

Out in the Netherlands

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Acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands

Saskia Keuzenkamp

David Bos

with collaboration from

Anna Adolfsen, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Gert Hekma



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The Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP

P.O. Box 16164

2500 BD The Hague

tel +31 70 340 7000

fax +31 70 340 7044

email info@scp.nl

www.scp.nl

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Foreword

The Netherlands was the first country in the world where partners of the same sex were legally allowed to marry. The first gay marriages took place in Amsterdam in the early hours of 1 April 2001, confirming Holland's global reputation as a gay-friendly country. Now that gays and heterosexuals have virtually the same rights on all fronts in the Netherlands, the emphasis on government policy is shifting to promoting the social acceptance of homosexuality. The experiences of gay people themselves show that their sexual preferences are not equally accepted by everyone. The present minister with responsibility for coordinating the gay emancipation policy has made clear during meetings with representatives of gay organisations that achieving this social accident is high on the agenda. And when the State Secretary for Defence and a number of senior military officers marched in the last *Pink Saturday* demonstration, they underlined the importance attached to this issue by the Dutch government.

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP, together with Universiteit van Amsterdam (UvA) and Rutgers Nisso Groep (RNG), the Dutch Expert Centre on Sexuality, was commissioned by the previous government to carry out a study into the acceptance of homosexual men and women in the Netherlands. Based on public opinion research, interviews with homosexuals and analysis of Internet forums, a broad picture was obtained of the present situation and of developments in recent decades. *Out in the Netherlands* summarises the main findings from the report, which was published earlier under the title *Just doing what comes naturally. Acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands (Gewoon doen. Acceptatie van homoseksualiteit in Nederland)* (Keuzenkamp et al. 2006). *Out in the Netherlands* also contains the findings of the most recent polls, which explore attitudes among the public. A brief outline of the history of homosexuality in the Netherlands has also been added.

I should like to thank the former coordinator of homosexual emancipation policy, Clémence Ross-van Dorp, State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport, and her successor Dr Ronald Plasterk, Minister of Education, Culture and Science, for making available the resources to publish this report. A word of thanks is also due to the researchers from UvA and RNG, who collaborated in the writing of *Gewoon doen* (*Just doing what comes naturally*), the report that forms the basis for this publication, and some of whom also contributed to *Out in the Netherlands*: Jan Willem Duyvendak, Gert Hekma, Farid Tabarki, Ramon van Geytenbeek, Edwin van der Hulst (UvA), Floor Bakker and Lisette Kuyper (RNG), and last but not least David Bos (Trimbos Institute).

Prof. Paul Schnabel

General Director of The Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP

1 *A gay-friendly country*

The fact that acceptance of homosexual men and women is by no means the norm in Europe has recently been demonstrated yet again in several ways. Latvia, for example, last year banned the Gay Pride March. And in May of this year, marchers in the Gay Pride demonstration for gay rights were beaten up and threatened in Moscow. Instead of arresting the attackers, the police picked up the demonstrators. In Poland, the children's programme *Teletubbies* was recently almost taken off the air because the character Tinky Winky was 'suspected' by the authorities of being homosexual.

Many Dutch people will find this latter incident amusing, but the other cases of homophobic behaviour were roundly condemned in the press. The Netherlands has a reputation throughout the world as a country where homosexuality has long been widely accepted. In recent decades, the Dutch government has done more and more to give gays the same rights as heterosexuals, and in April 2001 the Netherlands became the first country in the world to allow couples of the same sex to marry. Ronald Plasterk, the present government minister responsible for coordinating the emancipation policy for homosexuals, has emphasised on several occasions his desire to increase the acceptance of homosexuality in Dutch society. Any number of Dutch public figures openly profess their homosexuality, including a (male) state secretary in the previous Cabinet and a (female) minister in the present government. Gays and lesbians regularly figure in television programmes and commercials. And negative statements about gays draw indignant reactions from opinion leaders. Many Dutch citizens, gays included, consequently believe that the emancipation of homosexuals is as good as complete in the Netherlands.

However, there have been a number of developments in the Netherlands in recent years which run counter to this picture of complete acceptance. Hostility towards homosexuality occurs frequently in schools, making life more difficult for homosexual teachers and pupils than their heterosexual peers (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2006). And gays and lesbians are not infrequently insulted or even physically assaulted in the streets; in some neighbourhoods their lives are made almost intolerable, while in orthodox religious circles homosexuality is regarded as a sin.

It will be clear that homosexuality is more accepted in the Netherlands than in the countries of Eastern Europe. But does the image of the gay-friendly Netherlands match the reality? How can the conflicting images described above be reconciled? How can the fact that homosexual men (not women) experience lesser quality of life (lower sense of self-esteem and of mastery) than their heterosexual counterparts be explained (Sandfort et al. 2003)? Are the present expressions of hostility towards homosexuals merely exceptions, unwonted outbursts or remnants of another time? Are they perhaps noticed because the Dutch are today more aware of discrimination against homosexuals? Or do they signal a genuine increase in hostility towards

homosexuality, for example as a result of the increase in the share of ethnic minorities in the population? For many ‘new Dutch citizens’, acceptance of homosexuality does not appear to be something that comes naturally. But if this is so, why is it not reflected in the opinion polls, which still present a favourable picture of the acceptance of homosexuality in the population?

Some researchers (De Graaf & Sandfort 2000; Van Wijk et al. 2005) ascribe the discrepancy to the limitations of the usual opinion research methods, arguing that they neglect what they describe as a ‘modern homonegativity’: disapproval and rejection of homosexuality have not disappeared but are not (openly) expressed, because acceptance is today the norm.

Another limitation in standard opinion research is that members of ethnic minorities are often underrepresented. This is a serious shortcoming, because there are indications that it is precisely in these population groups that there is strong resistance against homosexuality. To obtain a clearer picture of this, we included a number of questions on this topic in a large-scale survey specifically aimed at ethnic minorities.

In response to concerns about a possible reduction in the acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands, the previous Cabinet asked the Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP to carry out a study of the situation. The SCP did so in collaboration with researchers from Universiteit van Amsterdam and Rutgers Nisso Groep, the Dutch Expert Centre on Sexuality. This culminated in the publication of the report *Gewoon doen. Acceptatie van homoseksualiteit in Nederland (Just doing what comes naturally. Acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands)* (Keuzenkamp et al. 2006). The publication you are now reading contains a summary of that report together with an update with more recent data and a number of additions. It addresses the following questions:

- 1 How do public attitudes to homosexuality in the Netherlands compare with those in other Western countries?
- 2 What developments have taken place in the attitudes to homosexuality in the Netherlands?
- 3 What are the present attitudes of the Dutch population with regard to homosexuality, homosexual men and women and homosexual behaviour?
- 4 Which are the main sections of the population with a negative attitude to homosexuality?

To be able to answer these questions, three separate and distinct projects were carried out. This reflects the fact that the acceptance of homosexuality is neither a simple nor uniform phenomenon and can therefore not be adequately explored with just one research model.

The first project involved an inventory and analysis of the findings of a number of large-scale opinion surveys conducted in recent decades in the Netherlands as part of international comparative studies. These research findings lend themselves well

to generalisation: they reveal the attitudes of the Dutch public towards homosexuality and homosexuals, the correlating background characteristics and (if the survey is repeated periodically) show the changes that take place in those attitudes and characteristics.

The second project was also concerned with opinions, but this time as expressed on the Internet. Whilst such statements clearly do not present a representative picture of the views of the Dutch public – Internet discussions tend to be dominated by select groups – their informal, anonymous and relatively uncensored character means they do provide a sharply defined picture of the way in which specific communities regard homosexuality. Whereas respondents in opinion polls are sometimes inclined to give what they consider socially desirable responses, on the Internet they can say what they really think – although moderators have a statutory duty to remove actionable comments.

The third project involved listening to gays and lesbians themselves. What are their experiences with the acceptance of homosexuality in their everyday lives? Have they ever been the targets of violence, discrimination or other negative reactions? How open would they like – and are they able – to be about their sexual preferences? To find an answer to these questions, 80 interviews were held with gay men and women in four different social sectors. One of these was a form of leisure activity (sport, in this case fitness training and hockey); the other three were working environments (the hospitality industry, the banking and insurance sector and the armed forces).

This report is thus concerned not only with the degree to which negative attitudes towards homosexuality occur in the Dutch population, but also with how and how far gay men and women are aware of this. The emphasis is therefore on attitudes and experiences, not on behaviour towards homosexuals. In fact, remarkably little research has been carried out into this latter aspect.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, this study can be described as a milestone: it marks the first time that, at the request of the government, a broad overview has been compiled of the status of gay emancipation in the Netherlands.

2 *Dimensions of attitudes to homosexuality*

The research questions mentioned earlier are concerned with the attitudes of the Dutch public towards homosexuality. Precisely what those attitudes entail is not completely uniform. For example, they can be interpreted as expressing how the Dutch feel about the existence of homosexuality in general, but also as the attitude they take to gays kissing in public, to the allowing of same-sex marriage, or how they would feel if their own son or daughter were gay. In this study we distinguish between four dimensions, which will be applied as far as possible in the presentation of the results.

1 *Acceptance in general terms*

How do people feel about the existence of homosexuality as such? This has been investigated in earlier Dutch research by asking respondents for their reaction to statements such as 'Homosexuals should be free to lead their own lives as they choose' and 'Homosexuality is morally wrong'. Statements on this subject can also be found on the Internet, and the gay men and women interviewed recount what they have heard about this in their own day-to-day lives.

2 *Equal rights and (anti)discrimination*

To what extent do people afford homosexuals the same rights as heterosexuals? And how is the principle of equality weighed against other fundamental principles, such as freedom of religion? Only the opinion polls provide information on this dimension. We barely encountered this theme at all in the discussions on Internet forums, and it was not raised in the interviews.

3 *Homosexuality at close quarters*

The way in which people respond to homosexuality is evident not only from their moral or political attitudes, but also from their emotional reactions to homosexuals with whom they come into contact. How do they react if a good friend, a teacher, a child or their GP turns out to be gay? This theme is hardly touched upon in Dutch opinion research. In Internet discussions, by contrast, these 'confrontations' with flesh and blood homosexuals are a recurrent motif. The interviews also provide a good deal of information on this, albeit viewed from the 'other' perspective.

4 *Homosexuality in public*

Compared with a few decades ago, gay men and women have a much more prominent presence in the media and the public space today, especially at certain events. How do those who see this feel about it? This is another theme that is almost absent from opinion research, whereas the visibility of homosexuality is a recurrent theme on Internet forums. The interviews also reveal that visibility is often seen as problematic.

3 The Netherlands in international perspective

The Netherlands is the world leader when it comes to giving equal rights to heterosexuals and homosexuals. Nowhere else in the world have the rights of gay men and women been established in law for so long. This leading position undoubtedly has to do with the greater acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands. But how big is that difference really when compared with other countries?

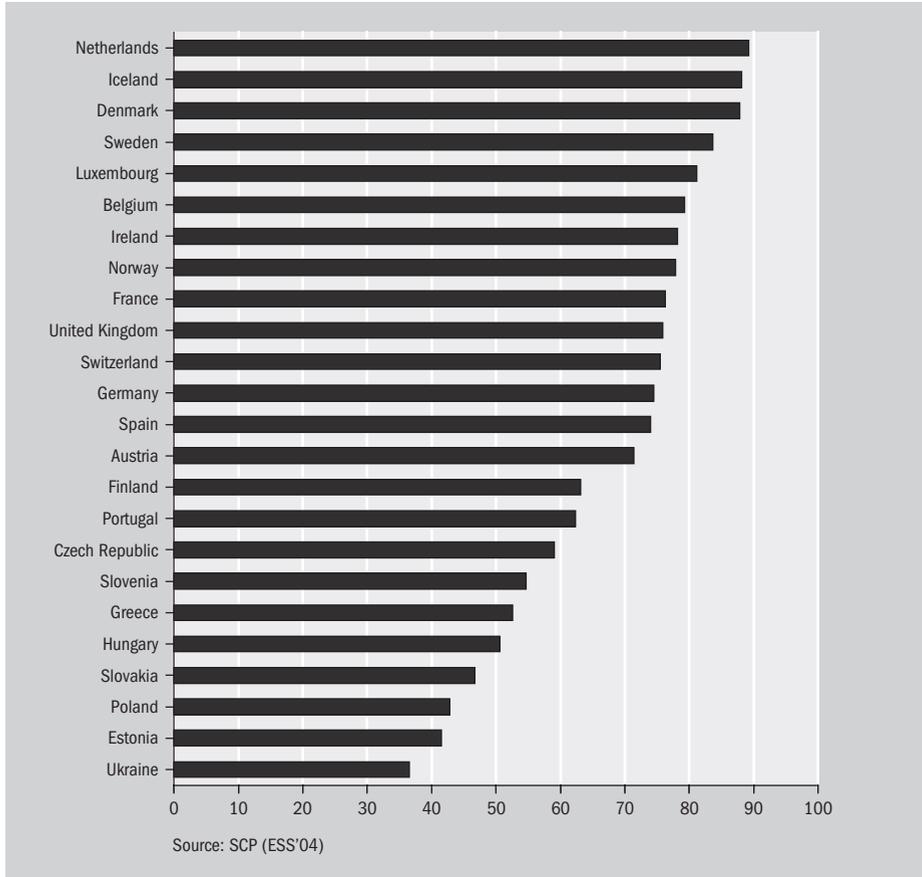
Not all of the four attitudinal dimensions applied in this study are included in international comparative research. Our study included two questions relating to the general acceptance of homosexuality, two on equal rights and one on reactions to homosexuality at close quarters. Our data were drawn from the European Social Survey (ESS), Eurobarometer no. 66 (EB66¹) and the World Values Survey (wvs). The ESS, which was conducted in 2002/03 and 2004 among the population aged 15 years and older in approximately 25 countries, contains one question on homosexuality. The EB66 contains two questions on equal rights for homosexuals which were put in the autumn of 2006 to residents aged 15 years and older in all member states of the European Union and some other countries. The 1999-2004 round of the wvs contained two questions on homosexuality. This survey was also held among the population aged 15 years and older, but this time in more than 80 countries.

