

# LGBTIQA+ in contemporary buddhism in europe

Summary of the 6-month-thesis for the academic degree „Master of Arts (M.A.)“ in gender studies at the faculty for social science at Georg-August-university in Göttingen, Germany.

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by Pia Schaefer  
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Preliminary note on the published version: This version of my master's thesis is shortened. Certain aspects have been removed for easier reading, others to further strengthen the anonymization. Since the transcripts, as well as other background documents, are not made publicly available, certain references relating to them have been removed. This version is intended for community information and not for scholarly debate. I am always open to questions, comments and criticism. Gladly by email to [queerbuddhism@posteo.de](mailto:queerbuddhism@posteo.de). I wish you a lot of fun and maybe some insight while reading.

## Introduction

*“But what's probably the most important teaching for me concerning queerness. It would probably be loving kindness because however I was cynical about it, really in the end helps, at least helped me accept myself as I am, which is easy because I'm amazing and perfect. But my views of myself sometimes are not and yeah that's that was probably you know... and it also helps to accept the people around me which has really helped” (T5)*

This work is dedicated to the situation of LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism in Europe in the form of a qualitative study. Buddhism, as a 2,600-year-old Asian spiritual and philosophical tradition, currently receives little attention in gender studies. This is despite the fact that Buddhism, as will also be shown in this study, has a lot of potential for gender studies to offer. Even the western mindfulness hype (see Pickert 2014) and the increasing number of researches from psychology and neuroscience (see Tang & Posner 2013) have not yet been able to initiate a major debate about Buddhism in gender studies. This study attempts to address this gap with a focus on the experiences of LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism in Europe.

Through interviews with eight people from different countries and Buddhist traditions, I was able to gain a first insight and hope that this study will open up space for further research and theoretical debates. This work has an exploratory character and does not claim to be representative. The documented experiences of LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism throw a colorful light on the multifaceted reality of Buddhist practices in Europe. These range from open discrimination based on gender and sexuality to self-organized networks to intensive inner growth and active empowerment. An attempt is made to do justice to an intersectional understanding and to keep other types of power/oppression systems in mind.

At the beginning of the work, the current research situation on the topic is described, reference is also made to research and literature on LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism in non-European



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countries, as well as feminist and other (cis) women-focused works in the Buddhist context. The second chapter is dedicated to the description and justification of the methodology used. In chapter three, the main part of this work, the presentation of the results and their classification in the state of research described at the beginning follows. The results are presented in the categories of positive experiences regarding gender and/or sexuality, negative experiences regarding gender and/or sexuality, other systems of power/oppression and desires for change. The present study is then discussed

In this work, the adjectives trans\*, trans, transgender and transgender are used, depending on the context and the self-description of the persons. The author herself tends to write without an asterisk<sup>1</sup>, within the framework of this work, however, the space for self-designation should remain. Quotes in German are translated for the purpose here.

In addition, there is the problem in this field of work that it is not possible to identify the one Buddhism. Buddhism as a religion has been developing for about 2500 years (see Schmidt-Leukel 2006: 21) and has divided into many different schools (see *ibid.*: 28ff). The understandings (and partial extensions) of what Buddhism is supposed to be, sometimes go in very different directions. The Buddhist schools to be found in Europe reflect this diversity and have been supplemented by efforts towards a secular Buddhism that places a stronger focus on practices and philosophy of life (see Hertz 2020). Despite these different directions, there seem to be shared issues surrounding LGBTIQ+, as reflected in this study,

## Theoretical background

Research on the subject of LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism in Europe is still in its infancy. Research on exactly this topic could not be found, which is why the international status of literature and research on LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism is presented below. In the second step, the (feminist) literature on women in Buddhism is also addressed, which is mostly geared towards

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<sup>1</sup>The asterisk might create more exclusion than inclusion. If, for example, transgender women are meant under \*, the question is why they were not already meant with women. On the other hand, non-binary people are sometimes included in women\*, which in turn does not take being non-binary seriously. This reasoning comes from the trans\_genial F\_antifa, unfortunately the corresponding online article could no longer be found.



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heterosexual, dyadic, cisgender women, but nevertheless represents a source for the debates about gender in contemporary Buddhism.

An important orientation for this work is the study on LGBTIQIA+ Buddhists in Australia, supported by the Rainbodhi Association (Kerry 2021). This dealt with the situation of LGBTIQIA+ in Buddhism in Australia using a quantitative approach.

In the setting of an online survey with questions on five subject areas, the data from 82 participants could be evaluated at the end. In addition to querying demographic data, questions were also asked about Buddhist identity, Buddhist practice, health and Buddhism, and LGBTIQIA+. Kerry particularly highlights the following findings: “More than half of Australian LGBTQIA+ Buddhists are reluctant to reveal their LGBTQIA+ identities to their Buddhist communities. More than half have witnessed sexism within their Buddhist communities, and one third have witnessed homophobia. And 16% have been told that their LGBTQIA+ identity is not in keeping with the Buddha's teachings” (Kerry 2021: 4). The caution mentioned here about coming out in the communities is not mentioned further in Kerry's study and the reasons are not given. However, the feeling that LGBTIQIA+ topics and people are being silenced or ignored is mentioned, a feeling that 60 percent of the participants describe (see Kerry 2021: 14). An expression of this ignorance can be seen for the participants in the gender segregation into men and women in Buddhist rooms, as one interviewee comments: "They segregated sexes and put me in a dorm room with other guys and it was really hard. - P6 (gay/queer man)” (Kerry 2021: 14).

Kerry's study is an important inspiration for this work. In addition, another qualitative study on LGBTIQIA+ in Buddhism in Australia is being planned. However, the results of this are not yet available at the time of writing this thesis. Rainbodhi, the organization that supported the study, has also published an important resource for the Buddhist community with its brochure "Welcoming the rainbow" (Akaliko Bikkhu 2021), which attempts to provide a guide to help Buddhist communities/centres to make it LGBTIQIA+ friendly. This booklet is also mentioned later in an interview and had a great response in the LGBTIQIA+ (friendly) Buddhist community in Europe. For these reasons, it is presented in more detail below. The booklet begins with a brief introduction to the LGBTIQIA+ acronym and the larger groups gathered under the rainbow, describes some of the findings from Kerry's study, and takes a brief look at the history (and future) of LGBTIQIA+ in Buddhism (Akaliko Bikkhu 2021: 4-9).



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The brochure further invites communities to publicly proclaim LGBTIQIA+ inclusion, to guide changes in language but also local changes (e.g. gender-neutral toilets) and shows concrete ways/actions for organizations. (Akaliko Bikkhu 2021: 11-13) These are: “

- Undertake LGBTQIA+ diversity and inclusion training for yourself and your whole organization. Encourage other Buddhist organizations to do the same.
- Use posters or stickers to let your community know that you support inclusion for LGBTQIA+ people in your center and include a 'safe space' rainbow symbol on your website and publicity materials. Mention that your organization welcomes and supports LGBTQIA+ people at talks and events.
- Have a Pride event for LGBTQIA+ people and allies in your community.
- Invite LGBTQIA+ people to participate in all aspects of your organization, including teaching, administration and volunteering.
- Create publicly available safeguarding processes that allow people to raise issues and concerns about discrimination or prejudice and ensure that there will be follow-up and resolution.” (Akaliko Bikkhu 2021: 13)

The brochure further details specific problem areas such as administrative barriers (e.g. through forms with only two options) and physical barriers (segregated gender seating arrangements, toilets, housing). It is informed about harmful language (eg misgendering, use of wrong pronouns, inappropriate jokes) and harmful attitudes (Akaliko Bikkhu 2021: 20-32). This is followed by brief explanations of intersectionality and then detailed descriptions of LGBTIQIA+ issues (Akaliko Bikkhu 2021: 37-47). The brochure thus provides a comprehensive starting point for Buddhist communities that want to work on the inclusion of LGBTIQIA+ in their structures. It is compared with the results of the study carried out here in the discussion part of this work. A similar resource is the booklet “Developing Trans\*Competence: A Short Guide to Improving Transgender Experiences at Meditation and Retreat Centers.” (Year unknown) by Audrey Renson, Chance Krempasky, and Finn Schubert, which focuses on the inclusion of trans\* in Buddhist centers. Here, too, there is an introduction and explanation of terms, followed by examples of exclusion and possibilities for inclusion. Here, too, topics include the fading out of trans\*, toilets, registration forms and accommodation. There is also a call to further educate one's own community and to see the change processes as an opportunity (see Renson, Krempasky & Schubert: 1-15).



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Concrete research, in the sense of qualitative or quantitative interviews with a focus on LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism, can hardly be found. A study on transgender women in Thailand and the Philippines presented by Winter (2005) indicates a higher acceptance of transgender women in Thailand, for which Winter suspects an explanation in the strong spiritual influence of Buddhism (see Winter 2005). The study is not presented in detail in Winter's text and he himself refers to massive weaknesses in the work, so the results/assumptions should be treated with great caution (see Winter 2005).

### Transcending & the Teaching of Not-Self

With a focus on trans Buddhists in the USA, the anthology "transcending- trans buddhist voices" (2019) represents a current and historically relevant contribution to the situation of trans people in contemporary Buddhism. It is the only collection of perspectives from transgender people in Buddhism found in the course of this work. The stories and explanations are varied. What is shown here is the frequent gain in self-knowledge through Buddhist practice (see Short: 47ff, Bormbadier: 18ff, Krempasky: 75ff) and the intensive spiritual examination of one's own gender (see Bartone: 36ff, Atlas 53ff, von Euw : 235ff). The experiences refer to discrimination/experiences of oppression (see McNamara: 32f, Schubert: 157) and support in (queer) Buddhist contexts (see Schubert: 158f, Manders: 166f). One of these oppressions, the exclusion of trans from the monastic path and ordination, is specifically addressed in the text by Santino Vella, a trans monk (Vella: 57ff). He writes: "As a transgender monk, I am a creature who should not exist, according to a strict interpretation of the Vinaya. Yet Buddhist practice has brought immense benefit to me and others and unless the Buddha appears to disrobe me, I plan to persevere." (Vella: 63). The Vinaya is the ancient monastic code that people commit to Buddhist monastics when they are ordained, more on the topic of banning trans people from ordination later. While most of the contributions relate explicitly positively to Buddhism (see e.g.. Manders: 166f), one person also describes their renunciation from Buddhist institutions (see Bartone: 41).

