

Hidden Sex and the Ordinary Youth: The Dolgan Way of Maintaining a Good Family Reputation¹

Aimar Ventsel, Department of Ethnology, University of Tartu, Estonia

Abstract

In this article I discuss sexual relations of young people in the tundra village in Russian Far East. Sexual behaviour and gender roles in this society are defined by traditions and young people are urged to follow these. Traditionally, premarital sex is not tolerated and from the first sight there is no physical space for illicit sexual relations in the village. However, young people find their own ways to pursue their interests. I show that they make use of what I call “empty physical and social space.” Young people are creative and manage to find space for sex. Young people also make use of contradictory social norms, intricate kinship and clan structures, or certain interpretations of “good behaviour” to have and meet the partners they wish to have.

Keywords: Youth, Sexuality, Tradition, Siberia, Dolgan, Social Norms, Space

In this paper I will discuss multiple levels of sexuality among Eastern Dolgan youth in the Anabar District, northwestern Republic of Sakha, eastern Siberia. At the beginning of the paper I will analyze Dolgan social and moral norms to show the social framework for young people’s lives. Furthermore, I will discuss the sexual behavior of the young people, how it is linked to the ideas of gender and prestige. In this article I shall give an overview of how young people’s sexuality exists in the social and physical space of a tundra village. I will argue that when pursuing their sexual adventures, ordinary (*obychnye*) young people do not rebel against their parents’ society’s norms but use “free space” as it exists both in social norms and the physical environment.

In 2000 and 2001, I spent eight months in the Anabar District (*Anabarskii ulus*), conducting fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation. Three villages are located in the district. Two of them, the district center, Saaskylaakh (2,500 inhabitants), and the northernmost village in the district, Uurung Khaia (1,200 inhabitants),² were my bases when I was not in the tundra. Uurung Khaia is mainly populated by Sakha-speaking Dolgans, whereas Saaskylaakh is home to Evenki, Russian, and Sakha residents. Dolgan people in the district belong to the eastern group and speak a different dialect than the Dolgan people discussed by John Ziker in this issue. Eastern Dolgans have also adopted many traits of Sakha culture into their everyday culture. Inter-marriage with Sakha over many centuries and 20 years of national politics of the Republic of Sakha have caused a shift in the identity of Anabar Dolgans. In many cases they feel affiliation with both Sakha and Dolgans and see no contradiction in identifying themselves with both groups the same time (Ventsel 2005). Historically, Eastern Dolgans were more trade-oriented than Western Dolgans. Therefore, among the Anabar Dolgans, the concept of private property is more developed, while kinship ties are looser (Ventsel 2005). Probably as a result of Sakha influence the kinship hierarchy and sexual division of labor are more strict and generally followed among Eastern than Western Dolgans.

Uurung Khaia is a village on the banks of the Anabar River, where a big part of the population directly and the rest of the inhabitants indirectly depend on the tundra's resources. This means that many adults are constantly in the tundra for hunting, fishing, and working in reindeer brigades. Most of the eight months I spent in this district, I spent with the reindeer herders and hunters of Uurung Khaia. Uurung Khaia is seen in the district as a "provincial" village (in contrast to the "capital," Saaskylaakh), and there was no hotel there, so I stayed at people's homes when not in the tundra. Uurung Khaia is a village that has a new modern school, a daycare center, and, at the edge of the village, a huge base for fuel that is transported by boat to the village during the navigation period and shipped by trucks to other villages. The center of the village is a square with a two-story office building for the village administration and the former *sovkhos*, which has turned into a municipal agricultural enterprise. Around the square, there are concrete buildings that contain two apartments, one three-story apartment house, and some fur-processing shops. Most people, however, live in one- or two-apartment wooden houses that are located around and between the few streets. This is a small and not very visually interesting village that is dusty during the summer and covered with snow in a winter that lasts eight months a year and can be very cold—more than 60 degrees below zero. Outside the village, there is endless tundra, an open space without any trees, and only a few bushes.