General acceptance

Figure 3.1 shows clearly that the level of general acceptance is highest in the Netherlands. 89% of the Dutch feel that homosexuals should be free to lead their lives as they choose. Next in the ranking are Iceland (88%), Denmark (88%), Sweden (84%) and Luxembourg (81%). The position of Ireland is somewhat surprising, given the rather traditional image of this country; we will return to this later. In its close neighbours Belgium and Germany, the proportion of the population with a positive attitude towards acceptance of homosexuality (79% and 74%, respectively) is slightly lower than in the Netherlands and the majority of Scandinavian countries. Of the other countries which participated in the ESS, Ukraine, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary had the smallest proportion of respondents who agreed with the statement (51% or fewer).

Figure 3.1

'Gays and lesbians should be free to live their lives as they choose', opinions of population aged 15 years and older, 2004 (percentage who (strongly) agree)



In the World Values Survey (wvs), respondents in more than 80 countries were asked two questions about the acceptance of homosexuality. For one question respondents had to state whether they felt that homosexuality is always or never legitimate, scoring their answers on a scale from 1 (never legitimate) to 10 (always legitimate). We report here on the share assigning a score of between 6 and 10. Figure 3.2 summarises the findings in a selection of countries, namely those which took part in the ESS plus the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The Netherlands has the largest share of people (78%) who consider homosexuality legitimate, followed by Sweden (74%), Iceland (68%) and Denmark (59%). The proportion of the public who feel that homosexuality is legitimate is smallest in a number of Central and Eastern European countries (Hungary, Ukraine, Poland and Estonia), as well as in Portugal. The image that the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands are proportionally the most open to homosexuality in a general sense is

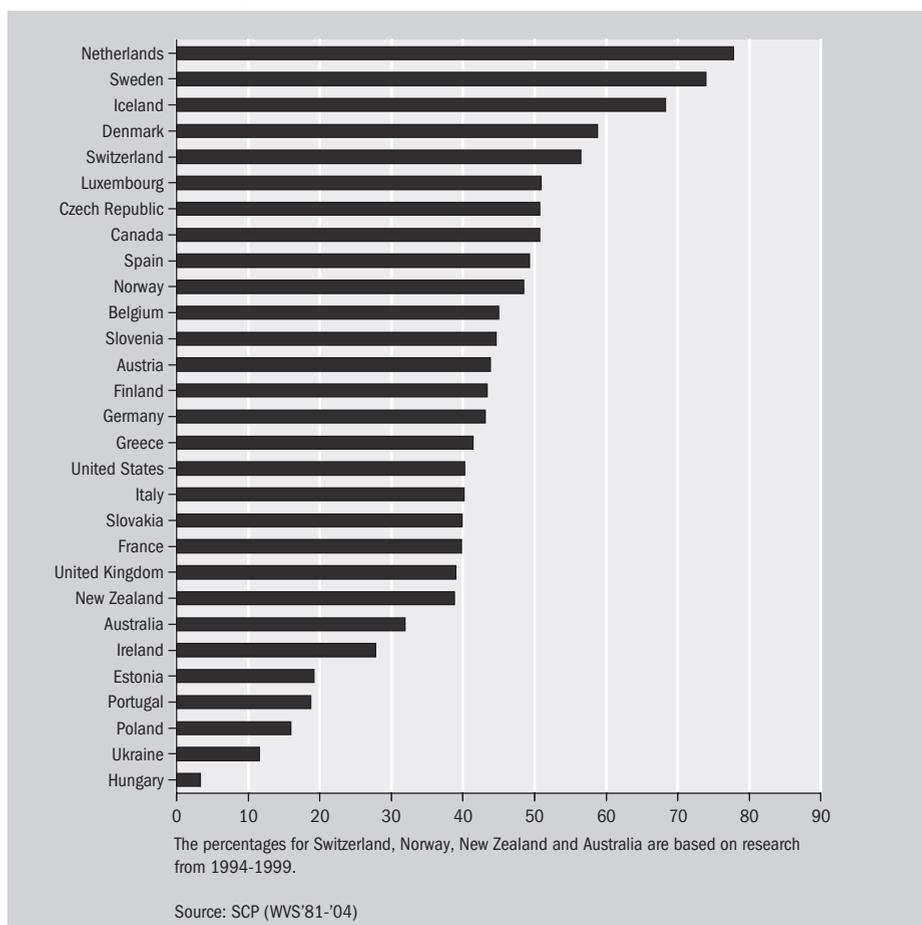
therefore supported in both figures, as is the fact that residents of the former Eastern Bloc countries have relatively the greatest difficulty with homosexuality.

The position of Ireland is striking. Figure 3.1 showed that a majority take a positive attitude to homosexuality: 78% believe that homosexuals should be able to live their lives as they choose. Table 3.2, by contrast, reveals a considerably more negative picture: only 28% believe that homosexuality is legitimate. As we shall see later, 29% of the Irish also say they would prefer not to have homosexual neighbours (wvs'99). One possible explanation for this discrepancy in Irish attitudes is the time lag between the surveys wvs (1999) and ESS (2004)².

Figure 3.2 also includes a number of other large (non-European) Western countries, and reveals considerable differences between them. For example, 51% of Canadians believe that homosexuality is legitimate, compared with 40% of Americans, 39% of New Zealanders and 32% of Australians.

Figure 3.2

Proportion who believe that homosexuality is legitimate, population aged 15 years and older, 1999-2004 (in percentages)



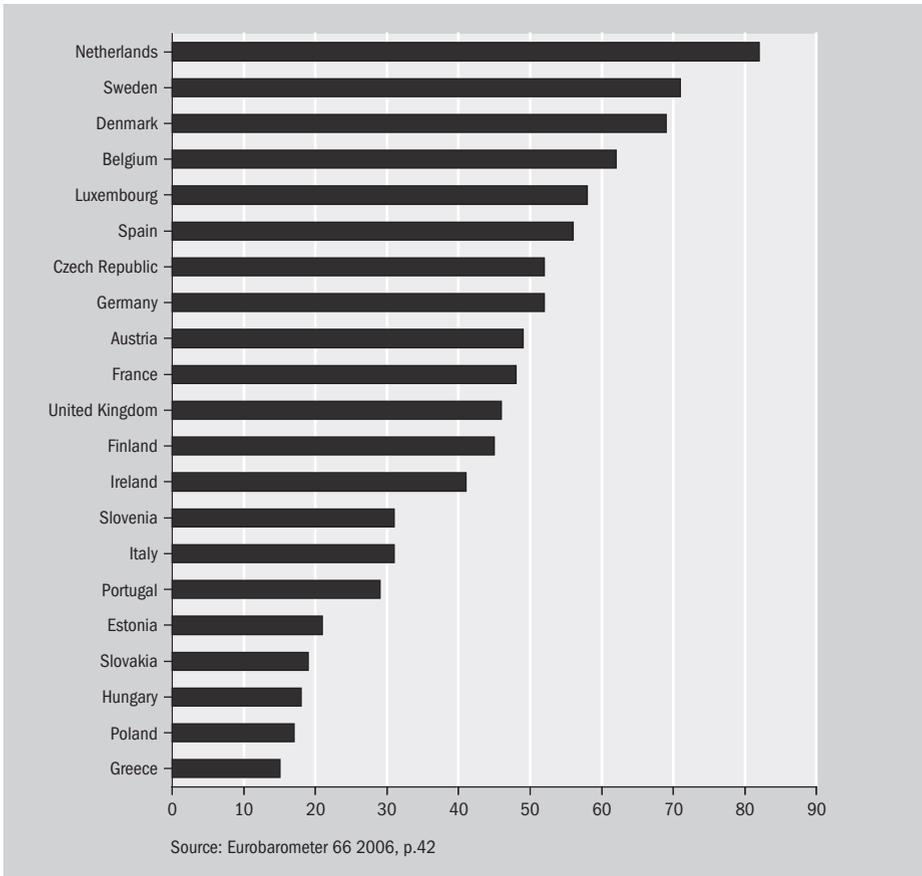
Equal rights

The 2006 Eurobarometer survey contained two statements on the question of whether gays and heterosexuals should have equal rights. The survey was conducted in the member states of the European Union, plus Bulgaria and Romania (as future member states) and in the candidate member states Turkey and Croatia³. The findings presented here are limited to those countries which also took part in the ESS.

The results of the Eurobarometer survey show that 82% of the Dutch feel that gay marriage should be allowed in Europe (see figure 3.3). After the Dutch, the most positive attitudes on this question are held by the Swedish (71%), the Danes (69%) and the Belgians (62%). The differences within Europe are however wide; at the other end of the figure we see that only 15% of Greeks, 17% of Poles, 18% of Hungarians and 19% of Slovaks believe that gay marriage should be legalised in Europe.

Figure 3.3

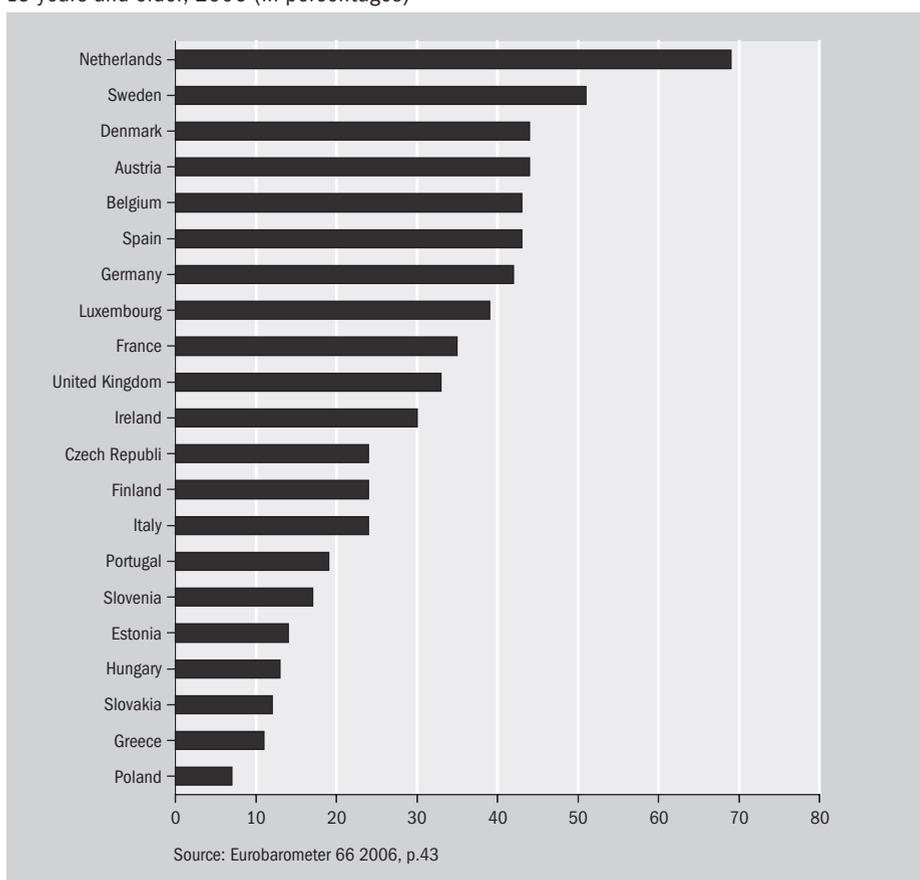
Proportion who feel that gays in Europe should be allowed to marry, population aged 15 years and older, 2006 (in percentages)



When Europeans are asked whether they feel that gay couples should be legally allowed to adopt, a similar ranking emerges, though attitudes are more conservative across the board (see figure 3.4). Poland, Greece, Slovakia and Hungary are the most conservative on this issue, with only 7%, 11%, 12% and 13%, respectively, believing that adoption by gay couples should be legalised in Europe. Comparatively, most supporters of this idea are found in the Netherlands: 61% believe that gay couples should be allowed to adopt children. Sweden comes in second place, though at some distance; here, a narrow majority support equal adoption rights (51%). The next in order of support are residents of Denmark and Austria (both 44%).