A Buddhist teaching that appears again and again in the anthology and also in other contexts around LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism is the teaching of not-self or not-I (Pali: anattā, Sanskrit: anātman). Since it will also play a role in the interviews, a detailed discussion is documented here. Not-self is one of the more complex teachings of the Buddha, which Em von Euw



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examines in more detail in their omnibus article “Coming home to themselves- The Resonance of Non-Self and Impermanence for Transgender Buddhists” (2019) with regard to transgender Buddhists . Non-Self, is one of the three characteristics, along with impermanence (Pali: anicca) and suffering (Pali: dukkha) or nirvana (freedom from suffering). Von Euw describes the teaching of non-self as follows: “Anattā connotes there is no self or soul that is permanent, inherent, or essential; and further, that grasping onto the idea of a permanent self is a form of dukkha” (von Euw 2019: 236).

Not-self is often used as an argument against LGTBQIA+, the identities outside the cis-heteronorm are deconstructed more quickly (see Akaliko Bikkhu 2021:32). In this sense, McNamara also reports in the anthology about a teacher's attempt to talk her out of the transition and to simply meditate until the insight of not-self comes. (McNamara: 32f) This attempt to overcome transgender identity is based on two problematic understandings. Firstly, an understanding of being trans as a pure identity. The anthology also contains a description that classifies transgender experience with transition better, namely as a physical need (Bombardier: 19). This understanding can be easily combined with the theoretical conception of Julia Serano, which speaks of intrinsic inclinations (see Serano 2016: 95ff). The second problematic understanding is the ignoring of the levels of ultimate and relative/historical truth. Hoeltzel explains this well in his article using vlogger Kat Blaque's understandable example of explaining the concept of ultimate and relative truth in relation to red lights. It is clear to all people that red lights have no meaning independent of their environment, despite this insight we should not step out onto the street at a red light (see Hoeltzel: 140). The treatment of LGTBQIA+ identities, which are to be deconstructed immediately with the help of ultimate truth, rather refers to internalized LGTBQIA+ hostility, the normative two-gender structuring into monks and nuns (if there are nuns at all), for example,

Von Euw notes that trans people in particular need a special examination of identity and, with reference to different Dharma teachers, proposes an approach in which transcending the idea of self is not in conflict with recognizing one's own self in conflict (see von Euw: 241). There are also changes with regard to the conception of non-self with regard to other mechanisms of suppression, for example Jasmine Syedullah describes her being black: “I did not realize that before I could decenter myself, there had to be a self to decenter.” (Syedullah 2016: 16)



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Intersectional articles can also be found in the anthology *Transcendence*, which contains articles in which intersectional experiences of oppression are addressed and the importance of safer spaces for LGBTIQ+ BIPOC is also emphasized (see Vanh 2019: 231ff).

### [Queer Buddhist History - Vermeulen, Faure & Burton-Rose](#)

To deal with LGBTIQ+ in contemporary Buddhism in Europe, you also need to look into the past. This helps to classify current disputes and, above all, to break through the colonial view of Buddhist traditions.

Michael Vermeulen in the texts “The rise of Rainbow Dharma: Buddhism on sexual diversity and same-sex marriage” (2017) and “The Buddhist pioneers of same-sex marriage in the West: a little-known history of compassion in action” (2018) not only provides a concise summary of the history of LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism, but also demonstrates Buddhism's active commitment to gay marriage equality. In the text “The rise of rainbow dharma” Vermeulen refers to the silence of the Buddha on homosexuality (see Vermeulen 2017: 28). He also follows the developments in dealing with homosexuality in the three major branches of Buddhism - Theravada, Vajarana and Mahayana. For Theravada, he points to a non-preoccupation with homosexuality, which he sees in the focus of Theravada on monastic life (see *ibid.*: 30). However, the introduction of homophobic legislation by the colonial powers did not lead to resistance from the Buddhist community (see *ibid.*: 31). Nevertheless, in more current debates about homosexuality in countries influenced by Theravada Buddhism, he finds silence until the support of marriage equality by the local Buddhist community (see *ibid.*: 31). According to Vermeulen, however, concrete statements against homosexuality and its classification as sexual misconduct can be found in Vajarana Buddhism, which is mainly practiced in Tibet (*ibid.*: 31f). Vermeulen does not elaborate on this argument, but it can be assumed that he is referring, among other things, to statements about the correct body openings for the insertion of the penis (see Roloff 2017: 134). The Vajarana, in the form of his most important representative, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, has meanwhile moved away from discrimination against homosexuality (see Vermeulen 2017: 32).

The development in Mahayana is also interesting. Here, for centuries, the acceptance of same-sex marriages in Buddhism seems to have been dominant, which Vermeulen shows, among other things, with the reference to the Chinese Golden Orchid Sisterhood. An order based on



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the worship of the Bodhisattva Guan-Yin, in which women married, sometimes had open sexual relationships and also officially adopted children (see *ibid.*: 33). Only through Western influences did the attitude towards homosexuality change in both China and Japan.

Vermeulen remarks appropriately: "[...] their acceptance of homosexuality was considered to be backwards compared to the West, just as other traditions such as polygamy or forcing women to bind their feet. ironically, many present day Chinese and Japanese consider tolerance for sexual minorities to be an ideological importation from the West, alien to their own cultures." (*ibid.*: 33). Here the destructive effect of Western/Christian colonialism and its massive and complex effects on the understanding of gender and sexuality worldwide can be seen (see Lugones 2007).

Bernhard Faure takes a detailed look at the history of Buddhism and sexuality in his book *The Red Thread- Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (1998). It begins with a detailed discussion of how to deal with (sexual) desire. Faure also addresses the problem that, due to the diversity of Buddhist manifestations, it is hardly possible to speak about one Buddhism (see Faure 1998: 11f). For Theravada Buddhism, he constitutes a rejection of sexual desire, since this is understood as a means of binding us to life (see *ibid.*: 22). This view is shown, for example, in the legend of Sakyamuni Buddha, who is supposed to be kept from enlightenment by the daughters of Mara by seducing him. Mara generally stands for desire (see *ibid.*: 21). In connection with this negative view of sexual desire, Faure sees the recurring misogyny in Theravada. He also recognizes the hostility towards women in a blatant devaluation of women's bodies (see *ibid.*: 55ff).

In Mahayana and Zen, Faure describes the ambivalent view of sexual desire that is classic for these traditions. Despite theoretically ambivalent statements, the same rules for sexual abstinence for monks and nuns can be found in Mahayana traditions as in Theravada (see Faure 2019: 40). In Vajarana and Tantric Buddhism there is a positive approach to sexuality and lust, in that symbolic or sometimes not only symbolic (cisgender & heterosexual) sex is attributed the power to let go of one's own ego (see *ibid.*: 48ff).

In his discussion of the Vinaya, Faure also addresses Pandaka and transsexuality (see *ibid.*: 76f). The position of Ven. Vimala (2021) on transsexuality and the concept of pandaka is presented in the course of the work, which is worked out in much more detail. Interesting for



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this work is the fact that according to the monastic code, homosexual sex has fewer consequences for the practitioner than heterosexual sex (see Faure 2019: 81f).<sup>2</sup>.

In Chapters 5 and 6 of his book, Faure also describes many phenomena similar to Vermeulen, including the shock of Christian missionaries at the apparent normality of homosexuality (see Faure 2019: 207). But he also introduces an important debate on the subject of male love, or nashoku in Japanese. He shows that this practice was often a form of pedophilia, especially in Japanese Buddhist monasteries. The boys were treated as sex objects and nevertheless partly deified (see *ibid.*: 237). They often wore women's clothes and had make-up on them (see *ibid.*: 210). However, they did not lose their status as men. (see *ibid.*: 225) If this were the case, they would still be subordinate to women in the social hierarchy, as Pandakas. (see *ibid.*: 277) Faure argues that Nashoku should be classified historically, thus marrying off young girls was also common practice in Japan at the time, but should not relativize the massive abuse of children (see *ibid.*: 275). Even the designation of these practices as homosexual is problematic because this label did not exist at the time, which Faure classifies with reference to Foucault's comments on sexuality at the beginning of the chapter (see *ibid.*: 215).

A word that has sometimes been used incorrectly for homosexuals is the term Pandaka (see *ibid.*: 214). This term, along with the word ubhatobyañjanaka, describes groups of people who, according to the Pali Vinaya, are also to be excluded from ordination. The ordination of transgender and intersex people is often rejected with these terms (see Ven. Vimala 2021: 4). Ven. In their text "Through the Yellow Gate - Ordination of Gender-Nonconforming People in the Buddhist Vinaya"(2021), Vimala has provided a very detailed treatment of the two terms for Theravada Buddhism. Ven. Vimala provides a historical classification of the terms Pandaka and ubhatobyañjanaka. They points to the impossibility to translate these terms into terms known to us such as eunuch or intersex (see *ibid.*: 4). They also points out that both terms can be found neither in the first versions of the Vinaya nor in the early sutras, which indicates that their introduction into Buddhism only happened with the second Buddhist council (see *ibid.*: 4f ).

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<sup>2</sup>Incidentally, masturbation is also prohibited. Which leads, among other things, to somewhat amusing listings in the Sanskrit Vinaya of various types of vegetables that nuns could use for masturbation. "If a nun satisfies herself with a radish, an onion, a cabbage, a root of horseradish, a creeper, a cucumber, a colocynth, a gour, a pumpkin, or any other object, and thus satisfies sensual desire, she commits a serious offense." (Nolot 1991 after Faure 2019: 88)



The terms, which probably emerged in the course of larger debates about gender at this time, remain difficult to define because the descriptions sometimes differ widely. A major Chinese commentator on the Vinaya describes types of pandakas: "A 'paṇḍaka', monks, means in this case, āsittapaṇḍaka, usūyapaṇḍaka, opakkamikapaṇḍaka, pakkhapaṇḍaka, napuṃsakapaṇḍaka. Five paṇḍakas:

1. āsittapaṇḍaka: a man who gains satisfaction from performing oral sex on another man and from swallowing his semen or who only becomes sexually aroused after swallowing another man's semen.
2. usūyapaṇḍaka: a voyeur, that is, a person who gains sexual satisfaction from watching others have sex.
3. opakkamikapaṇḍaka: eunuch, due to castration.
4. pakkhapaṇḍaka: those who become sexually aroused in parallel with the phases of the moon.
5. apuṃsakapaṇḍaka: a person born without sexual organs.

