated intention was to do a song about lesbian love, which according to her is still a taboo in Finnish mainstream media (see Wetterstrand 2016). Since Yasemin's album (2019) containing the aforementioned track reached the Finnish Top Ten (IFPI Finland 2019a), we may assume that this is changing.¹³

We are all gay, aren't we?

My third example of Finnish LGBTIQ activist mainstream music is a pop-rock song by middle-aged singer-songwriter and protest singer Jukka Takalo (b. 1967) entitled 'Jokainen on vähän homo' [Everyone's a little bit gay] (2010). This simple song combats homophobia and intolerance with straightforward lyrics, crystallised in the refrain (B):

Se on aivan sama hetero vai homo	<i>It doesn't make any difference, hetero or homo</i>
Se on aivan sama hetero vai homo	<i>It doesn't make any difference, hetero or homo</i>
Jokainen on sydämensä pomo	<i>Everyone's the boss of their own heart</i>
ja jokainen on vähän homo	<i>and everyone's a little bit gay</i>

According to the lyrics in the refrain it should not matter whether one is hetero or homo, because we are all similar human beings anyway, and 'there's a little gay guy/gal in each of us'. The piece is catchy in its ditty-like simplicity, repetitiveness and sing-along feeling, and it does sound – probably

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intentionally – like educational material suitable for schoolchildren, although in this case it is rather the adults who need educating. Takalo's song is clearly a political comment on the long-running and heated public debate on homosexuality in Finland in the 2000s, revolving around the issues of marriage equality, same-sex marriage blessings in the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the right to adoption by same-sex couples.

The tempo in the song is relaxed, about 84 bpm, with a basic beat typical of older popular dance music, such as Finnish or Slavic schlagers (the bass drum hits the first and the third beat, the snare the second and the fourth, and the bass guitar plays a root-fifth bass line). The acoustic guitar accompaniment, strumming triads, is in the foreground. The harmony is a single four-measure progression repeated throughout the song (in verses, refrain and interludes), drawing on the easy-going effect of the cycle of fifths (Dm Gm / C Fmaj7 / Bb Gm/E / Asus4 A7). This 'Baroque harmony' has the effect of emphasising the core message of the song and making it catchy. The melody employs the diatonic natural D minor scale (without the seventh degree or any chromatic accidentals) and hence has a folk-like simplicity. The word 'homo' in the first two phrases in the refrain is sung with an ascending second, which paints the word with an uplifting figure. The song follows a verse-refrain structure:

Intro	2 + 8	
A ¹	8	Miksi taivas ei ole mustavalkoinen... [Why isn't the sky black-and-white]
B ¹	4	Se on aivan sama hetero vai homo... [It doesn't make any difference, hetero or homo]
B ^{instr}	4	
A ²	8	Lääkäri, maalari, kirvesmies... [Doctor, painter, carpenter]
B ²	4	Se on aivan sama hetero vai homo... [It doesn't make any difference, hetero or homo]
B ^{instr}	4	
A ^{3*} [=A ¹]	4	Miksi taivas ei ole mustavalkoinen... [Why isn't the sky black-and-white]
B ³	4	Se on aivan sama hetero vai homo... (HOMO) [It doesn't make any difference, hetero or homo]
Coda		
B ⁻¹	4	Homo homo homo homo homo... (HOMO)
B ⁻²	4	(HOMO)
B ⁻³	4	Everyone is a bit homo... (HOMO)
B ⁻⁴	4	Mamamama... (HOMO)
B ⁻⁵	4	Everyone is a bit homo...
B ⁻⁶	4	Lalalalala... (HOMO)
B ⁻⁷	4	Lalalalala... [Fade out]

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The lyrics in the first verse (A¹) draw on the childish imagery of flowers and bees, pondering how every flower is, simultaneously, both different from and similar to other flowers, and that all flowers should be allowed to bloom. The second verse (A²) notes that everyone can be proud of themselves and should not have any fear, because looking at things from the perspective of outer space, we are all just human beings. In the second verse the singer also lists professions and characters, again like in a children's rhyming song, suggesting that there are gays in all these groups and professional fields:

Lääkäri, maalari, kirvesmies	Doctor, painter, carpenter,
lastentarhantätikin on kukaties	kindergarten teacher possibly,
arvatenkin hämähäkkimies	Spiderman supposedly
Ja urheilusankari otsa hies	and the sports hero with sweat on brow

After three verses and three refrains, there follows a long coda that consists of seven variations of the refrain with not much more lyrics than the single word 'homo'. In the first variation (B¹), for example, the whole refrain is sung only on the word 'homo', and the backing vocals shout 'homo' after each phrase (marked with capital letters in the structural outline above). The second variation (B²) consists of the backing vocals only. These backing vocals that shout 'homo' resemble jeers of derision or gestures of condemnation (like teenagers mocking someone for one's difference) but are here turned into a source of empowerment.¹⁴ The ancient Greek and Latin word *homo* appears in the video in many languages, pointing to the fact that the word actually means 'similar' and 'a human being' (or 'a man').

The music video combines images of the singer Jukka Takalo and his guitar-playing with many symbolic objects, images, photos, and texts, such as quotes from threads on internet discussion forums, social media entries and newspaper headlines, portraying the debate on LGBTIQ rights in Finland in the 2000s. Here are some examples of these quotes seen in the video:

Homosexuality – is it a sin or not?/Is homosexuality a [mental] disability?/A congregation tried to exorcise the 'demon of homosexuality' from a boy/What if your friend/relative were gay?/Latin star Ricky Martin announced he's gay/In our family there is not a single homo. This is 100% certain./My children could never become homosexuals/In our family it was not difficult even for father: our oldest son 'came out' as gay couple of years ago/Two priests registered their [same-sex] relationship/Mother, do you love me even if I am not a hetero?/Homosexuality is discussed: is it after all genetic?¹⁵

Takalo's music video became a YouTube hit and was quickly adopted as a power song by various people.¹⁶ In 2014, for example, a group of priests from the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, supporting the same-sex marriage bill that was being debated in Parliament at the time, made a music video in which Takalo's song is performed as a choral version. This was related to a strong – and eventually

successful – citizen's initiative campaign for equal marriage legislation; the campaign was called *Tahdon2013/2014* [I do 2013/2014].¹⁷ In December 2014, legislation allowing same-sex marriage and joint adoption by same-sex couples was enacted by Parliament, and the Act entered into force in 2017.¹⁸

In 2014, just before the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi in Russia, Takalo's song was released in a Russian version translated and sung by Pekka 'Petya' Peitsijärvi-Golubev, at Takalo's instigation (*Goluboy*).¹⁹ This was done to support gay athletes and LGBTIQ people in Russia, as Russia had just established new laws restricting the rights of LGBTIQ people (Stara 2014). Takalo's song is one example of how popular music artists can influence or set the 'public agenda' (cf. McCombs & Shaw 1972) by raising and upholding certain topics in public debate and by offering an audible form of activism, adaptable to various activist groups as a public way to demonstrate an opinion and thereby to advocate human rights (cf. Välimäki et al. 2018).

Even children and hockey players are gay

My last example of LGBTIQ activist pop music takes us deeper into the field of sports. 'Lätkäjätkä-Ville' [Hockey guy Ville] (2018) is a song by singer and media personality Tuure Boelius (b. 2001). His two earlier singles and music videos, 'Eikö sua hävetä?' [Aren't you ashamed?] (2017) and 'Oh Boe' (2017) dealt explicitly with homosexual orientation in the youth culture context (e.g. at school) in a positive, uplifting, and humorous manner. All these three singles made the Finnish Top 20 singles chart (reaching the fourth, first, and 19th positions, respectively; IFPI Finland 2018).