Figure 3.4

Proportion who believe that gay couples in Europe should be allowed to adopt, population aged 15 years and older, 2006 (in percentages)



Reaction to having homosexual neighbours

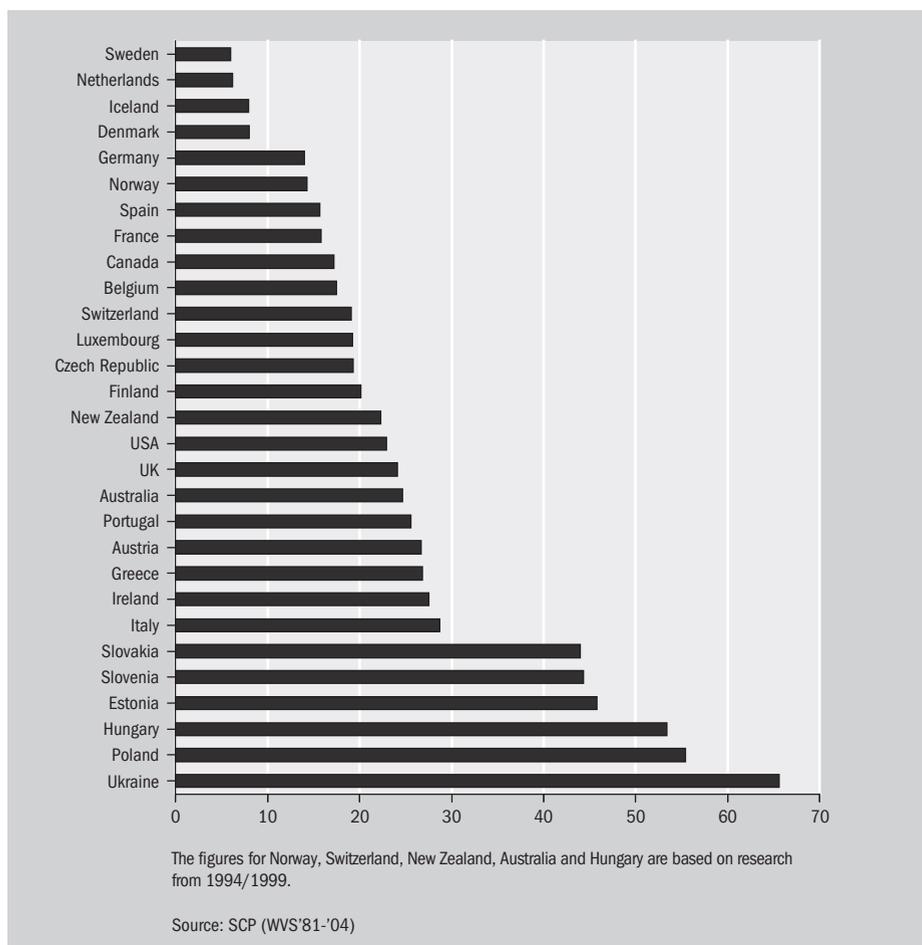
Only the World Values Survey (wvs) contains a question on attitudes to homosexuality in people's immediate setting. The question asks who people would or would not

like to have as neighbours, with homosexuals being one of the categories presented (response categories: yes/no).

Figure 3.5 shows that Sweden, the Netherlands and Iceland again have the most open attitudes towards homosexuals. Only 6% of the population in Sweden and the Netherlands, and 8% of respondents in Iceland, say they would not like to have homosexuals as neighbours. Poles and Ukrainians are at the other end of the scale (55% and 66%, respectively). Among the Western countries outside Europe, the resistance to homosexual neighbours is lowest in Canada (17%). In New Zealand, the United States and Australia, 22%, 23% and 25%, respectively, of the population say they would not like to have homosexual neighbours.

Figure 3.5

Proportion who would not like homosexuals as neighbours, population aged 15 years and older, 1999-2004 (in percentages)



Homosexuality in public

Unfortunately there is no survey available that provides international comparable data on the attitude to visibility of homosexuality in public.

Notes

- 1 http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_highlights_fr.pdf (geraadpleegd voorjaar 2007).
- 2 Enquiries to the Irish coordinator of the ESS (Eva Gillian, attached to the Centre for Comparative Social Surveys at City University in Dublin) provide a possible explanation for this discrepancy. In recent years Ireland has undergone a rapid modernisation of its views on sexuality and religion. The authority of the Catholic Church in Ireland is also declining. In addition, she points out the growing influence of political correctness and the introduction of regulations on equal opportunities. According to the researcher, these probably also contributed to a changing atmosphere in which negative statements about minorities – including homosexuals – are made less readily.
- 3 It would be interesting to compare the opinion of Turks in Turkey, with those of the Turks living in the Netherlands. This is however not possible, since the Eurobarometer-report does not present opinions of Turks in Turkey on homosexuality.

4 A brief history

Decriminalisation

The acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands is not the result of a centuries-old tradition of permissiveness towards 'alternative' or 'deviant' lifestyles. In the early 1730s, when the Dutch Republic was already renowned for its tolerance of religious minorities, it became the stage for the most vehement persecution of 'sodomites' in the history of early modern Europe. These persecutions brought to light a new phenomenon: just as in the metropolises of Paris and London, subcultures had arisen in the Dutch cities of Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague consisting of men (and women) who preferred sexual relations with members of their own sex, and who therefore regarded themselves as 'different from the rest'. This idea of sexual identity appears to have been a relatively new phenomenon (Van der Meer, 1995; 2007).

In 1810 Holland was annexed by the French Empire, and a year later the Napoleonic *Code Pénal* came into force there. This penal code recognised only two crimes of vice: encouraging lewdness (read: prostitution) with minors and offences against decency (Tielman, 1982, 63; Hekma, 2004, 40). This latter offence was a particularly easy tool for the criminal prosecution of men who consorted with men, but in itself sex between consenting adults of the same sex was no longer a criminal offence. This decriminalisation occurred slightly later than in France, Belgium and Luxembourg (1791-1792), but slightly earlier than in Spain (1822), Turkey (1858) or Italy (1861-1889), and much earlier than in Denmark (1930), Iceland (1930), Switzerland (1942), Sweden (1944), Portugal (1945), Greece (1950), Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic (all in 1961), England (1967), Bulgaria (1968), East and West Germany (1968-1969), Finland and Austria (both in 1971), Norway (1972), Malta (1973), Slovenia and Croatia (both in 1977), Scotland (1980), not to mention Ukraine (1991), Estonia and Latvia (1992), Lithuania and Russia (1993), Albania and Moldova (1995), Romania (1996), Cyprus (1998), and many of the US states (Waaldijk, 2003, tables 1 and 2). After regaining its independence in 1813, the Netherlands continued to operate the *Code Pénal* until 1886.

A liberal tradition

In 1848, while violent revolutions were breaking out in other European countries, Dutch citizens acquired a very liberal, democratic Constitution without the shedding of so much as a drop of blood. For many decades Dutch politics would henceforth be dominated by liberals, who regarded morality laws as undesirable state intervention in the personal lives of citizens. But many conservatives were also against criminalising homosexuality, because it put a fearsome weapon in the hands of minors (extortion) and because explicitly mentioning 'unnatural lewdness' might put ideas on the heads of innocent citizens (Tielman 1982, 63). The new Criminal Code (1886) did not make gay sex as such a criminal offence, but only forced sex, sex in public

and sex with minors. In doing so, as Gert Hekma (2004, 42) remarks, the Netherlands achieved a level of morality legislation which Alfred Kinsey would describe in 1948 as the future ideal for the United States.

And yet many homosexuals (if we may call them this at that time) came into contact with the judicial authorities in the 19th and early 20th centuries on account of 'offences against public decency'. Urban amenities such as parks and public toilets served as meeting places for men who were interested in sex with other men. This was not just because these men were generally not able to receive sexual partners at home, but also because they often did not feel sexually attracted to 'their own kind'. Homosexual contacts were generally very brief, often took place in return for payment, and consequently filled those concerned with feelings of shame or guilt (Hekma, 2004; see also Van Stolk, 1991).

Re-criminalisation

From the end of the 19th century onwards, the liberals lost ground to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Protestant political parties, who believed that the government had a duty to maintain moral standards. At their instigation, the legal age of consent for homosexual contact was raised in 1911 to 21 instead of 16 years (the age limit for heterosexual contact). This legislative provision (Section 248bis of the Criminal Code) was inspired by the idea that homosexuality was transferred through 'seduction'. It formed part of a whole raft of morality laws which also outlawed brothels, abortion and the distribution and display of pornography or contraceptives. Around 5,000 men (as well as a few women) would be prosecuted on the grounds of Section 248bis, of whom around 2,800 were convicted (Hekma, 2004, 70). Some of them were only just older than the minors with whom they had been caught.

Men who came into contact with the judicial authorities often fell into the hands of doctors who believed that they could 'cure' their homosexuality, for example by using shock therapy, aversion therapy or castration. Section 248bis also led to repression, by giving the police a pretext to keep a close watch on places where gay men and women socialised. This frustrated the development of gay and lesbian communities. On the other hand, Section 248bis unintentionally provided a stimulus for emancipation. In 1912 the aristocratic lawyer Jacob A. Schorer founded a Dutch counterpart of Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific Humanitarian Committee (*Wissenschaftlich Humanitäres Komitee*, WHK) in Germany (1897). Just as the WHK campaigned against Section 175 of the German criminal code, which made 'unnatural lewdness' between men a criminal offence, so its Dutch equivalent, the NWHK (the first gay organisation outside Germany) pressed for abolition of Section 248bis. It received little support, however, but plenty of fierce criticism from confessional (mainly Roman Catholic) organisations and periodicals (Tielman, 1982; Hekma, 2004).

The Netherlands was occupied by the Germans in May 1940, and just as in Germany all forms of 'lewdness' between men (including between consenting adults) were made criminal offences. There was no systematic prosecution of homosexuals

in the Netherlands, however, and the number of convictions pursuant to Section 248bis halved. The position of gays and lesbians was essentially no different from prior to May 1940. The Liberation also brought no real change: in fact more prosecutions were instigated against men in the late 1940s than before the War. In the meantime, however, a successor to the NWHK had been founded on 7 December 1946. Initially it was known as the Shakespeare Club, but was soon renamed the Cultural and Relaxation Centre (*Cultuur- en Ontspanningscentrum*, COC). The COC, which brought together the useful with the pleasurable and men with women, would develop into one of the biggest gay and lesbian associations in the world (and, today, the oldest). Until the 1970s, however, its influence remained limited (Warmerdam & Koenders, 1987; Hekma, 2000).

'Pillarisation' and 'depillarisation'

Until well into the 20th century, the Netherlands was characterised by a conservative sexual morality. The number of babies born out of wedlock was lower than in any other European country – including Ireland. To a large extent, this conservatism was due to a phenomenon known as 'pillarisation' (*verzuiling*). Since the end of the 19th century, Dutch society had been dominated by distinct sub-cultural organisations (political parties, schools, newspapers, trade unions, professional associations, broadcasting corporations, youth organisations, etc.) of Roman Catholics, Orthodox Protestants, Social Democrats, and others. These 'pillars', which effectively divided society along vertical lines and which guided their members along their version of the straight and narrow, competed with each other when it came to morality.

From the 1950s onwards, however, something began to change. Censuses showed that the Church were losing more and more ground: the percentage of secularised citizens (which since as early as the 1920s had been higher than in any other country in Western Europe) was rising steadily (Kennedy, 2005). As a result, church leaders realised that they were in danger of losing touch with modern society. In 1952 the synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk*), the largest Protestant denomination in the Netherlands, declared that it was 'completely contrary to the Scriptures' to regard sex as a sin. Sex before marriage was wrong, but a more relaxed attitude was needed towards masturbation, and there was nothing wrong with contraception, because the purpose of sex in marriage was not purely reproduction, but expression of love. It was with these statements that the Dutch Reformed Church sought to distinguish itself from its main rival (Bos, 2005).

Pastoral care

In the Roman Catholic Church, too, however, things began to change in the 1950s, however. Catholic intellectuals criticised the social isolation and moral rigidity that dominated their Catholic subculture. They began to test the traditional morality against a modern norm: mental health. Within the space of a few years the Dutch Catholic Church developed from the most conservative to far and away the most progressive in Europe.¹ The 'pillarised' infrastructure which had served up to that

point to keep the believers in the fold, became a motorway for the development of progressive ideas – for example on sexuality – and after this it was not long before a process of ‘depillarisation’ got under way (Coleman, 1978). Between 1965 and 1968 the Catholic political party lost more than half its members, and in the 1967 general election the combined confessional parties together won less than half the seats, the first time this had happened since the introduction of the universal franchise, in 1917 (De Rooy, 2002, 249-251).

In 1958, Catholic priests and psychiatrists opened a help centre for homosexuals, and a year later they published a booklet in which they cautiously called for the acceptance of homosexuals (Oosterhuis, 1992). In 1961, Protestants published a similar booklet on ‘the homosexual neighbour’. Both booklets were widely disseminated, and a progressive Catholic psychiatrist devoted four radio talks to the subject, reaching millions of listeners. A Protestant psychiatrist, who in 1948 had argued that homosexuality posed a threat to society, claimed in 1963 that homosexuals were threatened by society (Bos, 1995). Instead of ‘cure’, the talk was now of ‘self-acceptance’, and in place of asceticism came authenticity - ‘the regime of self-development’ (De Rooy, 2002).