Of these, the āsittapaṇḍaka and usūyapaṇḍaka are not prevented from ordination, but the other three are prevented.” (ibid.: 19f).

Ven. Vimala points out that, at least according to this definition, pandaka cannot be translated as eunuch, since obviously only one type of pandaka is a eunuch (see ibid.: 20). It is also noteworthy that the reason for the exclusion of Pandakas from the monastic community is based on their apparent hypersexuality, which seems not very conclusive with regard to people without sexual organs (pakkhapandaka) as well as eunuchs (opakkamikapandaka) (see ibid.: 20 ).<sup>3</sup>

Simply translating the usūyapaṇḍaka as intersex persons also falls short. In two central listings of the three types of usūyapaṇḍaka, one type of usūyapaṇḍaka is described as a person who can fertilize others (or even himself) and become pregnant (see ibid.: 28). The concept of usūyapaṇḍaka is therefore obviously mythological, since this type of intersex has not been proven in any real case and, based on our medical understanding, would also not be possible (see ibid.: 29).

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<sup>3</sup>The Pandakas, who are sexually aroused parallel to the phases of the moon, may have been the target here. It's not mentioned anywhere, but I can imagine it being a form of discrimination against people who are menstruating. Even if the reference is probably more of a mystical nature.



Ven. Vimala also refers to a passage in the Vinaya that describes the case of a gender change of a monastic (see *ibid.*: 35f). The Buddha seems to have a very pragmatic position here, because if a monk becomes a nun overnight, she is allowed to keep her rank and robes and is to live with the nuns from now on. In the opposite case, the monk should then live with the monks. While many see this passage as evidence or strong evidence of the Buddha's acceptance of transgender people (see et al. Vermeulen 2017:2, Chennery 2015:13), Ven. Vimala also questioned whether we can use the terminology we are familiar with (see Ven. Vimala 2019: 37). The overnight gender change seems to be more of a mythological nature as well, or could possibly apply to young monastics, who were ordained before puberty with unclear sex characteristics and who later turn out to have been mismatched. Then again, this would be an indication of the acceptance of intersex people (see *ibid.*: 37).

Furthermore, gender change in Buddhist literature is usually interpreted in terms of the patriarchal gender hierarchy. Bad karma turns a man into a woman, good karma turns a woman into a man (see *ibid.*: 36f). An image that still holds up. Other authors also see this connection between exclusions against gender diverse people and the oppression of women. (see Gyatso 2003: 113f, Burton-Rose 2012: 87) Daniel Burton-Rose also argues in his text “Gendered Androgyny: Transcendent Ideals and Profane Realities in Buddhism, Classicism, and Daoism” (2012). He shows that despite mentioning and sometimes even idealizing gender outside the norms, the patriarchal reality stayed intact (see Burton-Rose 2012: 87).

A third gender was recognized in many cultural contexts and also part of medical literature (see Gyatso 2003: 93f, Burton-Rose 2012: 77ff). However, the difference in the Buddhist way of dealing with it is massive. In her text “One Plus One Makes Three: Buddhist Gender, Monasticism, and the Law of the Nonexcluded Middle” (2003), Janet Gyatso impressively points out that while some Buddhist texts say that Pandakas should not even be taught the doctrine (see Gyatso 2003: 98), later in the Tibetan area it is said that the maning (third gender) pulse is a bodhisattva<sup>4</sup>Pulse. (see Gyatso: 105) The female pulse has too little and the male too much energy. Gyatso sees strong parallels between the description of a third sex and the description of the second sex, she writes: “Both the second and third sex are in the end *napumsaka*, to return to the Indic medical term—that which is “not male”— but now we can

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<sup>4</sup>According to Schmidt-Leukel, the bodhisattva ideal is to strive for enlightenment for altruistic reasons. (see Schmidt-Leukel 2017: 189ff)



see that the pandaka is also not what the order would like the female to be either.

Uncontrollability, instability, indefinability, softness, weakness: these features are common to caricatures of the second and the third sexes alike, rendering the two equally anathema to monasticism.” (Gyatso 2003: 114).

Gyatso sees the entire tradition against the third gender group, which from her point of view is probably mainly theoretical, as dealing with the actual discrimination against the second gender (see *ibid.*: 113f). She even goes so far as to speculate that only the Pandaka category made it possible to establish the ordination of women (see *ibid.*: 114). A very cis women-centric perspective that leaves little room for the most likely non-theoretical persons who could not or did not want to be assigned to the traditional two sexes.

### [Lotus Sutra, Vimalakirti Sutra and Bodhisattva Guan-Yin - Or: Queer Potential in Mahayana Teachings](#)

Two Sutras<sup>5</sup> are repeatedly mentioned in a queer and feminist discussion of Buddhism: The Lotus Sutra and the Vimalakirti Sutra (see *inter alia* Burton-Rose 2012: 72f, Chenney 2015: 1, Gross 1993: 70f & 177, Roloff 2017: 141, Atlas 2019 : 53f).

The Lotus Sutra describes the enlightenment of the naga princess, who appears before the Buddha and his followers as a being of deep insight. Due to the opinion expressed by the monks present that a woman is incapable of attaining enlightenment, the princess transforms into a man and attains complete enlightenment. (see Deeg 2007: 196ff)

The interpretation of this sutra is very different, definitely the possibility of gender changes in Buddhist mythology can be determined. Some interpret this sutra as repeated evidence of the patriarchal norm in Buddhism, for full enlightenment occurs only after gender change (see Burton-Rose 2012: 73). Others argue that the dragon girl was evidently enlightened before the gender change and that the whole story exposes the patriarchal narrow-mindedness of some monks in the Buddha's followers (see Gross 1993: 70f, Ikeda 2003: 28ff).

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<sup>5</sup>Sutras are ancient traditions intended to record the teachings of the Buddha. They were passed down orally for centuries before they began to be recorded in writing. (see Schmidt-Leukel 2017: 22)



In another relevant sutra, the Vimalakirti Sutra, we accompany Shariputra receiving a teaching on non-duality and emptiness from a goddess. Impressed by her knowledge, Shariputra then asks: "Goddess, what prevents you from transforming yourself out of your female state?"

Goddess: Although I have sought my "female state" for these twelve years, I have not yet found it. Reverend Shariputra, if a magician were to incarnate a woman by magic, would you ask her, "What prevents you from transforming yourself out of your female state?"

Shariputra: No! Such a woman would not really exist, so what would there be to transform?

Goddess: Just so, Reverend Shariputra, all things do not really exist. Now, would you think, "What prevents one whose nature is that of a magical incarnation from transforming herself out of her female state?"

Thereupon, the goddess employed her magical power to cause the elder Shariputra to appear in her form and to cause herself to appear in his form. Then the goddess, transformed into Shariputra, said to Shariputra, transformed into a goddess, "Reverend Shariputra, what prevents you from transforming yourself out of your female state?"

And Shariputra, transformed into the goddess, replied, "I no longer appear in the form of a male! My body has changed into the body of a woman! I do not know what to transform!"

The goddess continued, "If the elder could again change out of the female state, then all women could also change out of their female states. All women appear in the form of women in just the same way as the elder appears in the form of a woman. While they are not women in reality, they appear in the form of women. With this in mind, the Buddha said, 'In all things, there is neither male nor female.'" (Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra).

This sutra, which "very humorously makes fun of the self-importance of some monks" (Roloff 2017: 141), as already mentioned, is found again and again in queer and feminist debates on Buddhism. The very clear naming of the emptiness of gender categories is reminiscent of deconstructivist debates in gender studies. (see *ibid.*: 140) "In all things, there is neither male nor female" is a clear statement of the need to dissolve these categories. The



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fact that this insight can not only be used for queer arguments but also against LGBTIQ+ in the event of a misunderstanding has already been worked out here on the subject of not-self.

Another interesting sutra can be found in the Pali canon, in the Samyutta nikaya 5.2 “Soma-Sutta” (see Roloff 2017: 140). The nun Soma is meditating in the forest when Mara appears to convince her that being a woman is miserable. Soma then replies to Mara: "

“What difference does womanhood make when the mind is serene, and knowledge is present as you rightly discern the Dhamma. Surely someone who might think: 'I am woman', or 'I am man', or 'I am' anything at all, is fit for Māra to address.”

Then Māra the Wicked, thinking, “The nun Somā knows me!” miserable and sad, vanished right there. ' (Soma Sutta)

So the nun succeeds in making Mara, the personification of everything that hinders her, disappear through the insight into non-self. Here, too, a clear renunciation of gender identification as the key to inner liberation is staged.

Not only in the sutras, but also among the enlightened beings in Buddhism, there are examples of less fixed gender roles. This is how the Bodhisattva Guan-Yin/Avalokiteshvara, the great Bodhisattva of compassion, is described as male, female and genderless (see Gross 1993: 75f). As one of the most popular bodhisattvas in China, her influence is great, but the lived cis and heteronormative reality of Buddhist communities has changed little, either through her or through the sutras listed above.

## Patriarchal normality

While the discussion about LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism is still in its infancy, there have been developments in the discussion about women in Buddhism for years.

In German-speaking countries, Roloff and her contributions (Roloff 2017, Roloff 2019) should be mentioned. In her article "Gender Constructions and Gender Relations in Buddhist Traditions" (2017), she sheds light on different theoretical and practical approaches to gender



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in Buddhism. She also describes the simultaneity of theoretical enlightenment potential independent of gender and practices in which the genitals of aspirants for the monastic path are to be examined. (ibid.: 133) She also elaborates on the enlightenment potential of women in another text from 2011. Her distinction between Hindu and Buddhist beliefs on the subject of rebirth is also fascinating in this context. she turns out that in the Buddhist sense of rebirth there is no rebirth of a “permanent, independent self” (Roloff 2017: 132). She works in the text using Spoonberg's definitions from his text *Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism* (1992). These are helpful to classify certain dynamics in Buddhism and other religions (see Roloff 2019: 36ff), and are therefore presented in more detail now.