Frameworks of Romance

In Siberian anthropology, there traditionally exists a range of topics (mainly linked to research on indigenous peoples) that most scholars prefer. Especially in Western research on Siberia, it is still very uncommon to discuss youth as a separate social, cultural, and economic group.³ Indigenous people are generally discussed as hunting, fishing, or herding societies, with a strong emphasis on their traditional economy, way of life, and beliefs. The fact that Siberia is an important industrial region of Russia is not ignored; however, the complexity of the industrial society receives little attention. The presence of the industrial society not only means a struggle for land rights (Fondahl 2003; Fondahl et al. 2001), economic adaptation (e.g., Stammeler 2005), and a shift in traditional indigenous cultures (e.g., Konstantinov 1996; Krupnik 2000; Krupnik and Vakhtin 2002) but also implies multiple links to all different layers of modern life. Urbanization has affected life in remote villages. To some extent, former *sovkhos* villages in the Anabar district could be considered urbanized settlements.⁴ In the 1980s, these villages were restructured from small trade points to industrial settlements to support agricultural state enterprises. Professional life is highly specialized, with wage labor as the main income for most people. Mass media affect local people's choices; people rely on centrally governed infrastructures and so forth. Young people are familiar with the urban sphere not only from occasional visits to cities; it also comes to villages via TV, new music, magazines and journals, movies, and goods brought in by traders.

In recent years, the focus in Siberian studies has shifted. Some scholars have written about the indigenous youth as a social group linked both to their traditional values and lifestyles and to the lifestyle of the modern urban culture (e.g., Habeck 2004; Krist 2004). However, sexual life, norms, and practices of the indigenous population have not received much attention by scholars. The topic of sexual practices among the youth in Siberia seems to be more relevant for scholars dealing with health (e.g., Kazantseva et al. 2008) than for social scientists.

Sexual practices and norms are not an unknown topic in anthropology and sociology. Within evolutionary biology and anthropology studies, sex is a process of reproduction and

transfer of genes, and discussions of sexual relations are done through the prism of cost factors, i.e., the efficiency of different modes of reproduction (e.g., Crow 1999). Social-cultural anthropology, on the other hand, tends to interpret sexual relations as a social and cultural behavior specific to the individual “culture as context” (Geertz 1973). Margaret Mead wrote the first anthropological monograph dealing with sexual behavior and norms (Mead 1928), a book that initiated widespread criticism and discussion. Since then, sexual practices and norms have been more commonly featured within anthropological studies. Foucault argued that sexual desires and practices do not exist per se but are linked to particular historical contexts and social practices (Foucault 1976). For Gagnon and Simon (1973), sexual expectations and the motivations for finding a sexual partner depend on “historical-cultural scripts.” Not only do different cultures have their “own” sexual behavior, but sexual behavior also varies within a cultural sphere among different groups. For instance, Berelson and Steiner (1964:84-85) argue that in Western societies, children from households with lower incomes have more sexual freedom than their middle-class peers. Strathern (1995:166) argues that Euro-American anthropology interprets sexual antagonism (i.e., the inequality between women and men to make sexual choices) as an expression of unjust social relations. Pateman (1988) brings in the “contract theory,” arguing that male-dominated sex is the expression of power and male rights. She argues that the existence of the “sexual contract” guarantees men the “patriarchal right” for sex. However, even in a male-dominated patriarchal world, there can exist double standards. Kinsey and others (Kinsey et al. 1948) argue that in most societies there exists a difference between the public expectation of sexual behavior and actual sexual conduct. In this paper I show that this is exactly the case with the Dolgan youth. Rubin (1990, 1994) has noted that in Western societies, sexual behavior is linked to social respect. Below I show that this is also the case in non-Western societies. The social position of the Dolgan family depends on the reputation—i.e., respect—a family has in the community. For the family reputation, reputation of individual members (i.e., how much the peer group respects the individual) of the family is essential.

Modern industrial society has changed the meaning of sexuality and gender roles, as shown by youth studies (e.g., Allen 2003; Baker 2009; Haenfler 2006; Friedman and Weiner 1999; Leblanc 2001; McRobbie 1993; Schilt 2003). Giddens (2006:211) argues that Western ideas of romantic love have spread around the world alongside the invasion of Western media and pop culture and consumerism; Rubin writes that urbanization and industrialization have changed “sexual arrangements” (Rubin 1994:155).

Dolgan youth is no exception. I will show that for them, sex is part of fun and social interaction, stressing sexuality through consumer goods like fashionable dress, which is important for gaining attention by the peer group. For modern Dolgan youth, finding a partner does not logically end with the marriage or establishment of long-lasting relationships, as was true generations ago. Arctic villages in the Republic of Sakha were established to industrialize hunting and the reindeer economy. Moving people from the tundra to villages, the Soviet state placed indigenous people in an urbanized environment of wage labor, high occupational specialization, etc. All that had an impact on the perception of sexuality.