In 1963 the contraceptive pill was launched on the Dutch market, and a progressive Roman Catholic bishop declared in his very first talk on television that married couples should decide for themselves when and how many children they wished to have – an undisguised vote of approval for birth control. The primary purpose of sexuality was no longer to foster family formation (although that remained the official Catholic standpoint), but was an expression of love between partners, who were now described as being equal. ‘Homophilia’ fitted in well with these new views – and pastoral care for ‘homophiles’ fitted in well with the new role that the Catholic and Protestant clergy saw for themselves as ‘pastoral counsellors’ (Bos, 2005).

Growing self-awareness

Meanwhile, however, it had become apparent that many ‘homophiles’ had no need of pastoral care, let alone therapy. Where in the past homosexuality had been regarded as a tragic fate, it was now also seen as an opportunity for domestic bliss. On 30 December 1964, a gay and lesbian couple were seen on Dutch television for the first time – albeit filmed from the rear. By no means all gays and lesbians became monogamous, but they were more now endogamous, often seeking out partners among people with the same socio-economic status, of the same age and with the same sexual or gender identity (Hekma, 2004).

Homosexual citizens began to gain self-awareness. The writer and poet Gerard Kornelis van het Reve (a.k.a. Gerard Reve) wrote explicitly about sex between men, often with a sadomasochistic twist. In 1966 he was accused of blasphemy, because he had written that God would return to earth as a Donkey, Which he would ‘possess in His Secret Opening’. The writer was acquitted and shortly afterwards was awarded the national prize for literature – a milestone for the 1960s. Since those in authority, just as in 1848, offered no resistance to ‘unavoidable’ changes, this was another

revolution that passed off without violence – and one which had major and lasting consequences (Kennedy, 1995).

The 'homophile' movement also fell in with the spirit of the times. In addition to the COC, which relied on diplomacy and dialogue, students formed new gay groups, which opted for a more radical course. On 21 January 1969 (before Stonewall), they organised the first gay and lesbian demonstration in the Netherlands, calling for the abolition of Section 248bis – something which was achieved a in 1971. Public opinion had turned in favour of 'homophiles' and even allowed them to go a step further. When younger gay activists were prevented from laying a wreath at the National War Monument on May 1970, every newspaper in the land – left and right-wing, secular and confessional – denounced this as a scandal.

The COC was officially recognised in 1973, making it eligible for government subsidy, and added to its name the epithet 'Dutch Association for the Integration of Homosexuality'. In 1974 the ban on homosexuality in the armed forces was lifted, and in 1981 persecution on the grounds of homosexuality was recognised as grounds for asylum. From the end of the 1970s onwards, gay groups were formed in several political parties, in trade unions, in the healthcare sector, in the army and in the police.

A public affair

The fact that not everyone accepted gays and lesbians became apparent in 1982, however, when the annual Gay Pride demonstration was held in an average Dutch town, Amersfoort. The participants were insulted and pelted with stones. Politicians from left to right expressed their revulsion at this violence, and the hatred it expressed, and promised to bring forward 'gay policy'. As a result, the police were instructed no longer to move men on from cruising areas, but to protect them there against 'gay-bashers'. In 1986 the government published a first 'gay policy memorandum' and a year later the Homomonument was unveiled in Amsterdam, aided by government funding. The design of the monument (a pink triangle, the emblem that gays had worn in the Nazi camps during World War II) and the location (close to the Anne Frank house) were references to the Nazi era, but the monument was and is not used only for serious ceremonies (Hekma, 2004).

The arrival of AIDS did not lead to the backlash which had been feared in the early 1980s. The fear of the stigmatisation of homosexuals was so deep-rooted that initially the only information campaigns held were aimed at all citizens, regardless of their sexual proclivity. Also striking was the fact that, unlike in other countries, homosexuals were not encouraged to use a condom during anal intercourse, but were instead advised to refrain from the practice altogether. This policy did not arouse resistance, however – probably because gay organisations had been closely involved in its development and promotion: the elite ranks of the gay movement had been co-opted by the medical and political establishment (Duyvendak, 1996). An unexpected side-effect of the HIV/AIDS crisis was an increased visibility of homosexuality: more and more public figures came out as being gay, among them widely

popular names such as Jos Brink, Pia Beck, André van Duin, Paul de Leeuw, Mathilde Santing and soccer referee John Blankenstein. On television, homosexuality was no longer a topic reserved for serious talk shows and documentaries, but now also featured in personality shows, soap operas, children's programmes and commercials – beginning with adverts by insurance companies. An unforeseen consequence of this was that the straight community became well-versed in recognising gays and lesbians – even if they did not meet the stereotypical image of the effeminate man or the masculine woman.

Equal rights and antidiscrimination

In the 1990s, the rights of Dutch homosexuals received more protection. Since as early as 1934 the Netherlands Criminal Code had contained a section on slander. When that section was redrafted in 1971 in the light of the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, the new version also mentioned 'religion' and 'belief' in addition to 'race' – but not sexual preference. Homosexuality was also not explicitly mentioned in the first article incorporated in the Dutch Constitution in 1983: 'All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted.' (www.minbzk.nl). During the debate of the bill in parliament, however, it was agreed by the government and the House that this should be taken to include sexual orientation. In 1992, slandering people because of their 'heterosexual or homosexual identity' was explicitly made a criminal offence, and two years later an Equal Opportunities Act came into force (www.cgb.nl). Plans for such an Act dated from the mid-1970s. However, because they sought equal opportunities not only for men and women but also for straights and gays, they encountered objections from the confessional parties, who believed this would undermine the principles of freedom of religion and freedom of education.²

Confessional parties have traditionally played a key role in Dutch politics: they were members of every coalition government from 1918 to 1994. However, that year saw the first coalition which was not centre-left of centre-right, but 'purple': it was made up of social democrats, free-market liberals and social liberals (a.k.a. liberal democrats). They introduced a series of legislative amendments which until then had foundered on the resistance of Christian Democrats: shop opening on Sundays and after 6.00 p.m., legalisation of voluntary euthanasia, abolition of the ban on brothels and equal rights for men and women, gays and heteros, etc. With a view to achieving equal rights, they introduced the registered partnership in 1997 (which had existed in Denmark since 1989; Waaldijk 2003) and later opened the way for legal marriage between same-sex partners. During the night of 30 March/1 April 2001, the first same-sex marriage ceremonies were performed in Amsterdam (see cover photo).

Since 1 April 2001, same-sex couples have legally been allowed to adopt a Dutch child, but adopting a child from abroad is not yet possible. However, on 3 July 2007 the Lower House of the Dutch parliament passed a bill which will make this pos-

sible, too. This bill also reinforces the rights of the lesbian ‘mother’. At present, only the biological mother is recognised as a parent, while the ‘social mother’ can only acquire parenthood via adoption.³

Tolerance as a source of national pride

The ‘purple’ coalition was put to the test in the autumn of 2001 by a newcomer to the Dutch political scene. Pim Fortuyn called for a restrictive immigration policy, a robust approach to crime and small government, though he could not really be described as a true conservative: he was not only openly gay, but also talked publicly about his sex life, which was far from monogamous or domesticated (Storm & Naastepad, 2003). Fortuyn described the ‘islamisation’ of the Netherlands as a threat to, among other things, the country’s gay-friendly climate. The fact that an ethnically diverse society did not go hand-in-hand with sexual diversity had already become apparent long before 1986, when the municipal council of the provincial town of Zwolle wanted to house the local COC and a Surinamese mosque in one and the same building. In the spring of 2001 there was a great furore when an Imam in Rotterdam, following reports of anti-gay violence by Moroccan-Dutch youngsters, declared that homosexuality was a threat to society. Fortuyn described this as an example of the ‘backwardness’ of Islam (Hekma, 2002).

Fortuyn was murdered just before the 2002 general elections (by an environmental activist), but his party still recorded an enormous electoral triumph, winning 26 out of the total of 150 parliamentary seats. None of these newcomers to parliament was openly gay,⁴ but homosexuality was henceforth a frequent topic of the public debate – usually in connection with the integration of non-Western immigrants. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, MP for the free-market liberals, often described hostility to gays in the same breath as the suppression of women in Islamic circles.

Where in the 1970s and 80s gay emancipation was often regarded as a left-wing political theme, today (non-religious) right-wing parties are the most vociferous advocates. And where homosexuality was in the past seen as a threat to society, acceptance of gays and lesbians is today seen as a measure of good citizenship. In a course preparing for the admission examination for immigrants, for example, they are made explicitly aware that it is forbidden in the Netherlands to discriminate against homosexuals.⁵ Many Dutch people appear to regard acceptance of gays and lesbians today as an example of ‘how a small country can be great.’⁶

An attempted explanation

How can we explain the fact that the Netherlands has developed into a relatively gay-friendly society? A number of different factors are discussed above, but it is difficult to provide a uniform, coherent explanation. Opinions differ on this, if only because they are closely connected with views on the development of Dutch society. Rather than a definitive explanation, we therefore present a series of partial explanations below:

- As foreign visitors have commented for centuries, the Netherlands is a fairly egalitarian society, in which the power differentials between men and women, parents and children, bosses and workers have traditionally been smaller than in many other countries. This makes it slightly easier for a marginal group such as homosexuals to demand a place within society.
- The power differentials referred to above reduced further thanks to the generosity of the Dutch welfare state. Benefits, social housing and similar provisions made it easier for young people and women to escape the authority of parents or spouses. It is no coincidence that the acceptance of homosexuality, divorce, extramarital sex and working women is also high in Sweden, Denmark and Iceland – countries which also have a strong welfare state (SCP, 2000, 188-193).
- The Dutch welfare state, especially in the 1960s and 70s, was a ‘social welfare state’, which sought not only to guarantee the financial position of its subjects, but also their well-being (Rochon, 1999, 205; see also chapter 1 of the Dutch Constitution, www.minbzk.nl).
- The Netherlands is a small country, which is aware that it cannot impose its will on others, even domestically. This realisation of its interdependence means that Dutch politicians have for centuries set great store by achieving consensus. The dominant players often went to great lengths to prevent minorities or losers feeling entirely excluded. Representatives of communities (e.g. NGOs), researchers and professionals were often given ample opportunity to have their own say in the political decision-making process (Rochon, 1999).
- The NGOs which influenced government policy and public opinion on homosexuality not only included the COC, but also the Dutch Society for Sexual Reform (NVSH), which in 1965 numbered no fewer than 200,000 members. Most of them had only joined in order to obtain contraceptives, but the leaders dedicated themselves to bringing about cultural or social change.
- Both the authorities and the Dutch public have long been used to the pragmatic tolerance of social ‘evils’ where repression could do more harm than good. For example, in the late 1950s the Amsterdam police adopted a fairly lenient attitude to gay bars, because they preferred to see homosexuals there than in the city’s parks and public toilets (Hekma, 1992; 200*)
- Because the Netherlands is a small country, the distance between the elite groups has traditionally been small (Franke, 1995). This applied to an even greater extent in the heyday of ‘pillarisation’, when Roman Catholic priests, for example, came into contact in all manner of contexts with Roman Catholic politicians, lawyers, doctors and psychologists. The interchanges which took place between these disciplines or professions ultimately resulted in an approach to homosexuality which gradually became more empathic and realistic.
- Among other things as a result of pillarisation, the Netherlands has since the 1950s enjoyed a very extensive and highly accessible outpatient mental health sector, with more psychologists per 100,000 inhabitants than any other country in the world. These provisions were initially intended to protect the family and

community, but quickly led to the 'psychologisation' and individualisation of morality. From the end of the 1950s, priests and ministers also began to model themselves on the example of mental health professionals. The 'homosexual neighbour' offered them an opportunity to show that they were no longer 'black-coats' or moralists, but rather modern 'counsellors'.

- A striking feature of Dutch society is that so many of its members (between 40% and 60%, depending on how the question is put) are not affiliated to a church. This 'secular' group harbour far fewer objections than those who are church members. On the other hand, Catholic and Protestant clergy in the Netherlands have also made an important contribution to the acceptance of homosexuality.⁷ How can these apparently contradictory developments be reconciled? What seems to be important is not so much the present level of secularism as the historical process of secularisation. Since this began so early in the Netherlands and proceeded so rapidly, religious leaders became convinced that they had to make concessions to the modern age.
- Notwithstanding the prominent position of confessional political parties, the Netherlands does not have a strong conservative tradition. The conditions for this were absent in a country where the aristocracy gave way to the citizenry centuries ago, where the distance between town and country has traditionally been small, where the biggest church has never been a state church, nor sought to be the only church, and where the armed forces are not held in particularly high esteem. The temporary loss of sovereignty by the Dutch Republic in around 1800 led to the early decriminalisation of homosexuality. This social advance remained intact, even when the tide turned a century later.

Notes

- 1 From 1970 the Vatican would try to reverse this trend by appointing conservative bishops.
- 2 Since 1917 the Dutch Constitution has guaranteed the freedom of faith communities 'to choose their teaching aids and to appoint teachers as they see fit' (*Constitution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands*, 2002, art. 23 para. 6; see www.minbzk.nl).
- 3 The government appointed a committee in June 2007, chaired by former state secretary Ella Kalsbeek, to put forward recommendations on lesbian parenthood and international adoption.
- 4 In the years 1998-2002 this had applied for 7% of all MPs, including Christian Democrats (Hekma, 2004) The third government under Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende contained an openly gay minister for the first time: Joop Wijn, a Christian Democrat. In the third government under Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers (1989-1994), the social democrat Ien Dales was Minister of the Interior. Following her sudden death she was posthumously outed by the Prime Minister.
- 5 In the Dutch language, the term 'discrimination' (*discriminatie*) is often used not only to designate unequal treatment, but also slander.
- 6 Even if the Dutch overestimate their own tolerance, this is a significant fact: 'If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.'(W.I. Thomas)
- 7 Sweden, Denmark and Iceland moreover have a state Church, to which a fairly high proportion of the population belong (if only in name).