Spoonberg develops a view of the very different attitudes towards women and femininity in early Buddhism (see Spoonberg 1992: 3-30). Among other things, he describes the revolutionary role of Buddhism in the inclusion of women (see ibid.: 6). According to Spoonberg, women were recognized practitioners and teachers in the time of the Buddha (see ibid.: 7-8). His distinction between four attitudes towards women, which also proves to be helpful with regard to LGBTIQ+, was particularly formative for further research. These four attitudes in early Buddhism are:

1. Soteriological inclusion. With the concept of soteriological inclusion, Spoonberg describes the possibility of women, clearly formulated in early texts, to be enlightened (see ibid.: 9-14). In the early texts there are references to women's potential as well as references to women who attained full enlightenment and then broke the cycle of rebirth and death (see ibid.: 9-10). Spoonberg also sees this attitude in congruence with the doctrine of non-self (Anātman) (see ibid.10). In comparison to dealing with the caste system, which was genetically based at the time and whose socio-economic origins are explained, there is no such examination of the social construction of gender (see ibid. 11-12). Through that there is the possibility to include women on an abstract level, without deconstructing the category of gender (see ibid. 13-14).

2. Institutional androcentrism. Spoonberg describes this attitude as the opinion that male authority over women is appropriate in Buddhist institutions (see ibid.: 14). This was the same as the social normality of the time (see ibid.: 14). His interpretation of the story about the beginning of the ordination of nuns is interesting. He does not interpret this as a historical document, but rather as a symbolic and mythological formulation of the conflict resolution between the permission of women's ordination and patriarchal social reality (see ibid. 15).



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The 8 special rules for nuns that the Buddha sets out in the sutra are also to be understood in this sense. However, the consequences for the nuns' orders were devastating (see *ibid.* 19, Roloff 2011: 171).

3. Ascetic misogyny. The misogyny of some Buddhist texts cannot be denied (see Paul 1981: 21ff). Spoonberg also points this out and takes examples, for example from an important scripture in the Pali canon: “Monks, I see no other single form so enticing, so desirable, so intoxicating, so binding, so distracting, such a hindrance to winning the unsurpassed peace from effort.. as a woman's form. [...] Verily, one may say of womanhood: it is wholly a snare of Mara.” ((Anguttara-Nikaya III; 67-68) after Spoonberg 1992: 21) Spoonberg sees this defense of women in connection with the suppression of sexual needs in monastic celibacy (see *ibid.*: 21). He also highlights, that this externalizing of the own needs is not in line with the Buddhist insight that clinging and aversion are both not helping on the path (see Spoonberg: 23.24).

4. Soteriological androgyny. Soteriological androgyny is closely related to the concept of emptiness (see *ibid.*: 25). From this point of view, gender differences are considered empty at the level of ultimate reality. They are interpreted into dialectical modes, both of which must be integrated in order to achieve non-duality (*ibid.*: 26). This view is particularly intensified in the Vajrayana and translated into practices (*ibid.*: 27-28).

Spoonberg argues for juxtaposing these four views of Buddhism on women rather than trying to identify a truly Buddhist view. He also advocates understanding the Buddhist ideals of inclusivity and androgyny and the often profane patriarchal, heteronormative reality as connected (*ibid.*: 29-30).

Further comments on feminist perspectives in Buddhism can be found in Gross (1993), Paul (1981) and Campbell (2003), among others. It is also important to mention the criticism of these approaches. Among other things, Kawahashi accuses Gross of arrogance and that these outward, Asian women would not know feminism. (Kawahashi 2003: 310) Not seeing the developments and the changes that women in Asian countries have fought for and denying



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them their ability to act and self-determination is what Kawahashi describes as orientalist (ibid.: 309-310)<sup>6</sup>.

## Key question

As shown in the previous chapter, there is hardly any research on LGBTIQ+ in contemporary Buddhism in Europe. From this gap, a very open and explorative question was decided. The central question of this study is simple: What is the situation of LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism in Europe?

Three sub-questions were formulated: What positive/negative experiences of gender and sexuality do LGBTIQ+ have with and in Buddhism? What experiences are made with other systems of oppression such as racism and ableism? What change requests do LGBTIQ+ have in Buddhism in Europe?

## Methodic procedure

In order to find participants for the study, a request was sent through various channels of the LGBTIQ+ community in Buddhism. The search for participants was also shared privately. This request was sent in English and German. At this point, great gratitude should be expressed to all people who forwarded this request and also sent/posted via/in the mailing list/groups that are not accessible to the author. The community feedback was great and apart from about 15 people interested in participating, the author was also sent many tips, text recommendations and supportive messages. It is important to mention that both in the request and in the interviews, the participants and the community were promised insight into the results of the study.

In the request, care was taken to mention the social, theoretical and Buddhist position of the author. "I am a white, able-bodied, transgender, lesbian woman practicing in the plum village tradition and working from an intersectional, queer-political and feminist perspective." (Mail 1) The tone was deliberately kept open and friendly and in German the salutation "Du" was used. Overall, this should make it clear that the author sees herself as part of the community

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<sup>6</sup>The goddess Tara also plays an important role for many feminist Buddhists. More comments on Tara can be found in Wetzel (2010) on pages 221-237



and that a safer space is ensured for the participants. This clear positioning already in the inquiry is based on a conscious reflection on the impact of social inequalities, as demanded, for example, in intersectional debates. (see Erel, Umut et al 2010:68ff)

At least for reaching people, this seems to have been helpful. The author then created a calendar via the online service Calendly, in which people could register for an interview appointment that suited them well. Online video interviews were chosen as the form of interview, which is due to a lack of resources for travel on the one hand, and on the other hand in times of a global pandemic, in addition to telephone interviews, was the only organizationally possible option. Participants were later given the opportunity to opt for interviews with or without video, all opting for interviews with video, with one person (T4) having the majority of the interview without video due to internet connection problems. Skype was chosen as the platform because there video calls and recordings are possible without interruption without any costs. The Jitsi platform was offered as an alternative for people who do not want to install Skype or who have a higher need for data protection. In order not to lead participants into an interview situation that is harmful to them, both the possible emotional stress of an interview and the dangers that remain despite anonymization were pointed out. The LGBTIQ+ community in Buddhism in Europe is such a small group that it is not possible to anonymize it in a way that makes inference impossible. Making this clear was a clear decision for the safety of participants and against the possible lessons learned from interviews with people in particularly vulnerable situations. Everything else seemed wrong from a moral and research ethical point of view.

Eleven people then made an appointment for an interview. These individuals were then sent a small questionnaire on demographic data and a consent form. The questionnaire should enable preparation for the interview, facilitate subsequent evaluation and provide insight into the demographic structure of the participants. (Witzel 2000: 5)

Since there was no interview with three people due to illness, among other things, the demographic data of the eight participants are presented below. The age of the participants is between 25-68 years. When asked about gender, the answer was "fluid" once, "non-binary" once, "cis woman" once, twice female ("w", "female") and three times male (2x "m", 1x "times"). Three people describe their sexuality as "gay" or "homosexual", two as "lesbian", one as "attracted to women", one person as "bisexual", one person as "fluid". Three participants



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come from Germany, two from France, two from Great Britain and one person from the Czech Republic. Four people are “single”, two “in a relationship”, one person is “married”, another focused on “close friendships”. Three people are employed, one is self-employed, two are unemployed or ordained and one is retired. When asked about class/social class, there was a reference to the middle class four times (2x “middle class”, 1x “educational middle class”, 1x “comfortable background”), three people did not answer, one person sees himself as part of the “working class “. Five participants answered the question about physical/mental impairments with “none” or similar, two indicated both physical and mental impairments and one person did not answer the question. All participants were white, three answered the question about race/cultural affiliation with white/white, once the answer was "European", once "skin light", once "culturally and socially shaped in Germany", once "i do not support these labels". As their Buddhist tradition, two people gave "Zen", two others "Plum Village", one person "Zen / Plum Village", one person "Kagyu / Plum Village", one person "Dhyana Tradition" and one person didn't answer, but in the interview the person assigned themselves to the Kagyu tradition. And last but not least: Four people describe themselves as lay people, two as ordained ("ordained" "monastic") and one person as "member of the Order of Inter-Being".

From my point of view, there are many different perspectives in the study with regard to age and gender, for example, the middle class bias and the complete lack of the perspective of BIPoC in turn points to errors in the search for participants with a mixture of problems that exist in the Buddhist community can be found in Europe. This is a weakness of this study that should be more actively addressed, especially in future research.<sup>7</sup>It raises the question of which Buddhism is actually spoken of in this work. What is clear is the total lack of perspectives from Asian Buddhist communities in Europe. So the study is a white perspective on westernized forms of Buddhism and most of the participants are practitioners in one form or another in the Plum Village tradition. Only two people did not (also) locate themselves in the Plum Village tradition in the statements and interviews, one of whom described himself as practicing Korean Zen and another in the Kagyu tradition. The reasons for this probably lie in the author's access to the field, but also possibly in the fact that the Plum Village community is the most visible (and probably largest) LGBTIQ+ community in Buddhism in Europe. It

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<sup>7</sup> In this context, for example, one possibility would have been to approach Buddhist BIPoC groups more actively, which in retrospect might have enabled a more diverse perspective.



can be assumed that the study didn't reach many people outside of existing connected LGBTIQ+ communities.

Before the interviews were conducted with the participants, an interview guide was created and tested in a trial interview. This mock interview led to a stronger focus on a main narrative question, which was captured in the guide through possible follow-up questions on specific topics. After the interview, the main question was supplemented with a temporal starting point, which was intended to facilitate the flow of the narrative. The interviews were originally intended as guided (expert) interviews (see Helfferich 2019). However, this plan was discarded after the trial interview and instead a biographical-narrative interview more oriented towards Rosenthal with a focus topic was sought. (Rosenthal 2015: 170ff) Despite the initial question remaining the same, this worked very differently and in some cases there was hardly any narrative flow in the interviews. (T8, T4) Care was taken to always end with the question of desired changes, also in order to let the participants leave the conversation with a feeling of possible change and thus reduce the emotional burden. (see Rosenthal 2015: 177f)

The video recordings made in Skype and Jitsi were then imported into MAXQDA and transcribed by hand using the integrated transcription tools. Basically, the decision was made for a verbatim transcription and also um, laughing, clearing the throat and the like was noted, since this information often provided information about the contextual meaning of statements and, for example, irony. Dialects were retained because certain narrative patterns were easier to understand.