The lyrics of 'Lätkäjätkä-Ville' describe a young boy, an ice hockey player named Ville, who is handsome and 'every girl's dream'. However, Ville turns out to be gay and falls for the narrator of the song, portrayed by Boelius. This critical moment is described in the refrain:

Lätkäjätkä-Ville, kuinka se nyt silleen	Hockey guy Ville, why did he do that?
mua, pussas mua, pussas	Me, he kissed me, kissed
Mimmit pyydän anteeks, että Ville silleen	I'm sorry, girls, that Ville in that way,
mua pussas, mua	me, kissed me
Mut mä voin kertoo	But I can tell you
et se oli hienoo	that it was fantastic
[--]	[--]

The song is teenage feel-good pop, based around a simple dance-pop beat at a relatively fast tempo (about 140 bpm). Its sound is characterised by heavily echoed backbeat handclaps and various other rhythmical figures, and effects on drum machine and synthesisers. The melody is monotonous; the melody mostly stays at the same pitch, with occasional jumps of a fifth down or up, or a stepwise movement downwards. Boelius's voice is young, fresh, and boyish.

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In the second verse (A²), the narrator states (with an ironic twist) that it is not easy for Ville to be a gay hockey player; Ville does not want to tell other people about ‘this kind of love’ and prefers not to come out. For the narrator, this romance is just one fling among others, even though it was ‘something rather lovely’. The verse-refrain structure goes as follows:

Intro	~2	
A ¹	16	Lätkäjätkä-Ville kaikki tytöt kuolaa... [Hockey guy Ville, all girls are slobbering]
Bridge	8	Se riisuu rotsin ja voin kertoo... [He takes his jacket off, and I can tell you]
B ¹	16	Lätkäjätkä-Ville, kuinka se nyt sillee, mua, pussas mua... [Hockey guy Ville, why did he do that, me, he kissed me]
A ²	16	Lätkäjätkä-Ville, sillä ei oo helppoo... [Hockey guy Ville, it's not easy for him]
Bridge	8	Se riisuu rotsin ja voin kertoo... [He takes his jacket off and I can tell you]
B ²	16	Lätkäjätkä-Ville, kuinka se nyt sillee, mua, pussas mua... [Hockey guy Ville, why did he do that, me, he kissed me]
Coda		Lätkäjätkä-Ville, mua, pussas mua. [Hockey guy Ville, me, kissed me]

In the video, Boelius and another teenage boy, with a group of 13 teenage girls, sing and dance on the terraces at an ice hockey rink. Many of them wear the Finnish national team jersey or other national ice hockey props. Another narrative thread shows ‘hockey guy Ville’ on his way to the ice rink, as well as Boelius singing and dancing in a sensual and campy way in the locker room. Later, we see both boys putting on ice skates and watching each other. During the first refrain, a fulfilment is depicted by the group of teenagers ‘doing the wave’ on the terraces (at the words ‘I can tell you that it was fantastic’). During the second refrain, Boelius and hockey guy Ville – both wearing national team jerseys – kiss and hold each other in the locker room (see Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2 Tuure Boelius’s music video *Lätkäjätkä-Ville* [Hockey Guy Ville] (2018, screenshots): Singing and dancing on the terraces at the ice hockey rink, and in the locker room; two young, male ice hockey players wearing Finnish national team jerseys kissing each other.

Two weeks after the video was released, it already had more than one million views (in a country with a population of only five million), 36,000 dislikes and 16,000 likes. The video sparked controversy in the media and social media, and Boelius became the target of homophobic attacks, hate mail, and even death threats. The fury erupted, not because of singing about homosexuality per se, but because of singing about gay ice hockey players who wear Finnish national team jerseys. In the social media, Boelius was accused, among other things, of disgracing the Finnish men's national ice hockey team and the national team uniform (see e.g. Mattila 2018; Nyt 2018).