5 Trends in public attitudes in recent decades

In 1986 and 1987 the Dutch public were asked to predict the level of tolerance of gays in the future (2001). Around 70% of the respondents were convinced that by 2001 tolerance of homosexuality would have increased (68% in 1986 and 72% in 1987) (CV'86 and '87). Unfortunately, too few data are available to present a broad picture of how justified this public conviction proved to be, especially over a period covering the last 20 years. Despite this, a comparison of the various data that are available does offer some basis for providing an impression. The perspective we have chosen is to study whether there has been a decrease in the proportion of people with negative attitudes towards homosexuality.

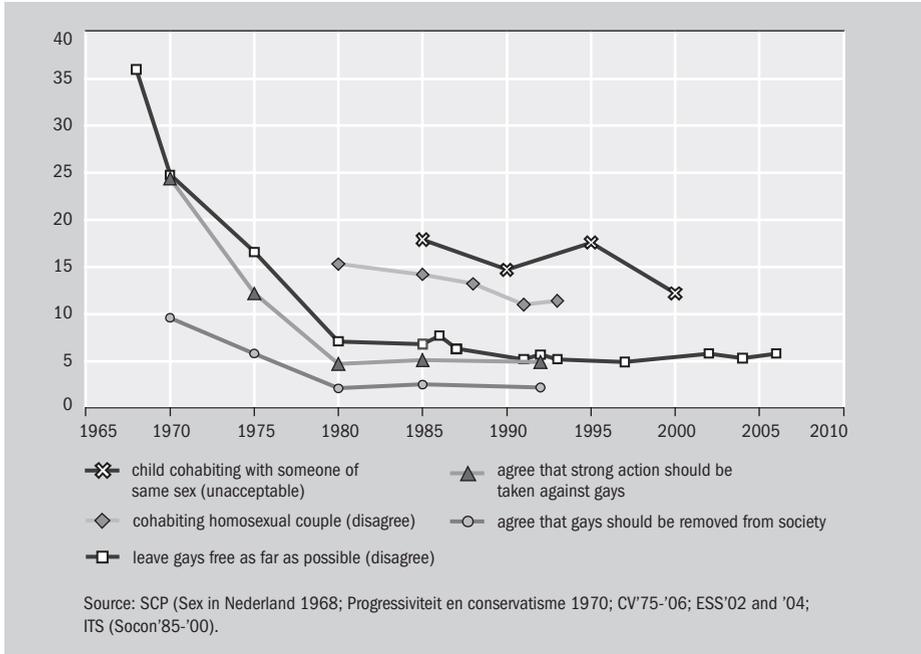
General acceptance

In general terms, we can say that the share of the population with a negative attitude towards homosexuality has fallen since the middle of the 1960s. The longest time series available relates to the question: 'Do you think that homosexuals should as far as possible be free to live their lives as they choose, or do you think they should be prevented from doing so as far as possible?' (CV'68-'06). The proportion of people disagreeing with the statement fell by 30 percentage points between 1968 and 2006 (from 36% to 6%). This fall took place in the period up to 1990, since when there has been no further significant change.

Strongly negative statements such as 'Homosexuals should be removed from society' and 'Strong action should be taken against homosexuals' are no longer included in opinion research today. As can be seen from figure 5.1, the proportion of respondents agreeing with these statements fell consistently in the period up to 1980, after which it remained virtually constant until the early 1990s, the last time they were included in the survey.

Another theme on which public opinion has been canvassed several times in surveys relates to the acceptance of cohabiting homosexuals. Both the *Cultural Changes in the Netherlands* (CV) survey and the *Social and Cultural Trends in the Netherlands* (Socon) survey¹ have contained questions on this on a number of occasions. The formulation in the two surveys is different, however. *Cultural Changes* asks about cohabitation by gay or lesbian couples in general, while the *Socon* survey asks about the (hypothetical) situation where someone has a son or daughter who cohabits with someone of the same sex. The two shorter lines at the top of figure 5.1 show the proportion of the public who react negatively to these statements. The trends resemble each other somewhat, though the proportion with negative scores is consistently higher in the *Socon* survey, which deals with a situation that is 'closer to home': people find cohabitation of gays and lesbians in general less problematic than if it were their own son or daughter.

Figure 5.1
Share of population (21-64 year-olds) with a negative score on a number of items (1968-2006)
(percentages)



Equal rights and antidiscrimination

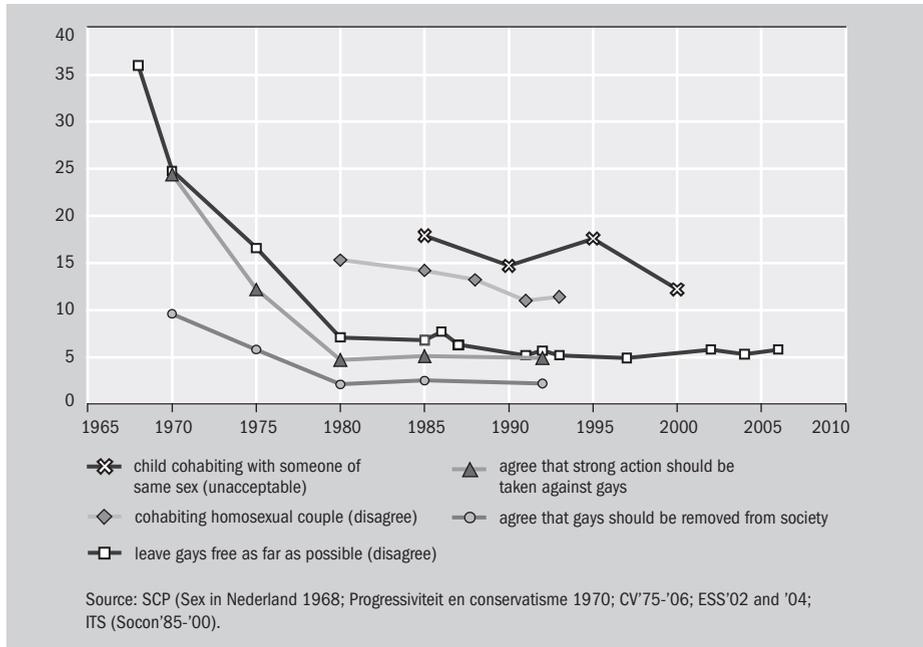
It can be seen from the questions that have been included in surveys over the years which issues are current in the public and/or political debate at the time. In the 1980s and early 1990s, for example, the *Cultural Changes* survey asked respondents how they felt about equal rights for gays in the areas of housing and inheritance. Questions on the right to adoption have a longer tradition, being first included in the *Cultural Changes* survey as long ago as 1980, and still forming part of the survey today. A question on allowing same-sex marriage was first introduced in 1988; a statement on this issue was also recently put to respondents.

As long ago as 1980, a majority of the Dutch public felt that gay couples should have equal rights as regards housing and inheritance; the proportion of the public with a negative stance on this issue was relatively small and shrank further in the period up to 1993 (figure 5.2). These themes were later also incorporated in the *Socon* survey, but because a different dataset is used the results are not directly comparable and are therefore not included in the figure. By way of information, however, it can be stated that in 2000 4% responded negatively to the statement that gays should have the same rights to housing as straight people, and 3% had a negative attitude to equal rights for gays in matters of inheritance.

Another equal rights issue relates to whether or not gay couples should be allowed to marry. The *Cultural Changes* survey asked Dutch respondents for their views on this in 1988, 2002 and 2006, albeit in different ways. In 1988, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement: ‘Gay couples should have the right to marry’. 43% disagreed with the statement. In 2002 the question was: ‘Gays are today officially allowed to marry. Do you think this is a good thing, a bad thing or does it make no difference?’ 11% of respondents felt this was a bad thing, while 35% took a neutral position. The question was phrased in the same way in the most recent edition of *Cultural Changes* (2006). This time, 16% said they thought it was a bad thing while for 29% it made no difference.² However, the results for just two measurement years (2002 and 2006) provide an insufficient basis to allow any conclusions to be drawn about declining support for gay marriage.

Figure 5.2

Share of respondents rejecting equal rights for homosexuals on inheritance, housing, adoption and marriage, 21-64 year-olds, 1980-2006 (percentages)



A longer time series is available for opinions on the rights of gays to adopt. The 1980 *Cultural Changes* survey asked whether gay couples should be given the same rights to adopt children as straight couples. Two-thirds of the population were against this at the time (see figure 5.2). Although the size of this group had shrunk considerably by 2002, it still accounted for a third of the population. Between 2002 and 2006 this share remained unchanged.

Conclusions

Based on the trend data, the first thing that becomes clear is that through the years a consistent and growing majority of the population have had a positive attitude to homosexuality. At the same time, a limit appears to have been reached as regards the acceptance of homosexuality in general: for around two decades now, 5% of the Dutch public have disagreed with the statement that homosexuals should be free to lead their lives as they choose. However, a large part of the population still take a negative view on same-sex marriage and adoption by gays, with more against gay adoption than gay marriage. The growing acceptance of gay adoption appears to be stagnating, while rejection of gay marriage appears to have increased between 2002 and 2006. Repeated measurements in the future will be needed to show whether a limit has been reached here or whether support for equal rights is even dwindling.

The general trend over the last few decades, with a steady decline in the number of people with negative attitudes to homosexuality, could be attributed to the changing profile of Dutch society, with more highly educated people and fewer people who are (strongly) religious. At the same time, however, a reverse trend may be occurring; the proportion of ethnic minorities in the Dutch population is increasing, and these groups relatively often have negative attitudes to homosexuality. In chapter 6 we will look in more depth at the relevance of these different population characteristics.

Another explanation for the positive trend is that more general changes in attitude have taken place within the Dutch population, as a result of which the Dutch have become less negative towards homosexuality over time. American research has for example shown that both demographic and cultural/ideological changes can explain changes in attitudes to homosexuality (Loftus 2001). Virtually no research on this has been carried out in the Netherlands; the only exception is Lubbers et al. (2006): based on a time series on one item from the *Cultural Changes* survey, they investigated the most important determinants of the changing attitudes (the question they studied was whether people think homosexuals should be free to lead their lives as they choose). They found secularisation to be far and away the most important factor. The available data did not allow them to determine the effect of the increased proportion of ethnic minorities in Dutch society.

Notes

- 1 The periodic *Social and Cultural Developments in the Netherlands* survey (Socon '85-'00) relates to people aged 18-70 years. The 2000 survey devoted fairly extensive attention to homosexuality.
- 2 In the same study, but in the written questionnaire, a response was requested to the statement: 'Gay marriage should be abolished'. 17% of the respondents agreed with this statement. Both questions thus lead to a virtually identical outcome.

6 What do opinion polls reveal?

6.1 The general picture

The principal current source of information on public attitudes to homosexuality is the survey *Cultural Changes in the Netherlands* (*Culturele veranderingen in Nederland*). Since the government had indicated that it wished to monitor public attitudes to homosexuality, the most recent round of this periodic survey included a relatively large number of questions on this topic. Table 6.1 summarises the questions and the responses to them, ranked according to the dimensions distinguished earlier.

The most general statement submitted to respondents was: 'Gays and lesbians should be allowed to lead their lives as they choose. The table shows that the vast majority of the population (85%) agree with this, while 6% disagree. Despite this 'abstract' acceptance, homosexuality can also arouse negative emotions: more than a third of the population find the idea of sex between two men repugnant. Men find this significantly more often than women.

The survey contained two statements relating to the question of equal rights for women and men. This revealed that a majority of the population support the idea of gay marriage, but also that one in six people believe that it should be abolished. Adoption by gay couples encounters more objections: a small majority of the population believe that gay couples should have the same rights as straight couples in this regard, but three out of ten respondents disagree.

Earlier research has already shown that gay men and women who display their sexual preferences publicly often attract disapproval (Van de Meerendonk 2003). In particular, men kissing in the street is seen as offensive (by 49% of the population); 33% have the same reaction to two women kissing in the street. This disapproval does not reflect a generally negative attitude to all public displays of affection; a straight couple kissing each other in public is found offensive by only 16% of respondents, and four out of ten people say they have less difficulty with a straight couple walking hand-in-hand than two men doing the same.

Although it might be expected that people have most difficulty with homosexuality in their own setting, this is not the case. Statements on public displays of homosexuality elicit more negative emotions than statements on possibly being confronted with homosexuality in one's own setting. Three-quarters of the population say they would have no problem if their own child was being taught by a gay teacher at school; only 10% would have difficulties with this. An own child cohabiting with someone of the same sex causes difficulties for a larger group, however: 18% consider this (very) unacceptable.