The finished transcripts were subjected to a qualitative content analysis according to Mayring. (see Mayring 2015: 50ff) A decision was made against other approaches to qualitative content analysis (see Kuckartz 2018), since the content analysis according to Mayring is the most established method. The decision against using grounded theory was based on the prior knowledge that should be included in the coding.

## Results

The results of the study are presented in the following section. The graphics below show the most common codings for the respective topic. The meta-codings are at the top, the respective

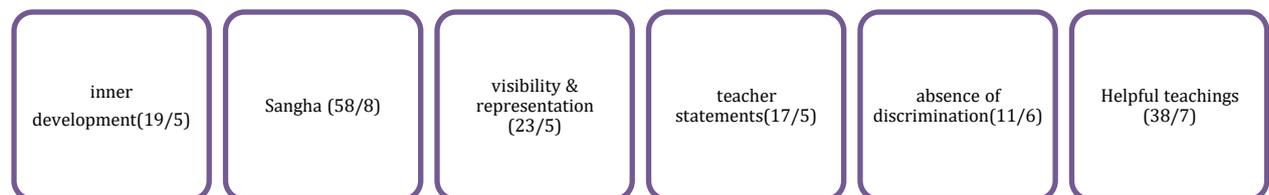


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codings below and sometimes these sub-codings below. The numbers in parentheses represent the frequency of the encoding and the number of times it occurs. For example, positive experiences in Buddhism in relation to gender and sexuality under the code of inner development can be found 19 times in interviews with five different people.

## Positive experiences

### Positive experiences in buddhism with regards to gender/sexuality(181/8)



The statements on positive experiences in Buddhism in relation to gender and/or sexuality represent the most frequently occurring meta-coding in purely quantitative terms. This is probably due, among other things, to the focus on the well-being of the interviewees in the conduct of the interview and is therefore not analyzed further here.

### Inner development

One code mentioned in five interviews is inner development. The inner confrontation with one's own gender is particularly impressive. T7 describes the following, for example: "Yes, in that area, I then got to know when inner peace was established, I got to know the feminine side of me. which I hadn't noticed, although it had been there for a long, long time, but it was simply buried". In the interview, They thus formulates a possibility of self-discovery through Buddhist practice, through which They was able to create inner peace. While T7's feminine side is one of his own among others, T1 describes a similar discovery of his own feminine side, which does not change his identification as a cis male:

"I would describe myself as a cis man, but I'm through with my practice. Actually, we're all talking about the yin and yang thing. That we never actually only have these two points but that we have a whole scale. And (pause) cis man (points to himself) but I have, I don't know



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how to express mans, I have a woman inside me. There are both aspects. Words don't really fit there again because man and woman are again not the right words for it" (T1)

T8 also describes the confrontation with one's own gender, who reports that she found time for an intensive confrontation in (queer) Buddhist spaces. T6 also reports on the positive possibilities for deep confrontation with one's own identity in trans-Buddhist spaces; she also makes an explicit distinction from non-Buddhist spaces in which she does not find this type of confrontation. T8 also reports the first time both feeling and communicating attraction to a woman on a retreat. The differentiation of one's own attraction can also be found in T1, who finds a change in the romantic attraction to people through the practice. T1 also describes discovering internalized homophobia and becoming more loving towards oneself.

### Sangha

Sangha, i.e. the Buddhist community, is repeatedly mentioned as a source of positive experiences. Here again, a distinction must be made between explicitly queer sanghas, i.e. communities only for LGBTIQ+, and communities in which everyone can participate. With the latter there are always positive experiences, which, however, as we will see later, are also accompanied by many negative experiences. T2, for example, describes his own impression: "I also believe from the many experiences I have had that most Buddhists are very happy in their communities and are also accepted." There are also positive examples among others, he describes T1 describes his experiences in his first Buddhist community with the words: "I felt very safe and accepted just the way I am."

T5 describes the radical openness in Buddhist spaces as positive and also mentions a friend from his sangha who campaigns for the rights of transgender people. The importance of community support is also demonstrated by T6, who mentions positively that her local sangha forwarded the LGBTIQ+ online sangha and also reports positive reactions to her own coming out to individuals in her community. One ally who brought prior knowledge of trans issues with him is mentioned particularly positively, but it should be noted that he is gay himself. Sensitivity is also described positively, which, after obvious discomfort with the old name, led to a course leader asking herself what name T6 would like to be addressed by.

T7 describes positive reactions to one's own outing via a mailing list, including a reaction that motivated They to continue on their path. and a growing acceptance, the clearer They talks about his own gender. T7 also positively mentions the overwhelming absence of segregation



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based on biological sex in a monastery in Germany. T1 describes positive changes at another monastery, including all-gender toilets and the introduction of a third group (For LGBTIQ+) on a retreat day where the retreat was otherwise divided into two groups for men and women.

However, while some of the participants report an absence of (direct) discrimination in relation to different communities (see T1, T2, T3, T8), it becomes clear that the most empowering experiences are made within LGBTIQ+ communities.

### "The strongest time that I have found community ever." (T6) LGBTIQ+ sanghas

The Buddhist LGBTIQ+/Rainbow communities are highly valued by the participants. T8 reports that they have experienced LGBTIQ+ community in these communities for the first time and considers the Buddhist LGBTIQ+ community to be particularly “healthy”, especially in relation to consumption and sexuality. A particularly formative memory for T8 is a Rainbow community party in Plum Village.

T1 explains the potential of Rainbow meetings, among other things, in analogy to groups that are separated by language, because the Rainbow community also speaks a language that not everyone can understand. Both T1 and T2 describe the possibility of addressing the special suffering of LGBTIQ+ in these rooms. Others, for example T3, also describe the special understanding of each other: “And and simply, I find this being together and that it is just so natural to be in your own community, you probably know that, it’s just the way it is. Something very special for me.”

This mutual understanding is closely related to one's own sense of security. T4 describes the Online Rainbow Sangha as “places of safety where we are able to speak openly”. This security also creates spaces in which people can be present in a special way. T6 describes a moment when she felt safe enough to turn on her camera in an online meeting, assuming others would know she wasn't defined by her body. She describes this being accepted independently of her body as "revelation".

T7 describes a similar experience of acceptance in relation to her female side: “And so in this queer circle and then she sat there and I was yes, yes that was that was very helpful for me because [my own female name] doesn’t have any Language. [Name] doesn't, doesn't have a community with which she can exchange ideas".



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All interviewees who are connected to Rainbow Sanghas speak very positively about their experiences there.

### Visibility and representation

One point that is repeatedly referred to positively is visibility. T2 describes the fact that the first Buddhist he met was very fortunate to be gay & in a long-term relationship. T3 also describes the effect of representation among her teachers: "And of course there is also the issue, being a lesbian is not an issue if you have a lesbian teacher.". T3 also describes openly lesbian women on other retreats as helpful for their own arrival. From the author's point of view, T3 shows the importance of representation. Overall, she hardly describes any problems in her own Buddhist path with regard to her gender and sexuality and also explicitly places this in connection with the feeling of occurring, which she also has in her lesbian relationship, which has existed for decades have sangha.

It is also positively mentioned when monks and/or nuns come out (T1, T6). T1 mentions that outing is even more difficult for nuns in the convent context. An outed non-binary monastic is described as "Ambassador" (T2). T4 describes how They found a word for himself through another outed person. In this context, sibling represents a third alternative to brother or sister. The open feminist attitude of female teachers is also positively mentioned (T3), as is the existence of a transgender Dharma teacher in the USA (T6).

T3 also describes representation in practices as positive, for example queer family models in the practice of Beginning anew or the naming of queer ancestors in touching the Earth.

### Statements from teachers

T5 describes a teacher who used him and his partner as an example as a positive experience. He also tells of statements that teachers are said to have made, of which there are no records. He has a recording of a statement that he found positive, in which a teacher says: "mentioned very clearly that any sexual activity engaged in with love and care for the other person is beneficial".



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The Dalai Lama is also mentioned twice here, once by T5 regarding the change in his attitude towards homosexuality, once by T1 with the statement that the Dalai Lama announced that he would be reborn as a woman in his next life.

T7 emphasizes the open-heartedness and accepting statements of a nun as very positive. The nun encouraged and supported them in dealing with their female side. Support from authority figures also describes T1 and T2, T1 in relation to the abbot of the monastery, T2 in relation to a recognized structure of buddhist representation.

T6 has made a statement from her Buddhist teacher as her motto: "If you are a lesbian, be a lesbian." She also finds the statement by the same teacher positive that he sometimes feels like a mother. The helpful statements of teachers are closely related to teachings that are perceived as helpful, the topic of the next sub-chapter.

### Helpful Teachings

Various teachings are raised by the interviewees. T7 mentions the sutra on the better way of living alone, from which they derives: "to accept oneself as one is. And this acceptance of individuality and so-ness, that is, the way I am". The acceptance of one's own self seems to be an important and helpful process here, which speaks for the thesis carried out by von Euw in transcendence that particularly trans and non-binary need a special handling of the concept of non-self (see von Euw 2019: 335ff). T3 also describes the acceptance of one's own self as helpful, with reference to a lecture by Thich Nhat Hanh, in which he makes the statement "be beautiful, be yourself" in relation to gender norms.

T1 cites the Buddha's ordination of untouchables as a teaching helpful to him. T1 quotes the Buddha here as saying: "The blood of all people is red.". T1 also points to the Buddhist teaching of formlessness and the need for freedom from concepts, among which he would also include male and female, homosexual and heterosexual as concepts, which he describes through a sutra. He does not remember the name of the sutra, but the assumption that it is the Soma Sutra (see Somasutta) is very close to the description. T2 makes positive reference to the passage explained in the Vinaya with the gender change of monk and nun and concludes from this that the Buddha accepts transgender people.