According to what is “known” about Arctic peoples, their sexual norms and practices differ from Western ideas of “appropriate” sexual behavior. For example, Rasing (1994) describes how Inuit tolerance for underage and premarital sex conflict with the state regulations and Western norms. Dolgan customs in this field are very much unknown in the academic writing. Soviet scholars documented gender division of labor and marriage customs of the

Dolgans but provided little about social norms connected to sexual practices and even less about such practices themselves. Popov (1946) wrote that Dolgan youth enjoyed broad sexual freedoms. Before marriage, Dolgans underwent a phase similar to engagement. A young man gave a girl presents and visited her at night. However, such a sexual relationship did not oblige the girl to marry the boy. If she did not want to sleep with the boy or broke off the engagement, she had to return the presents (Popov 1946:62-63). Popov also wrote down a Dolgan legend about two sisters. One sister slept with many men and had children with them. The other sister remained a virgin. When both died, the virgin sister was punished by the gods for not having children and accomplishing her mission on earth (Popov 1946:63-64). However, according to the reading of ethnographers, the aim of dating and sex was in pre-Soviet Dolgan society connected to reproduction of kinship. Young people attempted to find a suitable partner in order to establish a family and/or have children.

Dolgan families of Uurung Khaia are large, usually with three to six children; even ten children are not unusual. Young people in the village belong to the mainstream youth that is in Russian often described as “ordinary” (*normal'nye*). Ordinary young people do not rebel against their parents’ world and follow the accepted life paths of mainstream society. Occasionally they may break some rules and disobey their parents, but in contrast to the “non-ordinary” youth or “*neformaly*” (which is an umbrella term for various youth subcultures in Russia), “ordinary” young people do not principally question the existing social norms and structures (for a discussion of these terms, see Habeck and Ventsel 2009). On the contrary, they mainly focus on the “youthful” quality of their lives before joining the ranks of adults. For example, these young people try to be up to date with the latest fashion and music, even in the Far North. Although Uurung Khaia village is one of the northernmost “outposts” in the Republic of Sakha and difficult to reach nowadays,⁵ young people in their teenage and late teenage years passionately try to dress up appropriately for each moment they spend outside their homes. During my fieldwork time, I found out that young people spend a great amount of money on clothes. Moreover, their consumerist habits are financially supported by their parents. Dressing fashionably and sexily—see-through shirts, tight tops, and extremely short miniskirts—were a standard for girls, while boys sported the latest fashionable shirts, jackets, and jeans. From my first days in Uurung Khaia, I noticed that the Dolgan youth are as openly fashion conscious as they are open about their relationship with the opposite sex. In public events and parties and also in the streets, I noticed that boys and girls flirt openly with each other on every occasion. There are a lot of obnoxious jokes when meeting each other. Boys greet well-dressed girls with loud voices yelling across the street, or a group of boys will just start to spontaneously chat with groups of girls when seeing them either in the street or the village club. (It should be mentioned that when dressed up, boys and girls usually moved around in groups.) I was very sure that relations go further than only aggressive flirting, but I had not really imagined how they actually “do it.” Uurung Khaia is quite a small village, where almost all the buildings are overfull apartment houses in which many generations live together in two or three rooms. Although it is not unusual for young families to have a separate flat, it is not the case with unmarried youngsters, who are not entitled to receive a free apartment or construction materials to build their own house.⁶ None of these youngsters have their own private home; they were lucky if they had their own corner in the apartment, separated by a cupboard. There is no cinema or theater, and no hotel in the village. When boys and girls visited each other, they could not do it unnoticed, because either parents or grandparents were at home. To my eyes, the vast open

tundra around the village, where every human being can be noticed from miles away, is not suited for romantic private dates.

Dolgan Family and Social Relations in the Village: Family and Individual Reputation

During my fieldwork period, I learned that Dolgan social norms and ideas about morality are very conservative. Once in the tundra, I talked with a hunter in his forties about Western family relations. I told him that according to my experience in Germany and other countries, many couples live together unmarried and that this can last for years before they marry or split. There is a special expression in the Russian language for this—*grazhdanskii brak*, or “civil marriage.” This expression was also used by the hunter when he said, “We Dolgans do not accept *grazhdanskii brak*.” Besides the fact that for most people I talked to about the issue, a “proper” Dolgan family is only an officially registered one, I also noticed that Dolgan family ideology is very strict and patriarchal. The head of the extended family is usually a father or a grandfather, and all other family members very rarely question his decisions. The family functions as one social and economic unit where all the individuals have their obligations toward their kin and support each other (e.g., Ventsel 2002, 2005). Economic cooperation meant that everyone contributed to the well-being of the family. Full-time hunters provide meat and fish for everybody, whereas people employed in the village bring the necessary consumer items or imported food from shops and look for traders willing to buy the products of the hunters. The whole process is regulated by the family meetings that happen literally every day, because at least once a day all the sons and daughters gather with their families at their parents’ home. At such meetings, all family business—such as the next hunting trip, buying a truck, or even summer vacations in the city—is discussed over tea, but the final decision is made by the head of the family (Ventsel 2003, 2005).