Table 6.1

Views on homosexuality, population aged 16 years and older, 2006 (percentages)

	(completely) agree	neither agree nor disagree	(completely) disagree	never thought about it
general				
1 Gay men and women should be allowed to live their lives as they choose.	85	8	6	1
2 I think that sex between two lesbians is disgusting.	18	23	54	5
3 I think that sex between two homosexual men is disgusting.	35	22	38	6
4 Gay men are not really men.	12	19	64	5
equal rights				
5 Gay marriage should be abolished.	16	14	67	3
6 Gay couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples.	54	14	28	3
homosexuality in public				
7 I find it offensive if two men kiss in the street.	49	23	27	2
8 I find it offensive if two women kiss in the street.	33	23	42	2
9 I find it offensive if a man and a woman kiss in the street.	16	19	63	3
10 if I see a man and a woman walking hand-in-hand I mind less than if I see two men walking hand-in-hand.	39	17	43	2
homosexuality in own setting				
11 I would have a problem if my child was being taught at school by a gay or lesbian teacher.	10	12	74	5
	(very) unacceptable		(very) acceptable	
12 Imagine you had a son or daughter cohabiting with a partner of the same sex. Can you indicate how acceptable you would find that. ^a	18	27	56	

a Respondents had to select a number between 1 and 5, where 1 stands for very unacceptable and 5 for very acceptable.

Source: SCP (CV'06).

The responses to the various statements together form a scale, which can be used to present an overview of attitudes to homosexuality, taking into account the different dimensions considered in this study.¹ This scale produces a total score per respondent. A score of 1 means that the respondent completely disagrees with all statements, while a score of 5 indicates that the respondent completely agrees with every statement. This results in the following picture for the population: 3% achieve a score of 1

and are therefore the most negative in their attitudes to homosexuality; 12% achieve a score of 2, 33% score 3 (neutral), 40% score 4 and 12% score 5, and thus have the most positive attitude.

6.2 Differences between population groups

It is known from earlier research that there are (sometimes wide) differences in attitudes to homosexuality between different sections of the population (Van de Meerendonk & Scheepers 2004; Davies 2004; Herek 2000; Kite & Whitley 1996). In particular young people, people with a low education level, highly religious Dutch people and Turks and Moroccans show relatively strong resistance to homosexuality. Young people and ethnic minorities are not however well represented in the *Cultural Changes* survey, making comparison of the different population groups difficult. For ethnic minorities use has to be made of a different dataset (the 2004 Living Conditions of Urban Ethnic Minorities survey – *Leefsituatie Allochtone Stedelingen* 2004). This survey submitted three statements to Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean respondents as well as to a control group of indigenous Dutch respondents. No research is however available with comparable statements for young people, and the picture presented for this group is therefore based on different types of questions.

Differences within the population as a whole are first explored below, based on the variables education level, sex and degree of involvement with the church. Attention then turns to ethnic minorities. Finally, the opinions of young people are investigated.

Differences associated with education level, sex and degree of church involvement
Using data from the *Cultural Changes* survey, an answer can be given to the question of which groups in the population aged 16 years and older have the most negative attitudes to homosexuality (to repeat, ethnic minorities are insufficiently represented in this survey, so these data mainly concern the indigenous population).

Table 6.2 presents the differences between people with different education levels, of different sex and with different degrees of church involvement. It shows that people with a low education level, but above all those with a heavy involvement in the church, have negative attitudes to homosexuality. Of those with an education level no higher than primary or pre-vocational secondary education, 17% have a negative attitude. Of those who go to church at least once a week (11% of the population), 51% exhibit negative attitudes to homosexuality.

The table also shows that more men (15%) than women (9%) have a negative attitude to homosexuality.

Table 6.2

Attitudes to homosexuality by education level, sex and degree of involvement with the church, population aged 16 years and older, 2006 (percentages)

	completely negative	negative	neutral	positive	completely positive
education level ^a					
ba0, vmbo	5	17	38	35	6
havo/vwo/mbo	2	9	35	41	13
hbo/wo ^b	2	10	24	46	19
sex ^a					
male	3	14	35	39	9
female	3	9	29	43	16
involvement with the church					
goes to church once a week or more	12	36	31	17	4
goes to church once every two weeks or less	1	9	37	43	10
never goes to church	1	7	30	46	16

a The differences by education level, sex and degree of involvement with the church are significant (< .001).

b ba0 = primary education; vmbo = pre-vocational secondary education; havo = senior general secondary education; vwo = pre-university education; mbo = senior secondary vocational education; hbo = university of professional education; wo = university.

Source: SCP (CV'06)

Differences between ethnic groups

Of the total of 16.4 million inhabitants of the Netherlands, 3.2 million belong to ethnic minorities². More than half of these (1.7 million) are of non-Western origin. The biggest groups are Turks (just under 370,000 persons), Moroccans (almost 330,000), Surinamese (just under 350,000) and Antilleans (just over 75,000). A high proportion of non-Western ethnic minorities (42%) are second-generation 'immigrants' who were born in the Netherlands. (CBS Statline, 3 July 2007).

In order to ascertain the attitudes of ethnic minority Dutch citizens to homosexuality, three statements were submitted in 2004/2005 to Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, Antilleans and a control group of indigenous Dutch respondents from the 50 largest municipalities³. The responses of the different groups to the individual statements are described below.

The statement that homosexuals should be allowed to lead their lives as they choose receives most support from all ethnic groups. Indigenous town-dwellers have the most positive attitude, followed by the Surinamese. Substantially fewer Turks and Moroccans agree with the statement, but they still constitute a majority (60% and 64%, respectively).

Opinions are divided on the fact that homosexuals in the Netherlands are allowed to marry. Among the indigenous population, and to a lesser extent among Surinamese respondents, a majority consider this a good thing, whereas in the Turk-

ish population a majority do not (55%). 48% of Moroccans do not agree that people of the same sex should be allowed to marry, while 31% believe they should.

The third statement submitted to respondents was whether people would consider it a problem if their child were to be taught by a gay teacher at school. A majority in all groups said they would not consider this a problem. Turkish respondents most often (27%) said they would have a problem with this.

Table 6.3

Opinions of 15-64 year-olds from five ethnic groups on three statements, 2004/2005 (percentages)

	(completely) agree	neither agree nor disagree	(completely) disagree	not prepared to say, no information
Homosexual men and lesbian women should be able to lead their lives as they choose.				
Turks	60	11	23	6
Moroccans	64	11	17	8
Surinamese	88	6	4	2
Antilleans	77	9	12	2
indigenous town-dwellers	95	2	3	0
It is a good thing that gays are allowed to marry.				
Turks	26	12	55	7
Moroccans	31	12	48	9
Surinamese	61	12	22	5
Antilleans	47	15	36	3
indigenous town-dwellers	83	7	9	1
I would consider it a problem if my child were taught by a gay teacher at school.				
Turks	27	9	58	6
Moroccans	21	7	65	7
Surinamese	11	6	81	2
Antilleans	14	9	75	2
indigenous town-dwellers	2	3	95	0

Source: SCP/CBS (LAS'04/'05)

Based on the scores on the three items, a total score was once again calculated, enabling the attitudes of the various groups to homosexuality to be outlined.⁴ Table 6.4 shows the results.

The biggest share of people with negative attitudes to homosexuality is found among the Turkish group (32%), followed by Moroccans (26%). Indigenous town-dwellers have the most positive attitudes to homosexuality, closely followed by Surinamese and to a lesser extent Antilleans.

Table 6.4

Attitudes to homosexuality by ethnic group, 15-64 year-olds, 2004/2005 (percentages)

	completely negative	negative	neutral	positive	completely positive
Turks	10	22	34	26	7
Moroccans	7	19	33	30	11
Surinamese	1	6	19	43	32
Antilleans	3	12	25	37	23
indigenous town-dwellers	-	2	9	46	44

Source: SCP/CBS (LAS'04/'05)

As we saw in the previous section, there is a strong correlation between education level and involvement in the church and attitudes to homosexuality. But members of ethnic minorities differ from the indigenous population on several background characteristics. For example, on average ethnic minorities have a low education level and tend to be much younger than the indigenous population. They also follow different religions and are often also more religious. It is therefore possible that the differences in attitude between ethnic minorities and the indigenous population can be explained in part by differences in background characteristics. This was investigated using multivariate analysis, in which the groups of ethnic minorities were compared whilst controlling for differences in background characteristics. (Keuzenkamp et al. 2006).

The table contains standardised regression coefficients. These indicate the strength and direction of the effect, with possible values lying between -1 and $+1$. A value around 0 means that the characteristic in question has (virtually) no effect on attitudes to homosexuality.

It can be seen from the table that ethnic origin is fairly important in determining attitudes to homosexuality, even after controlling for differences in other background characteristics between the groups. Turks and Moroccans are more negative in their views on homosexuality than indigenous town-dwellers. This applies both for first and second-generation Turks and Moroccans, but members of the first generation are clearly more negative. First-generation Antilleans are also more negative towards homosexuality than the indigenous control group; this difference has disappeared in the second generation. Surinamese respondents do not differ from the indigenous population after controlling for sex, age, education and religion.

Sex is found not to be a relevant factor in this research population comprising people of different ethnic origin; men are not significantly more negative towards homosexuality than women, or vice versa. Age plays a modest role: older people have a more negative attitude to homosexuality. Education also offers an explanation for differences in attitudes to homosexuality. Finally, degree of adhesion to religion is a powerful predictor of attitudes to homosexuality; this was measured by the impor-

tance that respondents attach to religion.⁵ People who consider religion fairly to very important have a more negative attitude to homosexuality than people who are not religious. Part of the difference between ethnic groups is explained by differences in religiousness between these groups.⁶

Table 6.5

Attitudes to homosexuality, adjusted for background characteristics, by ethnic group, 2004/'05 (standardised regression coefficients^a) (n = 3967)

	beta
ethnicity and migration generation (compared with indigenous population)	
Turks first generation	-0.172
Turks second generation	-0.073
Moroccans first generation	-0.159
Moroccans second generation	-0.038
Surinamese first generation	(0.010)
Surinamese second generation	(0.001)
Antilleans first generation	-0.134
Antilleans second generation	(-0.021)
sex	
men (compared with women)	(-0.017)
age (compared with 25-34 year-olds)	
15-24 year-olds	(-0.016)
35-49 year-olds	-0.050
50-64 year-olds	-0.065
education level (compared with higher professional/university education)	
maximum primary education	-0.119
vbo/mavo ^b	-0.047
mbo/havo/vwo ^b	(-0.019)
importance of religion (compared with non-religious)	
religion not really important	(-0.002)
religion fairly important	-0.119
religion important	-0.172
religion very important	-0.223
explained variance (r^2) (in %)	16.5

a The non-significant coefficients ($p > 0.05$) are between brackets. Standardised regression coefficients have a value of between +1 and -1. The further from 0 to the value is, the stronger the effect. The plus and minus signs indicate whether the effect is positive or negative compared with the control group.

b vbo = pre-vocational education; mavo = junior general secondary education; mbo = senior secondary vocational education; havo = senior general secondary education; vwo = pre-university education.

Source: SCP (LAS'04/'05)

Young people

Young people are in a phase of life in which they begin experimenting with relationships and may have questions about their own sexual preferences. A safe environment – at home, at school and among friends – which is not dominated by negative attitudes towards homosexuality is then important.

The last large-scale national survey of attitudes to homosexuality among young people was held in 2004. The four attitudinal dimensions referred to earlier were not included in this survey. Questions were asked only about young people of the same sex having sex together and about reactions to homosexuality in people's own setting.

Table 6.6 contains the results. It can be seen that a high proportion of young people had difficulty in 2004 with the idea of gay sex. Sex between homosexual boys was considered particularly offensive; almost four out of ten young people considered this repugnant, compared with fewer than two in ten with the same attitude towards sex between two girls.

If young people are asked how they would react to homosexuality in their own setting, their response is less negative: 8% say they would break off a friendship with their best friend if he or she turned out to be gay.

Table 6.6

Attitudes to homosexuality among young people aged 11-24 years, 2004 (percentages)

	completely/ not really OK	completely OK/ OK really	
Two boys think a great deal of each other; if they have sex, I think that's ...	30	70	
Two girls think a great deal of each other; if they have sex, I think that's ...	19	81	
	(completely) agree	neither agree nor disagree	(completely) disagree
It's disgusting if two boys have sex together.	38	20	42
It's disgusting if two girls have sex together.	17	18	65
If my best friend were to tell me that he/she was gay/lesbian, I would break off the friendship.	8	10	82

Source: RNG (JOS'04)

Differences in views are also found among young people. Research shows that girls have a more positive attitude to homosexuality than boys, and that young people aged under 18 are more negative than those aged between 18 and 24. There are also differences between ethnic groups; young Moroccans and Turks have the most negative attitudes to homosexuality compared with Surinamese and indigenous young people.