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Similar to T1, T2 also states, "I believe it was Buddha, Buddha made it very clear to the Brahmins that any division of sex, color, race or such things, that it doesn't matter to him, that that it's all just that these are words, there's no reality in there." Here, too, there is a reference to formlessness and thus justifies what Spoonberg calls soteriological inclusion. (Sponberg 1992: 9ff) Emptiness also helps T8, she describes: "I'm thinking its its supporting me in the Buddhist practice, supported me in noticing different kinds of identities, like to feel deeply connected to the place of identity without words and at the same time also noticing that there are places with words that matter and (laughter) and in a way I think it didn't really supported me in in another way to really name things and tome want to try to define myself." Here the deep spiritual experience is described rather than the intellectual concept. The experience of an identity without words is articulated as helpful in the process of attempting self-definition.

Teachings that help in dealing with experiences of oppression are also described as helpful. For example, T1 describes listening and understanding the other person and their story as helpful to him. T2 sees a strength in the motto of the German Buddhist Union (DBU), which is "Unity in Diversity". Positively interpreting her experience as a transgender woman, T6 describes the early insight into constructs such as gender or nation and thus a recognition of the emptiness of such constructs. She also describes herself as a driver in a vehicle, which has become a mantra in her life.

While T1 also contains positive statements about the connection between queerness and spirituality, T5 becomes very clear: "I think it is an enormous advantage to be queer in buddhadharma". He sees this advantage in the fact that he will not have children, especially in the fact that being homosexual is difficult and Dharma works best in difficult situations. He also describes insight through the dangerous situation in which queer people move: "it keeps in mind that some things are not for you know are not granted, some freedoms, some eh the suffering and painful violent death can come very easily for the smallest reason (laughter) which is kind of scary".

With humor, T5 names loving kindness as the most important lesson for himself: "but what whats probably the most important teaching for me concerning queerness. It would probably be loving kindness because however I was cynical about it really in the end helps, at least helped me accept myself as I am, which is easy because I'm amazing and perfect. But my



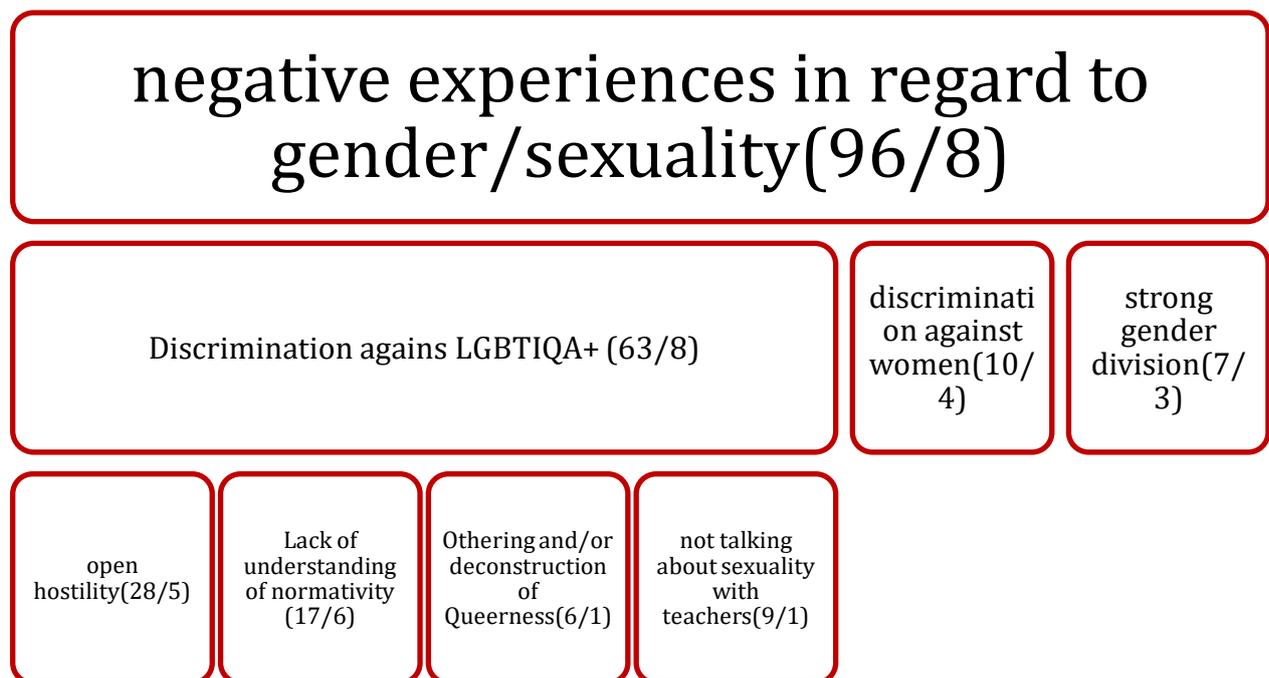
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views of myself sometimes are not (laughter) (clearing my throat) and yeah that's that was probably you know... and it also helps to accept the people around me which has really helped (laughter)".

The next chapter is devoted to the participants' negative experiences in relation to gender and sexuality.

### Negative experiences in Buddhism related to gender and sexuality

This chapter explains the various negative experiences of the interviewees in relation to gender and sexuality. For the sake of clarity, codes were formed, which, however, flow into each other fluently here and are not exclusive. The presentation of the results begins with discrimination against LGBTIQ+ and therein with the sub-coding more open hostility.



### More open hostility to LGBTIQ+

T6 describes a monastery from the Theravada tradition, which states on its website that it does not allow LGBTIQ+ people as monastics. T1 reports on the exclusion of trans people from ordination as monastics in the Plum Village tradition. T1 also reports experiences of discrimination as a gay monk, including a mentor who did not want T1 to be ordained due to unreflected homophobia and another senior monk who actively bullied him. While T1 was



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able to go into a clarifying process with the first monk, the second monk was excluded from the community, also due to other incidents. T2 reports that in discussions in larger associations, at least one voice is always explicitly against LGBTIQ+. Furthermore, umbrella organizations were hardly willing to openly position themselves as supportive of a project involving LGBTIQ+ Buddhists. He also refers to the sometimes extreme statements in Internet forums. T5 also refers, among other things, to Buddhist online forums in which LGBTIQ+ are attacked, for example by collectively labeling them as pandakas. On the other hand, T5 positively emphasizes that there was also resistance and the deletion of corresponding posts.

T5 describes other examples of discrimination, including a teacher's statement that transgender people should do therapy, ancient Tibetan texts that define the vagina as the only correct orifice for the insertion of a penis, and teacher statements such as: LGBTIQ+ rebirth is an expression of bad karma, Oral sex is "disgusting", the teacher would not accept it if their own daughter was a lesbian, homosexuality promotes egoism and attachment.

The accusation of making one's own identity too strong is reported by T4, among others. They got an anti-trans reaction to changing their own pronouns in her email signature. T2 reports on the experience that LGBTIQ+ are often taught about non-self and emptiness without being asked, sometimes at the first meeting. This leads to the statements of the sub-coding othering/deconstruction of queerness. T2 describes, among other things, that queer identity often seems to be a trigger, queer is made to the 'other' and queer identity is first put to the test. He also goes on to describe allegations of identity politics and that queer people are clinging to their identity.

“Sometimes people say no its easier to separate men and women so there is no attraction” (T8) – Lack of understanding of normativity

As the quote above makes clear, heteronormative views are at least partially not reflected. T2 also criticizes a lack of reflection on norms. T3 reports a situation in which it was assumed in an all-women group that no couple could be present. T5 tells of a case where he was told he would not be discriminated against. A lack of discussion is accompanied by a lack of knowledge, as T6 and T5 report on cases in which people wanted to support them but were discriminatory in this supposed support due to a lack of sensitivity.



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T1 reports unspoken difficulties that people with LGBTIQ+ have. T2 reports making fun of the voice of a queer man and a friend who is trans\*inter and no longer mentions this in Buddhist circles, as otherwise many uncomfortable and intimate questions would often be asked.

T6 highlights the lack of addressing the lack of trans representation among the recognized teachers. She also names an uncomfortable situation in the LSBTIQA+ sangha: "Tonight you look beautiful, tonight you look fabulous, because yeah because my family are on holiday and tonight I sit openly at this is what I'm wearing and presenting. And someone to go: How good to meet you at last. And I think: how ridiculous and offensive and silly, stupid thing to say, particularly because it came from another trans person". She sees this focus on appearance as an expression of trans or femme stereotypes.

An issue that plays a role in T5 and represents its own subcoding is not talking about homosexuality with teachers. T5 describes the lack of opportunity and/or motivation to talk to their teachers about their homosexuality. While he initially justified this with the difference in age and origin as well as the separation of his being homosexual and his Buddhist practice, he later also talks about the possible fears that move him to not address this issue: "It can shatter some glasses and its really unnecessary (laughs) I already lost so much so many people over this (laughs) or at least the ideas about them".

### gender segregation

Three interviewees mention gender segregation in a monastery negatively (T1, T7, T8). T1 also refers to the separation during certain rituals, T7 describes their lack of understanding of the classification according to biological sex. It is also about the separation of the sleeping places. T7 also describes the consequences of this separation: "It also keeps me from going to [the monastery], by the way, because I don't know. Now I don't know where to go."

### Discrimination against women

The interviewees also report discrimination directed against women. T8 describes a situation of significant mansplaining in a local sangha that resulted in her not going there anymore. T1 reports on patriarchal norms in the monastery, such as the nuns always walking a little behind the monks. He also describes that there are nuns in the convent who wish to be reborn as men.



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T2 describes the patriarchal character of Buddhism and refers, among other things, to the fact that in some traditions there is no nun ordination.

T3 describes a feeling of discomfort towards gender hierarchies abroad. But she also describes the case of her first Buddhist teacher in Germany, who slept with his students (including a good friend of T3), against which she takes a stand.

### More negative experiences

T2 says that he sees the same discussions in Buddhist circles as in society. He also raises the question of how it is possible that many of the great masters of Buddhism have discriminatory attitudes towards women, for example. He also recounts repeated comments that hurt him. T5 describes sadness at the few positive examples he can think of. T7 tells of the renunciation of their old sangha due to the suspected negative treatment of their identity.

T5 also talks about the difficulty that most of the statements he knows about LGBTIQ+ are only hearsay and there is little documentation.