I have discussed elsewhere how Dolgan society is built on informal age groups (Ventsel 2007). Retired people belong to the group called “elders” (*stariki* in Russian, *ogonnollor* in Dolgan). Male “elders” are usually heads of families, who make the final decisions in everything concerning family affairs. Older women, although not making important “final” decisions, are highly respected by the younger members. Dolgans tend to marry at an early age after girls have graduated from school and boys have returned from their army service (i.e., between 17 and 20). “Adults” (*vzroslye* in Russian) are married people of both sexes. They have an important social and economic role in the village. Adults are the most important breadwinners, and they look after the well-being of elders and children. Moreover, male adults have the task of being responsible for order and peace in the village, which has no police officer⁷—only they can control youngsters and avoid or punish any violation like a robbery or street violence by mobilizing village men through kinship networks. For the youth, the Russian word “kids” (*patsany*) is used locally. The singular word *patsan* means a young late teen or adult male who is not married. The plural word *patsany* can also mean “boys and girls.” For talking precisely about girls, the Sakha word “*kyrgyttar*” (or “girls”) is used (Ventsel 2007).

Young people, as I observed them during fieldwork, have their own tasks to fulfill, and as soon as possible they are engaged in the family economy and activities—they fish, chop wood, do laundry, repair snowmobiles, take care of the younger children, and so forth. Boys and girls do most of their work without any orders, almost automatically. It must be said that because of that, young people enjoy a relatively large amount of freedom—no one asked why they were not at home, because they might have been outside washing carpets or repairing a boat engine.

Young people are quite independent, spending a lot of time outside their homes either working, at school, or spending time with friends. Being “away” is acceptable when they have fulfilled their obligations toward the family.

Prestige is very important for Dolgan families. Prestige is not only a moral category but affects the family’s economy. The functioning of Dolgan economic networks is based on reputation. The family hunting grounds in the tundra are essential for food and cash income. A family of serious reputation, i.e., a family that can deal with poachers, is able to maintain control over its resources. In the village, the reputation of the family is important in order to find “business partners.” In everyday life, members of different families cooperate in various activities. Hunting trips, trading meat from hunting and fishing, buying equipment, and all other sorts of activities involve dealing with money and require a trustworthy relationship between these business partners. The family reputation depends on the reputation of individual family members, because in a village like Uurung Khaia rumors spread quickly and all misdeeds and misbehaviors very soon come to be known in the whole community (Ventsel 2005, 2007).

Social relations in the village of Uurung Khaia are complex, and this is also the case when we look at extended families. By establishing social relations, the construction of kinship is very “creative” (Leach 2003). Families are tied to each other with multiple links (Ventsel 2005). Besides marital relations, the Dolgans also have a tradition of fictive kinship, which adds a great deal of complexity. Fictive kinship applies to people who grew up together and consider themselves to be related to each other as brothers or sisters. These fictive relatives are adopted into the family network just like blood relatives. To make things even more complicated, Dolgans very often adopt children. Adoption not only is a symbol of friendship between nuclear families but has a broader significance—two big extended families become relatives in this way. Eastern Dolgans know their genealogy quite well for at least five generations, as I noted when I asked people to draw their genealogies. All these social relations are reflected in their economic cooperation, wherein families share tundra resources and cooperate in the village in various ways (establishing common enterprises, sharing goods, taking care of each other’s children when parents are in the tundra, etc.) (Ventsel 2005).

This is important because Dolgans also have very strict marital rules where marriage is forbidden for anyone closer than a fourth cousin. In a small village with 1,200 souls, it makes mating and marrying a complicated, “creative” (Leach 2003) business. Marriages have to be approved by elders, and as a rule young people seek their blessing before registering at the state office. People told me that since all extended families are already linked with each other by multiple formal and informal kin relations, elders have begun to allow marriages between third cousins. The socially acceptable way of creating marriages in Uurung Khaia is very conservative. Girls have to complete high school to be of a marriageable age, and boys are considered mature enough to carry the social responsibility after service in the army. To be taken as adults, they have to contribute properly to the family economics and behave in a socially accepted way.