Notes

- 1 Principal Component Analysis was used to determine whether the items form one or more scales (the statement: 'I find it offensive if a man and woman kiss in public' was left out of consideration here. Cronbach's Alpha for the scale is .92.
Since not all items are formulated 'in the same direction', some were recoded. A total score was then calculated for each respondent, with respondents who had not responded to more than three statements or who had indicated that they had never thought about it being left out of consideration (3% of the respondents). Scores were imputed for any missing values for the other respondents, taking into account the total response pattern of the respondent in question and the average over all respondents for the item in question.
- 2 Statistics Netherlands (CBS) count people as belonging to an ethnic minority if at least one of their parents was born abroad. Indigenous people are people whose parents were both born in the Netherlands, regardless of their own country of birth.
- 3 The vast majority (75-79%) of ethnic minorities aged 15 or older of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese or Antillean origin live in one of the 50 largest municipalities. This applies for 35% of the indigenous population. The indigenous respondents in this survey are therefore by definition a select group, because the majority do not live in one of the 50 largest municipalities.
- 4 Respondents who gave no response to two or three items are left out of consideration here (4% of the respondents).
- 5 A religiousness scale (alpha 0.6780) was constructed from the following three statements:
 - my faith is an important part of who I am;
 - if someone says something bad about my faith I feel personally hurt;
 - no one may cast doubt on my faith.This scale was then divided into four categories, based on the importance attached to religion, and a fifth category was added for non-religious respondents. Five dummy variables were constructed for these five categories. These dummies were included in the regression analysis, with the category 'non-religious' as the control group.
- 6 This is apparent from the comparison of the non-standardised regression coefficients.

7 Unvarnished views on homosexuality on the Internet

The Internet has acquired an important place in Dutch society: according to Eurostat, no fewer than 80% of Dutch households had Internet access in 2006 – more than in Denmark (79%), Sweden (77%) or any other European country. Young people in particular use the Internet extensively as a means of exchanging ideas and views.¹

The aim of this study was to determine where and how homosexuality and homosexuals are the subject of discussion on Dutch websites. To determine this, the researchers (Ramon van Geytenbeek and Edwin van der Hulst, under the supervision of Gert Hekma and David Bos) paid particular attention to generalising, negative statements. Their purpose was not to ascertain *how often* such statements occur – let alone *who* is most guilty of making them – but primarily to discover *what* is said to the detriment of homosexuality or homosexuals. What do the participants in these Internet discussions have against homosexuality and homosexuals? Do they simply express their own *aversion*, or do they also express (moral, religious, political) *disapproval*? With which ‘disorders’, ‘weaknesses’, ‘defects’, ‘wrongs’ or ‘vices’ do they associate homosexuality? Websites with a pronounced political, religious or ethnic character deserve special attention. Do these sites express negative views on homosexuality? If so, on what grounds? Is homosexuality portrayed as something that occurs in their own group as well, or is it seen as an ‘outside’ phenomenon? How are people recommended to behave towards gays and lesbians? Is verbal or physical violence regarded as acceptable, or even praised, or is it by contrast rejected? The study was thus concerned with statements on:

- a) the moral admissibility or acceptability of homosexuality;
- b) the occurrence, nature and causes of homosexuality;
- c) the characteristics, qualities or idiosyncrasies of homosexual men and women;
- d) personal experiences with homosexual men or women.²

The researchers restricted themselves to statements posted in the period from 31 October 2003 to 1 March 2006 on frequently visited forums where homosexuality was discussed in negative terms. These forums can be categorised as follows:

category	sites
Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch and Islamic websites	marokko.nl, lokum.nl, ontdekislam.nl, turksestudent.nl, islaam-online.nl
protestant forums ³	forum.credibe.nl, forum.gkv.nl, cdb-online.nl
extreme right-wing websites	nieuw-rechts.nl, stormfront.org, holland-hardcore.com
hobby forums	funx.nl, partyflock.nl, fokforum.nl

Turkish, Moroccan and Islamic sites

Homosexuality is a frequent topic of discussion on Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch forums. This is particularly the case for marokko.nl (far and away the biggest Internet community in the Netherlands) and turksestudent.nl. Almost half the statements made on this topic on this site are anti-gay. This occurs less, and in a more nuanced way, on forums with an expressly Islamic character – perhaps because the participants are slightly older. Many discussions are concerned with what is and is not *haraam* (sin, sinful, forbidden). In these discussions, references are often made to the Koran, especially the story of the People of Lot, a.k.a. the inhabitants of Sodom (see sura 29: ‘The Spider’; see also Genesis 19). The heated debates which take place on homosexuality on these forums are concerned not only with the question of whether homosexuality is permitted (for Muslims), but also with the question of what homosexuality actually is: an illness, a deviation or a variation? Is it congenital or acquired? Most participants appear to believe in *psychological* causes, though some regard it as a proclivity which God uses to test those concerned. This implies a condemnation of homosexuality (it is an inclination to which people should not submit), but also a sort of recognition. Many forum members cite both ‘scientific’ and religious arguments, sometimes supplemented with their own impressions of or experiences with gays and lesbians. Many participants say they dislike the way gays disport themselves, especially at gay public events. As the discussion progresses, however, there are more and more calls for an attitude of ‘live and let live’: ‘Gays, headscarves, parties... It enriches Dutch culture. I don’t have anything against gay parades and so on, it’s entirely up to them. Just as we Muslims can decide for ourselves whether or not we wear a headscarf... And if those gays emphasise it by walking hand-in-hand and kissing in the street... Then we Muslims must simply cast our eyes down.’

Participants who reveal that they themselves are homosexual attract very negative reactions, because homosexuality is often depicted as something that does not belong in their own community. But as the discussion advances, there is often an acknowledgement that homosexuality does indeed occur – perhaps even in people’s own families. Some participants, however, are adamant that they would not shrink from violence in such a case: ‘If my brother was gay, I’d stick a knife in his heart while he was asleep.’ One participant reveals that he is not driven by religious disapproval but by an instinctive aversion: ‘I am not really a practising Muslim, but I can say that I hate queers, I just can’t stand them.’ Strikingly enough, however, he then adds: ‘Not that I treat them any differently in everyday life, I just couldn’t bear to think that one day I might have a son who was gay.’ Despite his deep aversion, the writer can evidently imagine that his own flesh and blood could turn out to be homosexual. This kind of ambivalence can often be found in posts by forum members. Some of them reveal that they already have homosexual relatives, friends or acquaintances. They fall back on this ‘experiential expertise’ to counter other members’ anti-gay statements: ‘... my uncle (yes, that’s possible) was gay, too... and he wasn’t mad; he is a normal human being; I find your fear of them very strange...’.

Protestant forums

On Protestant (Calvinist and Evangelical) forums, too, homosexuality is often portrayed as a sin, but participants are much less negative in their views on gay men and women. A sharp distinction is often drawn between ‘the sin’ (which one has to hate as a Christian) and ‘the sinner’ (whom Christians have a duty to love). Many emphasise that love is the highest order, for example on the site forum.gkv.nl: *‘The greatest thing that determines the identity of every Christian is that you are a child accepted and loved by God! That is something you share with brothers and sisters in the community, whether gay or straight.’*

In addition to religious arguments, usually taken from the bible, ‘scientific’ arguments are also put forward, for example on the role of nature and nurture in the aetiology of homosexuality. The idea that homosexuality can be ‘cured’ receives little support: only older participants appear to see this as a solution. According to most others, gays and lesbians can at most be expected not to give in to their sexual desires. In common with some Muslims, they sometimes see homosexuality as a ‘trial’. By no means everyone regards abstinence as the only path, however: *‘In my view, homosexuality can indeed be regarded as something “unnatural”, in the sense that it deviates from the average human being, who is heterosexual. That doesn’t mean that gay people experience love any differently or feel any differently from straight people, so I don’t see why gays shouldn’t be allowed to express those feelings while straight people are.’*

Virtually nothing is said about the idiosyncrasies of gays and lesbians; at most, mention is made of their alleged inability to embark on monogamous relationships – though even then, many participants are not convinced. The vast majority of them are evidently aware that homosexuality also occurs in their own circles. Some of them know gays and lesbians personally. This knowledge is almost always cited as an argument for acceptance. But what about homosexuals who wish to take up a post or ministry within the Church? The forum.credible.nl contained a discussion about a homosexual verger: *‘Personally I think it’s fine as long as he isn’t a practising gay... But if he begins to practise at a certain point... then I don’t know any more... Because in my view God has really forbidden this.’*

Extreme right wing sites

The majority of Dutch political parties do not operate (public) forums, but for supporters of extreme right-wing parties and opinions the Internet is an important vehicle for exchanging views. These discussions are strikingly often concerned with homosexuality. Religious arguments are not put forward: it is not God or the Bible, let alone the Koran, but nature and the social order which appear to be the most important touchstones here. It is on this basis that the supposed sexual habits of gays (in particular promiscuity and anal sex), their presumed effeminacy and the excessive attention they allegedly receive in the media are condemned. All these things, the argument runs, are diametrically opposed to the way of life that is supported in extreme right-wing circles. Some accordingly call for a harsh approach: *‘To start with, they should first ban all public activities by gays. Then marriages and then ban them*

from appearing in public so that children's eyes do not have to see these things. And finally these sick people should be re-educated.'

However, wide differences were found between the three forums studied: contrary to the members of Stormfront.org, members of Nieuw-Rechts.nl and especially Holland-hardcore.nl often say that they have nothing against gays – as long as they do not force themselves on others or manifest themselves too explicitly. Moreover, some members do not rule out the possibility that there could also be good homosexuals: 'So I don't hate all gays; I can only say that once I know them as individuals.' The occasional member even knows this from their own experience: 'I [know] a gay man... he works in the snack bar... he's a really nice bloke... and he's easy to talk to.' This tolerant attitude is probably due to the fact that many members of the latter forums are also members of the 'party scene', where they readily come into contact with homosexuals. Moreover, nieuw-rechts.nl is allied to a political party whose leader (Michiel Smit) is himself openly gay.

Hobby and leisure forums

Although traditional, religious objections to homosexuality are sometimes cited on hobby and leisure forums, this is usually done in order to refute them. These sites are dominated by a hedonistic morality: each to their own. Homosexuality is a popular topic of discussion, but for the vast majority of participants it does not seem to be a problem. Members of these forums do not seem to be too bothered about the question of what homosexuality is. Discussions on this topic generally arise as a result of news reports in other media and are conducted in an open, tolerant atmosphere: unobtrusive, negative comments are rare, and generally arouse many counter-reactions. Acceptance is the norm here: gays are simply part of society. 'Why is such an issue always made of this? Just let everyone do what they please', writes one participant on PartyFlock. This explains why even the few participants who do have an objection to homosexuality express themselves in very restrained terms. These forums do by contrast often use terms such as homo⁴ or flikker ('queer') as insults for people who are not 'cool'. It might therefore be expected that they ascribe negative characteristics to gays and lesbians, but there is virtually no evidence of this. Many participants say they have no problem with gays – though they sometimes add that they themselves 'wouldn't be caught dead doing it'. Gays are valued and even protected. A girl who excitedly recounts how a gay couple were spat at, is firmly put in her place: 'People who say they hate gays are just very short-sighted... And have hidden feelings themselves.' Many forum members reveal that they know some gay people well and value them. 'I'm a member of an ethnic minority myself; I have only one passport (yes, Dutch); I'm straight and I'm not a gay-hater, because I have an uncle who is gay and who can cook with the best of them and also a colleague at work is gay and I can always have a laugh with him.' Criticism is reserved only for gays who engage in public sex or force themselves on others in some other way – though even then, few people really object.

The role of moderators

In contrast to newspapers, magazines, radio and television programmes, Internet forums are generally not edited. However, that does not mean that everything sent in by members actually makes it to the forum. Webmasters or moderators acting on their behalf can exercise censorship, and in the case of criminal statements they are actually obliged to do so.⁵ Instead they often remove such statements. It would be interesting to know which statements are removed in this way, but most moderators are not willing to provide any information on this.⁶ According to moderators, it is difficult to bar users who repeatedly misbehave, since some of them use one nickname after another.

Moderators themselves are found to have very different views on their task. Some of them permit everything that is not a criminal offence, while others 'try to filter out emotions'. Some moderators allow many anti-gay statements to pass through, and a few even add their own contribution: *'I agree with you completely... [...] Just look around you. Read a gay magazine. Go to a gay site; what do we see? It's always about SEX and nothing else. [...] And I'm supposed to respect these people?... Well sorry, but one time when I ended up on a Turkish gay site I nearly had to be sick...'*

Conclusion

Research on Internet discussions offers a valuable addition to traditional forms of attitude research. This is of particular importance when it comes to groups (for example Dutch Muslims) who are underrepresented in surveys. Web statements must however be interpreted with caution. While respondents in surveys are inclined to give socially desirable or politically correct answers, people in Internet discussions feel encouraged to make exaggerated statements. Research into such statements is valuable, but there are many problems with it.

In the first place, the Internet is a rather disorganised medium: it is not difficult to find strong statements, but it is difficult on the basis of such fragments to construct a coherent picture that is in any way representative (Benschop, 2005). In the second place, the Internet is still a relatively new medium, in which people organise themselves in new ways. As a result, discussions often follow a very meandering and unstructured course. Thirdly, the Internet enables people to communicate with each other anonymously, which means it is almost always uncertain whether people say who they are and mean what they say. Some Internet users move from one forum to another, sowing unrest as they go.⁷ In the fourth place, it is unclear to what extent and on the basis of what considerations moderators remove offensive or criminal statements. What do visitors not get to see? Fifthly, and finally, little is known about the influence of statements on the Internet on the views, attitudes or behaviours of those who read them.