Also mentioned twice was discomfort with the third mindfulness practice of the Plum Village tradition. (T8, T6) However, this exercise was modified between conducting the interview and the evaluation, including through the intensive work of people from the Rainbow community in Plum Village.

Among other things, it now includes a section that reads, “I recognize the diversity of human experiences and am committed to not discriminate against any form of gender identity or sexual orientation.” (5 Mindfulness Training)

It remains to be seen what the consequences of this change in the foundations of one of the largest Buddhist communities in Europe will be. Due to the many negative experiences, the two-gender structuring and exclusions, participation in Buddhism for LGBTIQ+ is currently restricted. Summing up from this chapter it can be clearly stated that there is a need for change in Buddhism in Europe if LGBTIQ+ as LGBTIQ+ are to be part of the Buddhist community.

### Other forms of oppression

Even in the Buddhist community, LGBTIQ+ hostility and other forms of oppression are not separate. In the sense of an intersectional approach, the interconnection of different forms of



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oppression can be assumed. (see Kerner 2017: 948ff) In order to pursue this topic, a question was asked in the interview about other forms of oppression such as ableism or racism. The statements that could be found on this topic were converted into higher-level codes.

## Other forms of oppression(81/8)

Personal discussion/reflection on power(32/7)

racism [statements or experiences] (20/6)

Ableism (6/2)

### Personal discussion/reflection on power

"Hey I'm oppressed too I'm oppressed too. I need to be in on this conversation and it's like no, but you can't, cause you're not oppressed in the same way, not oppressed for the same reason." (T6).

As can also be seen from the demographic data, most of the participants are socially privileged when it comes to the topics of racism, ableism and classism. In principle, many of the statements made by the participants indicate a reflection on the dynamics of power, and these statements are explained in more detail below. In the quote above, T6 describes their reaction to BIPoC groups in which they cannot participate. Noting differences in oppression, that is, between transphobic and racist oppression, is helpful for They to understand the need for separate groups.

However, T6 is very obviously in a process of confrontation and vacillates between defending against this confrontation and being open to entering into this process. She also mentions the White Awareness Sangha in the Plum Village tradition, in which she does not participate but which seems to initiate processes anyway. She describes herself as an Ally of PoC, this Ally being informed by her own experience of being treated differently because of her origins in



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the north of England, which has led to different treatment in the south of England a few decades from now. Basically, their non-identification with their body leads to difficulties in dealing with their own whiteness. She describes: "So i have found that quite, I'm still working on it, what happened with the white awareness sangha is. I can't actually attend it, on on the times that it runs. But I need to go there, I need to face that, need to face that demon and talk about it, but I know that I will be starting with: But I am not white. And I know that they answer I will get is: But, you are. But I know the correct answer, the correct answer: But, I'm not. Because I'm not the body."

T1 also deals with the need of Vietnamese monks and nuns for separate rooms in the monastic community, which he first calls racism, but then reflects: "Racism may not be the right word, it may be more a search for a sense of home which I can well understand." He also reflects on the poor representation of Black people and people from South America in the community.

T3 shares her awareness that she is in a privileged position when it comes to racism and as a result she is likely to miss many small incidents.

T8 describes her process and how it took her a few years to see the racism in the Buddhist community and that she also contributed to it.

The reflection processes described by T5 are particularly noteworthy. He himself says "I used to be a little bit of a nazi". He describes his original aversion to Eastern religions. He also deals with his racism against Sinti\*zze and Rom\*nja. In the interview, he presumably unconsciously makes an anti-Asian racist gesture, which he then reflects on immediately afterwards. His transformation towards a more social-democratic political stance and the active reflection of his prejudices is in the narrative in the context of his spiritual interests.

T7 statements on the subject of other mechanisms of suppression remain on a very personal level. They gets along very badly with people who think they know. They reflects on their own glorification of the Chinese Cultural Revolution and describes the attempt to find parts of themselves that Trump, for example, would like. In addition, they talks about their conscious projection of positive attributes onto certain groups, for example that black people are particularly musical. A further description of personal reflection can be found in they's examination of their cultural "glasses" in view of Chinese Buddhism.



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The problem surrounding the non-Western origin of Buddhism is only touched upon by T2: "[B]ut it is still very much shaped by still very much shaped and partly also by patriarchal structures, because quite a few monks just came from Asian countries . Which of course is good, because this wisdom didn't come from here, it came from other parts of the world". The causal chain and the location of the origin of patriarchal structures in Asian countries point to the same dynamics as those criticized by Lugones in white feminist western movements (see Lugones 2007: 202ff).

T2 describes German Buddhism as predominantly white and middle-class. He also describes barriers for people with disabilities, such as structural conditions or the lack of alternative seating options. He reflects on various experiences in the queer community and explains that it is now becoming increasingly difficult for him to change his habits, for example in relation to gender.

T6 describes an increasing proportion of neuro-diverse people in their local trans community and the associated need to educate themselves on this topic.

### Racism

As described in the previous chapter, racist statements can be found again and again in the interviews, and some participants also describe racist incidents they have heard about.

T1 tells about the visit of a black person in the monastery and the detachment of some monks and nuns. He also reports hearing that there was racism from the community when a Black nun was ordained and later again when she was appointed Dharma teacher. T8 also describes that there is a lot of racism in the Buddhist community, although it is unclear to which incidents she is referring.

T1 also notes that "we don't have any Black people here in the sangha" and "[t]he entire continent of Africa is not represented here".

As with T2, the negative attribution of attitudes towards Asian cultures can also be found in the interview with T5. T2 also describes exclusions due to the lack of translation of the websites of major Buddhist organizations.



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Various statements by teachers sometimes show massive racism. T5 describes a leader who uses the N\* word for Black people and keeps his daughter away from Sinti\*zze and Rom\*nja. T3 describes a white teacher who slanders Tibetan teachers in a book. The same teacher also plays a role in T5, who, among other things, problematizes his support for a German Nazi party and his statements about Arabs. These statements are one should arm oneself if Arabs live in the neighborhood and then also that he does not pray for Arabs.<sup>8</sup>

### Ableism

In addition to the already mentioned barriers in some rooms (see T2), T8 and T4 describe further cases of ableism. T8 describes the case of a friend who required a separate room due to her chronic illness, but this was not provided, although separate rooms were available for others.

T4 explains: “My main experience of ableism within Buddhism, is the practitioners who have who are neuroly diverse or have physical disabilities are barred from ordination. There's a very much closed door I've found, that through my own research it's through all traditions that I know of”. This has very practical implications for T4, although They is (self-) ordained and receives support from the monastic community, he is not officially ordained and does not live in a monastery. They also describes some very disturbing experiences with ableism shared by others with T4, but which they cannot go into further.

Alter/Ageism is also dealt with at the side. Among other things, T6 addresses her imminent exclusion from ordination due to her age. As already described in previous chapters, T5 also refers to age as a difference category. This is also found in T8.

In summary, unsurprisingly, the Buddhist community shows various forms of racism, as well as ableism and classism. Lookism and ageism seem to be less of an issue, but this is probably also related to the question asked in the interview. This chapter ends with a quote from T6 with the insight to make it their business to enable and empower others: "As I got older and realized the right attitude: empower and enable those people."

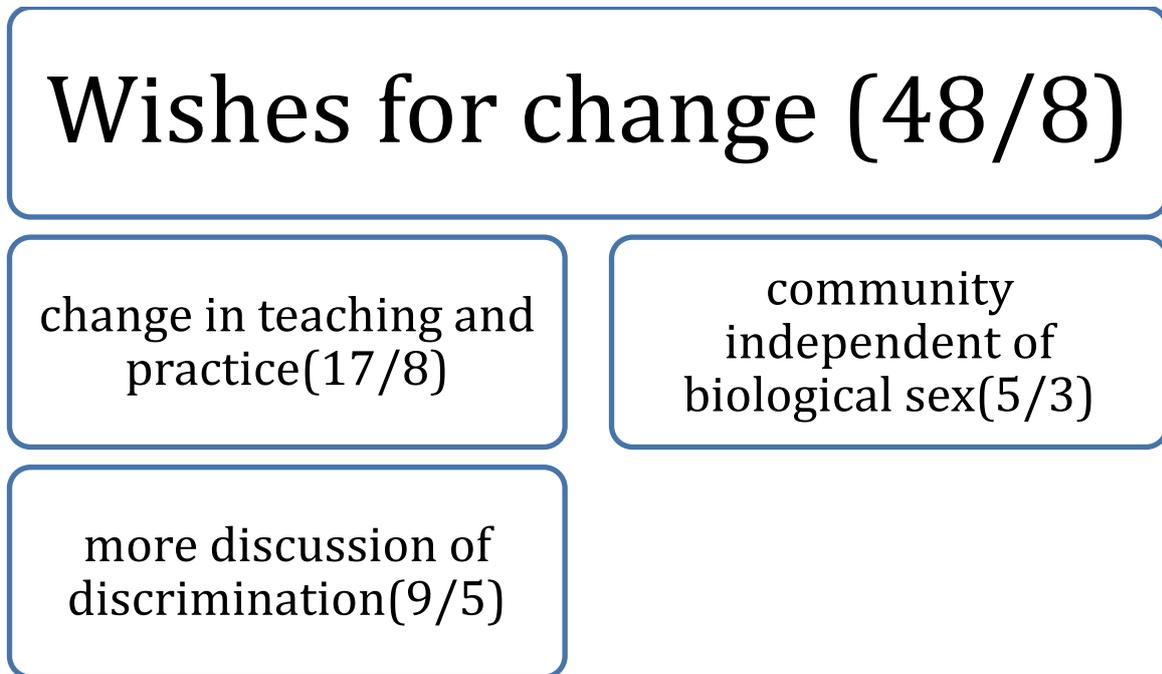
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<sup>8</sup>For more information about this teacher: Scherer (2011) and Tenzin Peljor (2021) The decision was not made to anonymize the teacher, since this behavior and these statements by him are already public knowledge.



## Wishes for change

The participants had different requests for change, and these were also summarized in codes. The graphic below shows, among other things, that all participants want changes in teaching and/or practice.



### Changes in teaching and practice

T1 wishes to open the ordination, "that we can have more space that does not fit into male and female, in cis male and female, but that we can simply ordain people.". In addition, a revision of some rules that are simply "out of date".