Although in theory young Dolgan people are expected to behave according to community ideology and avoid any violation of the conservative norms, in reality it is not so. As a local gynecologist told me, there is quite a remarkable problem with teenage pregnancy and venereal diseases. According to law, doctors can give abortions to girls younger than 16 only with the approval of their parents. Cases in which girls begged doctors to carry out an abortion and not to tell their fathers were not unusual. The doctor was convinced that the village youth begin their sexual lives very early, often not thinking about the consequences.

One social problem among the indigenous youth in the district is high alcohol consumption. Young people have indirect contact with alcohol already in their childhood. Adult people of the village drink a lot; drinking is one of the few leisure activities in the village and accompanies more or less all festive events. Offering alcohol to respected guests is connected to prestige. Therefore, consuming alcohol also has an important social function and meaning. Even those people who do not drink have on their kitchen shelves a few bottles of vodka to offer to unexpected but respected guests.

In general, young people do not drink with adults and even refuse to touch alcohol during family celebrations. This behavior was explained by many boys and girls as showing respect toward parents and their guests but also maintaining a good face within the family. On the other hand, more alcohol is present when the older generation is away. I remember speaking to some girls I met in the village administration who had huge hangovers. They told me that they had met with some of their female friends the day before and decided to chat a bit. For that purpose they stole a few bottles of their parents' vodka and emptied them during the night. When I asked whether it was not possible to chat without alcohol, one of them said, "No, then we won't have anything to chat about!" Youngsters have taken on the general perception that alcohol is part of normal socializing.

Different Life-Worlds of Boys and Girls

In this section I shall discuss the norms and forms of socializing of young people in the village of Uurung Khaia. I try to analyze their own categories of sexuality and how they are connected to prestige, morality, and the social norms of youth, but also how common Dolgan social norms are reflected in the behavior of the youth.

To have many sexual partners is seen as prestigious for teenage boys and probably also for girls.⁸ There is a thin line between "good" and "bad" manners, though. A girl who has too many sexual partners—or is believed to have too many—is branded as a "slag" (*guliashchaia*). Sexuality is one sign of virility, masculinity, and also popularity among young men. Popular boys and girls were also sexually attractive, whereas unpopularity expressed itself in low sexual interest on the part of the opposite sex.

Dolgan youth culture is centered around same-sex friendship groups. There is a strong and unquestioned leader of the male group who has many friends around him. The male-group ideology has a strong focus on loyalty and solidarity, traits taken over from the Dolgan kinship ideology. Girl groups have their leaders, too; however, I am not familiar with the decision-making strategies in girl groups. At the weekend discos and during festive events, I noticed that people constantly hang around together and come or leave together. Most such friendship groups are very much kin-based—young boys or girls from the same extended family or family alliances form the group. There is a very simple explanation for that—they grew up together and have spent lots of time together during their childhood either visiting each other with their parents or spending summers together in the tundra. At parties, boys' groups—when drunk—often clashed to defend their reputation against real or imagined offenses. The concept of masculinity and honor very much dictated the behavior of boys, and in an environment that tolerates and even reveres aggression, violent behavior is not unusual (Ventsel 2005, 2007).

However, from my point of view, girls were under even stronger social pressure. Both adult and young males generally expect a girl to behave "properly," but they clearly pay more attention to well-dressed and talkative "funny" (*veselye* in Russian) girls. Girls walk a thin line

between being popular, i.e., sexually attractive, and being *guliashchaia*. While the boys' violence was tolerated and to some extent even appreciated by the community, girls were under pressure to maintain their good reputation both within their social group and in the eyes of their family. One case that shocked the whole district illustrates the social pressure upon girls. In the district center of Saaskylaakh, there is a sacred mountain with a huge, high rock on its west side. There is a legend that if there is a suspicion that a woman has cheated on her husband, she should jump down from the rock. If she survives, the suspicion was wrong. During my fieldwork period, a young girl had jumped down from the rock and barely survived, being hospitalized for a long period with serious injuries. I was told that her boyfriend had accused her of sleeping with other boys, and the girl wanted to prove her innocence. To sum up this section, I want to stress that although young people enjoy great personal freedom and have established their own social world, the social and moral norms they follow are taken over from their parents' culture and affect their actions and behavior.