Homosexuality has been a taboo in many areas of sport (e.g. Hargreaves & Anderson 2014), especially in men's ice hockey, a form of sport that is traditionally considered macho masculine, besides being regarded as the 'national' sport of Finland (Heiskanen & Salmi 2015). Many people may consider ice hockey to be one of the last remaining bastions of heteronormative hegemonic masculinity in Finnish culture. Every year in May, most Finns follow the men's Ice Hockey World Championship as if it were a holy national ritual (ibid.). Boelius's song was released just before this annual event.

The debate was heated and widely circulated and developed in the media. Boelius himself went public with the negative response, hate mail, and death threats. He also explained that the point of the song was to foster debate on 'gay censorship' in sports and what that does to young people (see e.g. Mattila 2018; Nyt 2018). The most iconic and successful Finnish hockey player of all time, Teemu Selänne (b. 1970) (now retired),²⁰ posted a tweet supporting Boelius and his fight against homophobia in ice hockey and sports (Selänne 2018):

On the behalf of myself and the Lions [= the Finnish national men's ice hockey team]: You really do not disgrace (the Lions), on the contrary. By showing a good example, we encourage each and every one to be boldly what they are, happy and joyful – and everyone may do that in their own way. We support you [smiling face emoji]. Go, go, Tuure! Remember, fighting spirit [thumbs up sign emoji].²¹

Several celebrities expressed their support for Boelius.²² By contrast, another Finnish ice hockey icon, Juhani 'Tami' Tamminen (b. 1950), demonstrated the darkness and blindness that still exists in the field by commenting publicly that he had 'never in his life seen any homosexuals in hockey locker rooms'. He also emphasised that he has had a long and international career and that therefore 'he had seen plenty of locker rooms'.²³ Boelius commented on this in a newspaper interview: 'It is impossible that there would never have been any homosexuals among ice hockey players, considering how many people in Finland play ice hockey – whether Juhani Tamminen likes it or not'. Boelius also pointed out that it is very sad that such a prominent personality as Tamminen should have said something like that, considering its impact on many young ice hockey players (see Silvennoinen 2018).

Boelius's song is yet another example of what an extensive and important public debate LGBTIQ activist pop music may stir up. On the one hand, the resulting controversy shows that while Finnish society in general accepts LGBTIQ people, there are still areas and situations where heteronormative bias, homophobia and transphobia, prejudices, discrimination, hate, and violence hold firm, and where it is not safe to express one's LGBTIQ identity. On the other hand, despite the first homophobic reactions, the effects of the public debate clearly led to positive change by bringing homophobia in sports under serious consideration and forcing sports institutions and actors to react to it.²⁴ An activist artist like Boelius can demonstrate how queer people and culture should not be seen as something marginal and separated from the mainstream culture but rather as a prominent part of society at large, its history and its culture.

Conclusion

In this article, I have aimed to demonstrate, through four musical examples, how LGBTIQ activist popular music has influenced the public agenda and created topics for and contributed to public debate. Among the examples above, Sini Yasemin and Tuure Boelius are outspoken queers, but Jenni Vartiainen and Jukka Takalo have not talked about their orientation or identity in public. This is perhaps in accordance with the observation made by GLAAD (the world's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer media advocacy organisation) that young people are more likely to identify as LGBTIQ (GLAAD 2017). The visibility of openly LGBTIQ-identifying artists may be understood as a kind of activism too, even when the artist does not make music specifically about LGBTIQ issues, because an artist can contribute to LGBTIQ representation in the music industry simply by being a successful LGBTIQ artist (Tan 2018).

Yet it is the stories about LGBTIQ life that challenge most effectively the heteronormative assumptions of the culture. Music plays a central role in LGBTIQ human and civil rights activism as a public vehicle and arena for narrating the stories, experiences, and histories of LGBTIQ people – making them visible and making their voice heard. The making, publishing, and mediating of music and the awarding of music prizes shape cultural conceptions about whose stories are worth telling, whose lives are worth protecting, and what is included in our shared society and cultural heritage.