T2 describes the desire to change the content of teaching and sometimes also the practice. For him, this also includes letting go of the concept of patriarchs in Zen. T3 wants a change in the role of women in Buddhism and more recognition for nuns.

T4 refers to Buddha and Thich Nhat Hanh and expresses the need to modernize from Buddhism and adapt to the time and situation. T6 wishes "more far more queer and trans involvement in buddhism and zen". T8 a change of at least the modern texts and teachings so that they are more educative and/or more inclusive.



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### More confrontation with discrimination

Many of the interviewees would like to deal more with exclusion. T4 wants more inclusivity for all communities. For example, T2 says: “Engagement means actually dealing with the things that we are confronted with on a daily basis. And that's partly already exclusion because of things, of racism or whatever, the social exclusion that exists.” He would also like more discussions, for example about new terms that non-binary people to be able to use. T5 would also like more and more open discussions. Regardless of the outcome, he would find an open conversation desirable, perhaps even in the form of a Buddhist council. T8 would like to change the third mindfulness exercise. She also suggests more education and a deep exploration of privilege on retreats. Especially considering that most retreat participants have many privileges.

### Community regardless of biological sex

“Namely a community where people come together who (clear their throats) engage in some form of exchange regardless of their biological gender. That's what I would wish for or I wish, not only would, but I wish that this this way of thinking would also come to Plum Village and then you can choose who lives where and how.” (T7) This wish for the abolition gender separation also shares T8.

T1 desires a change in gender segregation in certain rituals and ceremonies and is inspired by centers in the US that sit in a U-shape rather than two lines for male and female.

### Other wishes

T2 reports on his own wish, which he says he shares with others, "that Buddhism should be more involved." He sees the potential for finding new answers through Buddhism. He also wishes for more research on such topics.

He also wants communities to be more proactive about inclusion.

He hopes that the motto "unity in diversity" will be implemented and that everyone will come together after the exchange in safe spaces. (see T2: 13)

T3 would like more public outings from monastics to have more role models.

T6 would like more physical locations for the Rainbow community, possibly with the option of staying there longer term. This is partly due to the problematic handling of gender in some monasteries. She wishes for more opportunities for queer and trans retreats and ordination options for older people as well.



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T7 wants a room where they can live out their feminine side. They is important to emphasize "and I don't want that to be understood as criticism, but rather as a suggestion to go further on this path and that's what I'm expressing."

T5 would like more resources to address the issue of LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism. T2 expresses a similar wish: "And I think we have to see where we are, yes, with all the good and bad aspects, hopefully there's not only bad but also good ones that we can build on, because I hope that that a lot of things become better known because of what you do." This brings the topic back to this work and the discussion of the study.

## Discussion

The results of the work reveal many problem areas in the Buddhist community. The negative experiences point to great potential for further training in the Buddhist community and structural problems. For example, the opening of the ordination for transgender and/or non-binary people is still pending, as is the opening for people with disabilities. In view of the experiences described, it is hardly surprising that Buddhism in Europe is white and middle-class. In contrast, approaches such as the white awareness Sangha seem to point in a progressive direction.

The exclusions from ordination also create consequential problems, such as the rarity of trans and non-binary Dharma teachers. In the Plum Village tradition, for example, there are ways for a transgender and/or non-binary person to become a Dharma teacher, but these are often much more lengthy and, due to the internalized and insufficiently reflected transphobia in the community, are not included security realizable. However, Dharma teachers are of massive importance in carrying safer spaces like Rainbow Sanghas. For example, the author is aware of a canceled queer retreat for which a recognized Dharma teacher was missing. Precisely because of the extremely positive experiences in such safer spaces, it is important to strengthen them with more teachers and more resources.

## Comparison of results with Rainbodhi guide

Rainbodhi's guide refers to Buddhist spaces to which all people have access. At this point, the study results that do not refer to LSBTIQ+ sanghas are of particular interest. From the



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author's point of view, the following points presented by Rainbodhi are supported by the study.

- More education on LGBTIQ+ topics. Ignorance is still high in many communities, leading to harmful understandings of gender and inappropriate behavior. (see e.g. T5 & T6, T3)
- Labeling LGBTIQ+ friendly spaces and communities. The sheer number of negative experiences shows that it is not a matter of course for LGBTIQ+ to be accepted in Buddhist spaces. Labeling could help give LGBTIQ+ guidance as to which spaces are safer.
- Participation of LGBTIQ+ at all levels of the organization. The representation of LGBTIQ+ is also clearly an important element in this study, but there are currently only a few examples, especially for transgender teachers.
- Setting up structures to receive complaints about discrimination and take them seriously. The number of incidents of open hostility speaks for the establishment of such structures, precisely the description of T1 regarding discrimination by higher-ranking monks points to the need for structures that can balance the existing power systems.
- Change of two-gender structuring in the areas of housing, toilets, etc. One person does not go to a monastery because of this, others feel uncomfortable as a result. (see T7,T8) It is clear that the strict two-gender separation cannot be maintained if the Buddhist community wishes to welcome all LGBTIQ+.
- Reflected dealing with non-self and emptiness. The use of concepts such as emptiness or not-self against LGBTIQ+ is still a problem, and there is also the associated knee-jerk accusation of exaggerating one's own identity. (see T2, T4)

The Rainbodi guidelines are therefore largely empirically supported by the results of the study and all Buddhist communities that decide to include LGBTIQ+ are called upon to comply with the changes listed there. The already existing double strategy of (virtual) rooms for LGBTIQ+ and processes of change in the larger communities still seems to make sense.

From the state of research it is already known that Buddhism has a particular tendency towards "soteriological inclusion" and "soteriological androgyny" (see Sponberg 1992: 7ff). This tendency should always be borne in mind by any movement for more inclusion in



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Buddhism. Attempts to get closer to the ideal certainly have a history as old as Buddhism itself. Buddhism “like all other human institutions, encompasses both noble aspirations and all too human failings.”<sup>9</sup>(Spoonberg 1992: 29) The loving but resolute process for change demanded by the interviewees remains, despite all confessions of emptiness, one to be conducted on the level of relative truth. The insight into the interconnectedness of relative and absolute truth, their interness, can help in these processes. These approaches are not new, as Rev. Kyoto Williams describes in the book *Radical Dharma* (2016) necessary changes in Buddhist teachings: “What is required is a new Dharma, a radical Dharma that deconstructs rather than amplifies the systems of suffering, that stars rather than fertilizes the soil of the conditions that the deep roots of societal suffering grow in.” (Williams 2016:xxiii).

The sometimes very positive experiences and the sometimes intensive processes of change through Buddhist practice, which the participants describe, also raise questions for queer movements. What is the potential for LGBTIQ+ in mindfulness practice? What practices can be learned from the rainbow communities in Buddhism? Does intensive meditation practice lead to a place of identity without words (T8)? What does this mean for queer movements? These are just a few of the questions that future research could address.

However, the results of the present study are of limited value as they are based on a non-representative study. In addition, the technical problems in conducting the interviews and the sometimes imprecise implementation of the qualitative content analysis further limit the quality of the data collected. The verification of the data by a second or even third person, which would have increased the intersubjectivity, could not be carried out within the scope of this work.

The resulting, very positive, image of rainbow communities in Buddhism may also be related to the fact that no people were sought who had turned their backs on Buddhism. As mentioned at the beginning, the interviewees were all white, which means that a large part of the Buddhist communities in Europe are definitely not represented. Especially with regard to the problems of cultural appropriation, a more diverse sample should be obtained for future research.

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<sup>9</sup>To this quote I would object that not all human institutions are aligned with noble ends. However, the failures of higher ideals can also be found in all other institutions.



The intersectional intention of the work is noticeable, but it would still require a more intensive examination of other forms of oppression in Buddhism in order to do justice to an intersectional claim. For example, a stronger engagement with decolonial and postcolonial literature on Buddhism.

Overall, this work provides a contemporary historical documentation of a movement that has so far received little academic attention. The intensively worked out research situation refers to a long history of debate about LGBTIQ+ in Buddhism and shows potential for an LGBTIQ+-friendly understanding of the Buddhist teachings. The key question on the situation of LGBTIQ+ in contemporary Buddhism in Europe could be partially answered and answers could also be found to the sub-questions, at least in relation to the sample. A large amount of material was produced and evaluated. This enables insight that was not previously available. The study should and could only be a starting point for further discussion. From the author's point of view, this goal was achieved. Whether the topic will become the target of further scientific debates will only become apparent in the course of time.

## Outlook

From the author's point of view, the potential for research on LGBTIQ+ and Buddhism/mindfulness is great.

The following questions arise for LGBTIQ+: What role can mindfulness play in dealing with oppression hostile to queers and trans people? Can Buddhist practice help in dealing with LGBTIQ+ identity? What effects can Buddhist thoughts/practices have on queer contexts? Are Buddhist LGBTIQ+ spaces actually healthier, as T8 has found for themselves? What effects does soteriological inclusion have at the same time as discriminatory exclusions?

With regard to Buddhist communities, the following questions could be asked: What steps are needed to support Buddhist communities on their way out of heteronormative, two-gender structuring? Is this even possible in a transformative process? Are official representatives of Buddhist communities actually interested in such processes? To what extent are patriarchal norms solidified in Buddhism?



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In the area of gender research, the following questions seem interesting from the author's point of view: What effects does Buddhist practice have on the perception of one's own gender and one's own sexuality, also among cisgender and heterosexual people? Does mindfulness practice lead to more inclusive thinking or do social (power) norms mostly remain unaffected? What are the connections between masculinity and Buddhist practices? What role does the monastic community play in a queer, feminist, intersectional Buddhism?

In this sense, I can only join T2's hope: may we find new answers.

## Gratitude

My gratitude goes to all participants who made new insights possible through their time, openness and deep knowledge. I would also like to thank everyone else who was in contact with me during the work to support me. I would also like to thank my primary supervisor, Dr. Carola Roloff, as well as the second supervisor Dr. Nicole Witte, for accepting the topic and my independent way of working. I am deeply grateful to my spiritual teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, Lama Rod Owens and all the people who inspired or encouraged my interest in mindfulness practice. I would like to thank my friends, my roommate and my sangha for listening and supporting me with the emotional stress that arose from dealing with the topic.

May all beings be happy and free from suffering.



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