How Do They Do It?

In this section I will go into the social dimensions of intimate life practices of indigenous youth and demonstrate how young people in the Anabar District use empty social and physical space for this purpose.

After being in the district more than half a year, I still could not answer the question "How do they do it?" A few times when I tried to ask such questions, boys avoided direct answers and were very reluctant to continue discussion about this issue. I never had a chance to talk about sex with girls. I doubt whether it was possible at all, especially because as a male foreigner I was not somebody to talk with about such issues. I understood that it must be difficult, if not impossible, to break through the barrier of silence that surrounded everything connected to sex. And since this was not the main topic of my research, I did not try too hard to get through this barrier. Looking back at my fieldwork period, I now understand that it took a long time until boys were ready to talk about sex, violence, and other important issues in their lives. It was only in the last month of my stay in the district that boys began to talk openly about these issues and take me to their parties.

I happened to be in the tundra with three sons (18, 18, and 21 years of age) of an old reindeer herder I usually lived with when visiting this brigade.⁹ We were left behind alone when the parents left for the village to settle some business. The first evening we made tea and cooked some food, and the boys asked if I had some alcohol with me. I had a bottle of vodka, and the boys relished the opportunity to have a glass of vodka without being confronted by the critical stare of their parents.

In the jovial atmosphere this created, the boys started to talk about their sexual adventures and tell stories about what happened to their friends. I assumed that young people in the village had developed a series of clever strategies to use permanently or temporarily empty spaces in the village to explore their sexuality. One of the boys said: "It often happens that someone's parents are not at home. They are either in another village or in the tundra. This provides the opportunity to arrange parties. You just have to watch out that you do not make too much noise or break something."

Such apartments usually have several beds, either in different rooms or separated from each other by cupboards, where couples withdraw at the end of the party. "And when you cannot stay, you just go out to the tundra; there is plenty of space," said one of the boys, smiling. "Okay,

you can do it in the summer, but the summer is short and no one is in the village anyway,” was my reply. “Sure, but [also] in the winter you always can find something,” was the answer. “For instance, you can sneak out. When you have your own room, you take the girl in there and do it quickly. It takes only 10 or 20 minutes anyway. Then you bring the girl home.” When I asked what happens when you do not have your own room, boys described in detail which garages or sheds you always can go to and have sex. The most popular place seemed to be the boiler house (*kotel'naia*) of a two-story apartment building at the main square, just opposite the village club. Boys told me that this is a heated place where couples go to have sex during the winter. Sometimes there are so many couples waiting that they have to line up. And as one of the boys told me, if you really want to have sex and there's no place to go, you just do it in the snow, lying on a fur coat, and do not pay any attention to the freezing-cold temperature.¹⁰

As other boys explained to me later in the village, a lot of casual sex takes place when visiting other villages or when people from other villages come to visit. Sports are one sphere that makes it possible to travel. Boys and girls who are in the village basketball and volleyball youth teams travel regularly to other villages for sports. Similarly, when for example a girls' team comes to Uurung Khaia, the organizing boys not only take care of the success of the event but try to arrange some after-party at someone's home. As far as I understood, often there are such get-togethers prearranged over the phone and boys have already bought alcohol and condoms (which they can freely purchase in the village hospital) to be prepared for the event. For teenage boys and girls, sports often represent the only chance to travel outside of the district, and such trips are also seen as a paid holiday to new places, accompanied by parties. To arrange such parties is not too difficult, because many of the coaches see it the same way and disappear to drink with their local colleagues, leaving their team unsupervised.

Later I was invited to such parties and observed that they were very similar to the adult parties—people were gathering, the boys opened the first vodka bottles and started to drink and chat around the table. Girls cooked food, served it, and cleaned up afterwards. Often, bigger youth parties were accompanied by toasts, as were the adult parties. The main difference from adult parties was that at youth parties, communication between boys and girls was freer—for example, boys grab girls to put them in the next chair. But apart from that, it was very obvious that gender roles and teenagers' party structure are rooted in their parents' culture.

Uncontrolled Social Space

The hidden sex happens not only because there is an empty and uncontrolled physical space but also because there exists an uncontrolled or empty social space that permits people to make use of the empty physical space. By “empty social space” I mean absence of control, like tolerating not sleeping at home, and different and contradictory interpretation of social norms.