Though Finnish mainstream pop music has started to narrate stories about lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, stories about transgender people still haven't entered the mainstream stage. Probably this is related to the harrowing fact that in legislation concerning transgender issues, Finland lags behind the other Nordic countries, and the Finnish legislation violates human rights (see e.g. Amnesty 2019).²⁵ Currently there is a strong campaign in Finland for the reformation of the transgender legislation, called #translaki2019 [#transact 2019] (see Trasek 2019). It remains to be seen whether trans issues will be a visible

topic in the Finnish mainstream pop music before or after the transgender legislation reformation, and whether some prominent pop artists will challenge the current injustice and influence the 'public agenda' by music.²⁶

Furthermore, it is a fact that despite all the remarkable progress in LGBTIQ rights during the 21st-century, LGBTIQ people continue to experience bullying, discrimination, and hate crimes in Finland, in other Nordic countries and in other member states of the European Union (FRA 2013). Taking even broader look at our global world, we need to remember that homosexuality is still a crime in 78 countries around the world, and in eight countries it can be grounds for the death penalty (ILGA 2017). Activism is needed in music and every other field of culture and society.

Notes

- 1 By comparison, 5.4% of Finland's residents have Swedish as their first language (Statistics Finland 2018).
- 2 I use the terms 'queer people' and 'LGBTIQ people' synonymously here to denote gender and sexual orientation identifications that oppose the idea of naturalized, privileged, and fixed categories of binary gender and heterosexuality.
- 3 The insistence for artists to be transparent about their sexual orientation or gender identity is not a simple matter and can be criticised from various angles. Even a basic issue such as what counts as transparency and in which way it may be practiced is debatable. Transparency also has a bearing on personal safety, and in a hostile environment it can constitute a serious risk. Moreover, the experienced reality is much more complex than any verbally defined identities. It is also problematic that transparency is required only of queer artists, not straight artists; but on the other hand, for the sake of the visibility of LGBTIQ people, transparency is important for queer politics.
- 4 Jari Sillanpää (b. 1965), for instance, who probably is the most famous gay celebrity on the Finnish music scene and the third best-selling artist in the history of Finnish music (IFPI Finland 2019b), has told that he wanted to come out in public in a television interview as early as after his breakthrough winning the *Tangomarkkinat* [Tango singing competition] in Seinäjoki in 1995. But according to Sillanpää, the interviewer, i.e. the FBC journalist, told him that it would be better not to talk about that topic on television (see e.g. Paananen 2013). This is an example of the self-censorship of the FBC in the 1990s.
- 5 *SETA* was founded in 1974 and is a member of ILGA Europe (the European Region International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association) and several other international LGBTIQ rights organisations (see Seta 2018).
- 6 Before the advent of openly LGBTIQ themed music, queer music was often subcultural and 'double-encoded' music that was aimed at an audience of people in the know; a large part of this was originally mainstream music appropriated for queer-cultural purposes. An example of the latter in the history of Finnish popular music is a new wave song, 'Reippaina käymme rekkain alle' [Briskly we hurry to be run over by lorries] (1980), by the (male) punk band Hassisen Kone. The song became a lesbian favourite because the Finnish word for an articulated lorry (*rekka*) also denotes a macho lesbian in popular slang, a 'diesel dyke' – under which one naturally would be glad to fall. The polysemic nature of music and its adaptability to queer interpretations is well documented in queer musicology (e.g. Koestenbaum 1993; Brett et al. 1993; Whiteley and Rycenga 2006; Välimäki 2015; Hawkins 2016).