First of all, when talking to people, it emerges that Dolgan society is not as conservative as it seems. This was evident when I discovered that the *grazhdanskii brak* does exist, even within very conservative families. For example, the daughter of one of my guest families left her husband and lives unregistered with another man. This family is very traditional, practicing Dolgan religious customs more than most other families I know, donating food for poor families in the village, following other social norms, and having a very strict family hierarchy. In this family, internal family solidarity and loyalty are very strong and the father has almost absolute decision-making power, especially in the family economy. The third-oldest daughter herself is someone that other people describe as *khuliganka* (a mischievous girl), which actually means

that she is full of courage and often crosses the line when it comes to the common rules. She might disappear for days to party in another village with her female school friends or just spend all her money on expensive clothes. However, as I observed, she obeys her father's "economic orders." When the family leaves for the tundra, she always comes along to the tundra with her son, even if she does not want to leave the village. In Dolgan society, it is possible to ignore some social norms if you comply with others and at the same time have a strong enough personality to execute your own will.

The teenage practice of hidden sex is similar in that it follows certain rules while ignoring or manipulating others. Most likely, young people's parents know something about their offspring's adventures, while the latter do everything to keep their parties, alcohol use, and relations with the opposite sex hidden from their parents. Obviously, the youngsters would not tell their parents about such parties. However, there are several "gray" areas that youngsters exploit to live their own lives. The freedom that Dolgan youth enjoy makes the hidden sex possible. As mentioned above, as long as young people fulfill their obligations and are home in the morning, they are free to visit each other and spend a night at a friend's place. In a community that has its roots in a nomadic culture, this hosting constitutes a common practice. There is nothing unusual if a guest stays for the night.

Another factor is the very complex kinship structure of people in Uurung Khaia, as mentioned above. People from one age group within the marriage-prohibition circle are considered to be brothers and sisters and should not have sex with each other. However, due to the centuries of cross-marriage and widespread adoption, sexual prohibition is often very confusing; the nature and proximity of the kin relation are often a matter of discussion. The problem in the district is that its population has become quite isolated. Native youth with little money cannot travel as easily as they could in the Soviet era. For most young people in the district, it is impossible even to visit villages in neighboring districts. Therefore, the options for dating possible partners are limited to young people from your own village or from Saaskylaakh. I am sure that young people maintain sexual abstinence in relations with closer relatives. However, in some cases the kinship proximity is not very clear. Following different kinship lines, a third cousin can also be a fifth cousin. I know of cases in which even elders were unsure whether to allow a marriage between their children or not. This makes dating the opposite sex without pangs of conscience easier, because it widens the number of potential partners. The cases in which elders were not sure whether to allow marriage shows that hidden sex for Dolgan youth makes it possible to have relationships with people they should not have according to kinship rules. Afterwards the young couple tries to push their will through and legalize their relationship by marriage.

Above I explained that young people have adopted many of their social norms from their parents' world. However, there are many other adopted adult norms besides behavior at parties. Dolgan gender roles support female communication with various men. It is tolerated for girls and women to use men economically but have no sex with them. Men, being tough guys, are expected to be generous and share food with other people, especially female community members. This norm is also followed among teenagers. When boys provide alcohol, it does not mean that girls have any sexual obligation to them. Girls are always free to come and go. To lock the girls up in the party house against their will is condemned among all age groups in the community. Sexual violence as such is nearly nonexistent in the community, and rape is the worst crime one can commit.¹¹ The freedom to communicate with males makes the definition of "proper" female behavior very difficult. A young married woman can party with other men and

women, but it depends very often on how much her husband can tolerate such behavior. Unmarried young women in their twenties can freely party with men because it is expected that they have a sense of responsibility, and the fact itself does not cause much gossip. It can even be that parents silently support their daughter's partying. At such an age, a woman should be married already, so parents tend to hope that doing so will help her meet a potential husband. Although the line between "proper behavior" and being *guliashchaia* is a very fine one, in general it seems to me that women in the northern part of the Republic of Sakha have more personal freedom to hang out with men than women in villages in the central districts.

Last but not least, although it is easy to be branded as *guliashchaia* among the Dolgan because of "improper" behavior, girls are not afraid of any serious consequences when they give birth to an unwanted child. According to Dolgan custom, a girl aged 17 or 18 is mature enough to have a child, and her parents usually accept the newborn as a member of their family. More problematic is the situation for girls younger than 17: in these cases pregnancy is very often condemned. Even in this case the girl does not risk exclusion from the family.

As among most Arctic people (cf. Rasing 1994), to be a mother without a husband is not seen as negative. A young unmarried mother is not confronted with the negative attitude of the community; the shame usually goes to the father who has abandoned his child and social obligations. In the northern communities in Sakha, marriage as such is very fragile. Some marriages break up because of the husband's alcohol abuse or domestic violence. In such critical situations, a daughter can always return to her father's home, taking her children with her. Also, the mortality rate is quite high in the northern communities (cf. Ziker 2002). A man can have fatal accidents during hunting trips (freezing to death, for example) or be killed in drunken fights in the village. On these grounds, a single mother is not the shame of a family and can easily count on her family's support.

Conclusion

This paper is about hidden sex among "ordinary" (*obychnye*) Dolgan youth. I have sought to show that being young in an Arctic village is not about rebelling against society but rather about adapting their lifestyle to the norms and codes of behavior of their parents' world. Young people conceal their premarital intimate relations, because sex before marriage does not match with the concept of "proper behavior." I have demonstrated how the social and physical environment of young people strongly affects their sexual strategies. Dolgan youth are "creative" in finding empty physical and social spaces for their intimacy. In a place where the whole environment in and around the village seems to be unsuitable for hidden sex, they find possibilities to use space that their parents cannot control. Of particular relevance is how individuals in this village utilize Dolgan norms and uncontrolled social space to pursue their own interests. To understand hidden sex, one should have background knowledge about Dolgan kinship structures, social and moral norms, and gender roles. Dolgan youth use their relative freedom, complex kinship structures, and the community's tolerance to certain aspects of social life (like not sleeping at home or not condemning single mothers) to follow their own interests. Dolgan youth behavior is not an outright rebellion against their parents' world. The young people just try to establish and maintain their own parallel world, one that is not in conflict with the main values of the community.

Notes

¹ This research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Center of Excellence, CECT) and the Estonian Science Foundation.

² Here and in the following, I will use the Sakha spelling for district toponyms. In maps, Russian spelling is used. Uurung Khaia's Russian spelling is Iuriung Khaia, and Saaskylaakh is Saskylakh.

³ I like very much Piers Vitebsky's remark that in Siberian studies, Western scholars follow in the footprints of Soviet ethnographers (at the workshop "Everything Is Still Before You: Being Young in Siberia Today" (Halle, Germany, 15-17 November 2003). In my opinion, Russian scholars discovered the topic earlier than their Western colleagues. For example, see the works on indigenous youth by scholars of the Republic of Sakha (e.g., Boiakova 2001; Donskoi 2001, 2002; Lapparova 2002).

⁴ There is even a Russian official expression for settlements like these: *poselok gorodskogo tipa*, or "town-like village."

⁵ Anabar District was well connected to the world in the Soviet era by a regular plane connection and cheap tickets. This all vanished with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Also, wages in northern villages were much higher in the Soviet period, when workers in Anabar District received substantial "northern subsidies," or *severnaia nadbavka* in Russian.

⁶ In the village there is a scarcity of living space because all construction materials must be imported by ships. A private person cannot afford this and has to rely on central distribution, which is controlled by the village administration.

⁷ The nearest police station is 150 kilometers away, in Saaskylaakh.

⁸ As an adult male stranger, I never had a chance to talk about the issue with girls.

⁹ Brigade (*brigada*) is a team of workers. On reindeer-herding brigades in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), see Vitebsky's article in this issue.

¹⁰ And at the same time prove your toughness. In the village I noticed that ignoring the freezing cold is one way for young males to show off. So they often walk on streets without any coats when visiting each other.

¹¹ I had many discussions about rape with various people because during my fieldwork period there was an ongoing court case against a man who had raped a child. All my discussion partners explained that the last rape in the village's history had been committed 12 years ago. In contrast, brutal fights take place weekly and unnatural deaths—stabblings or suicides—happen every month.

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About the Author

Aimar Ventsel, PhD, is lecturer in the Department of Ethnology of the University of Tartu, Estonia, and Visiting Academic at the Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, United Kingdom. He has worked and published on property relations, music culture, and youth in Siberia. Since 2006 he also studies East German punkrock culture from the perspective of legal anthropology. Recent publications include “Punx and Skins United: One Law for Us One Law for Them,” *Journal of Legal Studies* 57:45-100, published in 2008; and Habeck and Ventsel (2009, see References Cited). Aimar Ventsel is guest editor of the special issue “Generation P in the Tundra: Youth in Siberia,” *Electronic Journal of Folklore* 41.