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- 7 In my previous queer-musicological research (e.g. Välimäki 2007, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2019) I have often looked for *queer strategies* in music. Here my focus is narrower, since I am interested only in music with straightforward LGBTIQ activist subject matter and not more complex conglomerations of musical queering or queer-musical world making.
- 8 All translations in the article are mine.
- 9 The number after the section indicates the number of measures in the section. The superscript number (e.g. A¹ or B²) indicates whether it is first, second, etc., verse or refrain. An apostrophe (e.g. B') indicates a notable variation in the section compared to previous occurrences. B^{instr} indicates an instrumental version of the refrain, i.e. a refrain without vocals.
- 10 The ballet *Swan Lake* (1876) by Peter Tchaikovsky is a queer classic and has been subjected to various queer remakes.
- 11 The Emma Awards are a set of Finnish music awards given out annually by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) Finland.
- 12 *Zurna* is a traditional double reed wind instrument (a shawm/oboe), used in Turkish music, for instance, and existing under various names largely in West and Central Asia, south-eastern Europe and parts of North Africa.
- 13 The song *Kavereita* can be considered Yasemin's mainstream breakthrough, though it did not manage to become a big chart hit. A new version of the song was released on Yasemin's debut album *Nimeä mut uudestaan* [Rename me] (2019) as *Kavereita – Pt. 2*.
- 14 In order to put 'people power' into the backing vocals, Takalo launched a contest of 'homo shouting' online. Several mainstream artists (e.g. Kauko Röyhkä) also contributed to the backing vocals by shouting the word *homo* in unique ways (Takalo 2014, 76).
- 15 The headlines were originally in Finnish.
- 16 The song was also released on Takalo's EP *Homo EP* (2010) and later on his album *Vastarannan laulut* [Songs from the opposite bank] (2011).
- 17 In the priests' version, an anonymous female voice sings the song in a slow tempo, with arpeggio accompaniment played on a kantele, and one priest after another shows a thumb as a sign of 'yes' for the equal marriage legislation. The kantele, being the 'national' instrument of Finland, indicated that the issue concerned 'all Finns' as a society; simultaneously the kantele prompted an association with a 'heavenly harp' and Christian egalitarianism ('all humans are equal in Heaven, i.e. before God').
- 18 In Finland, from 2002 until 2017, same-sex couples could enter a registered (civil) partnership but not marry.
- 19 The title of the Russian version, *Goluboy*, is a derogatory term for gay men in Russian, the negative energy of which is here turned into a source of power.
- 20 Teemu Selänne enjoyed a long and successful career in the National Hockey League in North America. He is the highest-scoring Finn in NHL history, and among the highest overall (Selänne 2019).
- 21 Original tweet in Finnish.
- 22 Arman Alizaid (2018), a Finnish TV personality and journalist, tweeted out that ice hockey circles should show their support to Boelius, and that 'everybody knows some hockey players love "holding the stick"'. After Alizaid's and Selänne's tweets, the Finnish Ice Hockey Association issued a statement, albeit a vaguely worded one, in support of Boelius (see *Nyt* 2018).
- 23 Why Tamminen chose to talk about locker rooms in particular and not about ice hockey rinks or life in general we do not know; but it can be seen as symptomatic of a homophobic conception (or fantasy) of homosexuality being related to places where men change clothes, and not, for example, being an issue of identity or life in general.

- 24 Before this ice hockey debate, Boelius had sparked a controversy as a teenager talking about his gayness. He even received the 'Gay of the Year' prize at the annual QX Gay Gaala Finland at the age of 16 for his contribution to Finnish LGBTIQ-culture (see e.g. Mattila 2018). Showing an example of an LGBTIQ child who is happy about himself and life was a new thing for Finnish mainstream culture and media.
- 25 While in the other Nordic countries anyone can simply declare their gender to the authorities, in Finland citizens who wish to have their legal gender status reassigned have to undergo sterilisation (unless they are infertile to begin with for some other reason) and accept a mental disorder diagnosis (see e.g. Amnesty 2019; Trasek 2019).
- 26 About music and transgender rights, see e.g. Välimäki (2014, 2015, 2017, 2019).

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