There are plenty of radical opinions on homosexuality to be found on the Internet, but what they mean only becomes apparent when entire discussions are analysed rather than individual statements. A discussion which initially lacks any nuance is found after a period of time to evolve of its own accord into a dialogue in which

there is scope for understanding, respect and tolerance. Internet discussions provide an opportunity to adopt extreme standpoints, but also to correct them afterwards. Those intent on stirring up trouble, sowing unrest or spreading hate are not only constrained by forum managers or moderators, but also by other members. Interestingly enough, it is often (young) women who force men to moderate their views and adopt a more nuanced standpoint. When it comes to homosexuality, women in particular appear to play such a moderating role and to contribute to the self-regulatory capacity of the Internet.⁸

Notes

- 1 Only in Sweden (80%) and Denmark (78%) is there a higher proportion of 16-24 year-olds who use the Internet at least once a week than in the Netherlands (76%).
- 2 We also include views on marriage, cohabitation and adoption by homosexuals here.
- 3 Dutch Roman Catholics have a much less prominent presence on the Internet, as do other ethnic minorities (such as Surinamese or Antilleans). This does not mean that they make less use of the Internet, but that they evidently have less need of separate forums.
- 4 NB: Although the term 'homo' is also used as an insult in Dutch, it has nothing like the negative connotations that the term carries in English. It is much more an equivalent of 'gay'.
- 5 Verbal communication from Dr Albert Benschop, VU University Amsterdam.
- 6 Internet users can now report discriminatory statements themselves to the Internet Discrimination Hotline (Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet, MDI): www.meldpunt.nl. The MDI annual report shows that in 2006 there were 93 reports of discriminatory statements on the grounds of sexual preference, 53 of which were criminal offences. This was a doubling compared with 2005, when there were 45 such reports. The reported statements occurred mainly on Islamic, Christian and extreme right-wing forums (Stichting Magenta 2007).
- 7 It is therefore possible that just a few users are responsible for most of the negative comments.
- 8 In each of the four types of forum, much less attention is devoted to lesbians than gay men.

8 Experiences of gays and lesbians

In order to gain an impression of the acceptance of homosexuality, this project not only included research into the attitudes of the general population, but also into the experiences of gays and lesbians themselves. How do they see their position in Dutch society, and what changes, if any, do they see in that position? How do those around them – especially at work and in amateur sport – react to the fact that they are gay? Do they even tell them? These are the subjects addressed in this chapter. A brief report of a quantitative study is given first, but the bulk of the chapter (§ 8.2) is devoted to a report on 80 in-depth interviews.

8.1 Survey

Quantitative data were gathered by the Rutgers Nisso Groep research institute (Bakker & Vanwesenbeeck 2006), as part of a survey on sexual health in the Netherlands (SGN). The survey was conducted among the general population and the respondents included 239 women and 163 men who feel sexually attracted to members of their own sex. 46% of the women in this group said they felt attracted exclusively to other women, while 31% said they felt mainly attracted to women; the other 23% were attracted equally to men and women. Among the men, a slightly higher proportion (53%) reported that they were *exclusively* attracted to men, while a slightly smaller proportion (22%) were attracted *mainly* to men; the percentage who were equally attracted to men and women was of roughly the same order.¹

Roughly a third of the gay and bisexual respondents reported that they had never had negative reactions about their sexual orientation. Two out of three reported that they had sometimes had such a reaction, mostly ‘once or twice’.

Table 8.1

Gay and bisexual men (N=163) and women (N=239) who have had negative reactions to their homosexual or bisexual feelings or behaviour, 2006 (percentages)

	men	women
never	33	33
once or twice	44	51
several times	20	13
often	3	4
very often	1	-

Source: RNG (SGN'06)

More than half those who reported a negative experience said this had taken place more than a year previously.

Table 8.2

Recentness of negative reactions to homosexual or bisexual feelings or behaviour, 2006 (percentages)

	men	women
less than 1 month ago	8	10
between 1 and 6 months ago	16	14
between 6 and 12 months ago	19	18
more than 12 months ago	56	58

Source: RNG (SGN'06)

Respondents who had experienced negative reactions more recently (during the last 12 months) were asked who it had come from. 10% of both the male and female respondents said it had come from neighbours or local residents, while around 25% said it had come from colleagues, fellow students or classmates. However, while almost a third of the male respondents referred to ‘strangers in nightlife venues’ (such as cinema or theatre), and no fewer than half cited ‘strangers in the street’, this applied for only 15% and a third, respectively, of the women. Against this, women reported much more often than men (20% versus 12%) that the negative reactions had come from close relatives.

The degree to which respondents have experienced negative reactions does not appear to be related to their age, degree of urbanisation, education or ethnicity. Some correlation is however found with sexual orientation: a higher proportion of women and men who feel *exclusively* or *mainly* attracted to members of their own sex report negative experiences than those who are *equally* attracted to men and women. This may be because the latter display their homosexual side less openly, and are therefore less likely to attract negative reactions.

The respondents expressed very different views on the question of whether the situation for gays in the Netherlands has improved or deteriorated in the last five years.

Table 8.3

Views of gay and bisexual men (n=150) and women (n=212) on the situation for homosexuals in the Netherlands in the last five years, 2006 (percentages)

	gay and bisexual men	gay and bisexual women
(much) better than five years ago	38	37
the same as five years ago	19	19
(much) worse than five years ago	29	21
both better and worse than five years ago	5	10

(Source: Bakker & Vanwesenbeeck, 2006)

Women see the situation in a more positive light if they are bisexual (rather than exclusively or predominantly lesbian), young or live in the countryside; among the male respondents, no correlation is found with sexual orientation, place of residence or age. A striking difference between men and women is that the former often detect a deterioration where the latter feel there have also been improvements.²

Women are more open about their gay orientation than men. For example, 82% of the women have told their mother and 77% their father, versus 70% and 68%, respectively, of the men. And whereas 80% of the women have informed their siblings, this applies for only 64% of men. This greater openness may explain why more women than men report negative reactions from close family members. Women are also more open (86% versus 71%) in informing their heterosexual friends, and the same applies for colleagues, etc. (73% and 60%, respectively). More than half the respondents (53% of the women and 57% of the men) have informed their GP³ of their sexual preference.

Respondents were also asked to react to the statement: 'If I could choose I would rather be (completely) heterosexual.' No fewer than 10% of the gay and bisexual women and as many as 17% of the men agreed with this statement. It may be surmised that this dissatisfaction with their own sexual orientation is partly related to the degree to which people feel accepted.⁴ This is the subject of the qualitative part of this study.

8.2 In-depth interviews

In order to obtain a fuller picture of the extent to which homosexuality is accepted in the modern-day Netherlands, a qualitative study was also carried out, consisting of 80 in-depth interviews with gay (or bisexual) men and women in one of the following for sectors of society: a) banks and insurance companies; b) the hospitality industry; c) the armed forces (army, navy, air force and Royal Military Constabulary); and d) amateur sport (field hockey and fitness training). These studies were carried out by researchers from Universiteit van Amsterdam (Farid Tabarki, Gert Hekma, Linda Mans and David Bos, respectively), under the supervision of the sociology professor Jan Willem Duyvendak.

8.2.1 A description of the four sectors

Sectors a) and b) were chosen because they belong to the services sector, a part of the Dutch economy which is employing more and more people. It is often suggested that gays and lesbians feel more at home in this sector than in the agricultural sector or industry, but this has never been researched. An interesting aspect of the hospitality industry and the banking and insurance sector is also that employees often not only have intensive contact with colleagues (fellow team members, superiors or subordinates), but also with customers. This is of particular importance if those customers have a lot of money to spend:

'If you are gay and you are an effeminate type who fits the stereotypes, you will not be taken seriously. And if you're not taken seriously, you won't be sent to see customers. And if you're not sent to see customers, your career will move in a very different direction.'
(Bob, 45 years old, senior banker)

Banking and insurance⁵

Around 48,000 people were employed in the insurance industry (life insurance companies, pension funds, funeral expenses insurers and nonlife insurance companies) in 2003, with men in the majority (59%). The banks employed more than 106,000 people in 2005, with slightly more men (52%) than women. Women are mainly found in lower-ranking positions, in the administration, call centres and above all marketing departments. According to the respondents these departments, where the competition is rather less intense, employ lots of gays. Banks and insurance companies generally have a fairly hierarchical structure. Members of ethnic minorities also often work in administrative functions and in call centres; beyond this, the banking and insurance industry is a fairly 'white' sector. The biggest banks in the Netherlands pursue a conscious diversity policy, which is coordinated by a special department. Although this policy is focused mainly on sex and ethnicity, gays and lesbians also seem to benefit from it to some degree. In the largest banks, gay and lesbian employees have their own networks, such as ING's Gay & Lesbian Association (GALA), with 500 members in 19 countries, and ABN AMRO's Blije Bankiers Borrel association. Use was made of these organisations when recruiting respondents for the study.

Hospitality industry⁶

Hotels, restaurants and bars constitute a large and very varied sector employing around 320,000 people, distributed roughly evenly between the three segments. The smaller establishments often mainly employ men, because they have fewer difficulties with working in the evenings and at night. Ethnic minority employees are scarce in these businesses, and the contacts between colleagues are informal and egalitarian. In larger establishments (particularly hotels) there is a much greater distance between management and the work floor (the main level at which large numbers of ethnic minority employees are found), but here again the contacts between team members are informal. Few employees are members of a trade union.

It is said that lots of gays are employed in the hospitality industry. Several explanations are put forward for this. In first place, gay men tend to be more amenable and more obliging to guests. Secondly, they are said to be neater, more charming and more gallant, and therefore better equipped to receive or serve guests – ‘front of house’ functions. Thirdly, guests not only have to be served, but also entertained: the hospitality industry is also something of a theatre: ‘*The restaurant is a stage, and that suits gays better. They come across as both more pleasant and nicer [...] They’re the oil that lubricates the wheels of the hospitality industry.*’ (Farhid, 56 years old, receptionist). Many Dutch towns have gay bars, clubs or even hotels, but these are left out of consideration in this study, which is concerned with the experiences of gays and lesbians in a predominantly heterosexual environment.

*Armed forces*⁷

The Dutch armed forces employ around 70,000 people, around 50,000 of whom serve as military personnel. The Netherlands has a professional army; national service was abolished in 1992. Since 1998, the armed forces have included not only the army, navy and air force, but also the Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary (*marechaussee*). Each of these four sectors also employs civilian personnel, though more in the logistical and administrative services than in the operational combat units. In 2001, 8.1% of the military personnel and 21.2% of the civilian personnel were women. The armed forces are well-known for their good terms of employment, career opportunities and the opportunity for personnel to obtain valuable diplomas. They are also characterised by high levels of internal mobility: almost all military personnel change posts every three years. Relations between colleagues are by definition hierarchical, though they are rather more amicable in the air force. The macho culture is also notorious: in recent years parts of the armed forces (especially the navy) have more than once been involved in scandals on account of sexual excesses. Since March 2006 it has been forbidden to show porn films in a public place.

Gays and lesbians have been allowed to join the armed forces since 1974, and since 1986 the Ministry of Defence, like all other parts of the Dutch government, has been striving to improve the position of homosexuals. As part of this commitment, the Ministry supports the Homosexuality and Armed Forces Foundation (*Stichting Homoseksualiteit en Krijgsmacht, SHK*), which was founded in 1987. On 30 June 2007 the Minister of Defence, Cees van der Knaap, took part in the annual Gay Pride march, together with several military personnel in uniform. Their participation did not go unnoticed.

In the 1990s the Ministry of Defence commissioned two studies into the position of gay defence personnel. Ketting & Soesbeek (1992) studied the extent to which professional military personnel discriminated against their gay colleagues or were inclined to do so. They found little in the way of open discrimination or hostility to gays. However, many military personnel were found to keep their openly gay colleagues at a distance, which explained why many gays in the armed forces preferred to give the impression that they were heterosexual. Stoppenburg & Feenstra (1999)

carried out a policy study, conducted a survey among both civilian and military personnel, and interviewed 84 gays and lesbians. 20 of them reported that they had been confronted by verbal or physical aggression, and almost the same number reported that they faced prejudice and stereotyping. Despite this, eight out of ten felt liberated by the fact that their colleagues were aware of their homosexuality; only 5% regretted coming out.

In 2005-2006 a third study was carried out (Adolfsen & Keuzenkamp, 2006), in which more than 1,600 defence personnel, drawn in a representative sample from the entire defence staff, completed a written questionnaire. To accommodate the possibility of underrepresentation of members of the operational (combat) units, a supplementary survey was carried out among this group. Four platoons, a total of 170 individuals, completed the aforementioned written questionnaire. The vast majority (90%) of defence personnel believe that gays and lesbians should be '...free to live their own lives as they wish.' In their views on equal rights, too, defence personnel do not differ significantly from the Dutch population as a whole. However, almost a quarter of defence personnel think it is a good thing if individuals or organisations do *not* cooperate in the realisation of the equal rights of homosexuals. One in ten said they would prefer not to be confronted with homosexuality, but a mere 1% regard it as a problem if a homosexual person begins a conversation with them. In 1999 67% of the men reported that they knew a gay colleague, while 45% of the women said they knew a lesbian colleague. In 2006 this applied for no fewer than 73% of the defence personnel. The vast majority of respondents (87%) said they would continue their contacts as previously if a friend or acquaintance turned out to be homosexual. Some defence personnel are occasionally reticent when it comes to closer contact: 16% prefer not to go out with a homosexual colleague and 17% would rather visit a heterosexual medic. 6% of defence personnel believe that homosexual colleagues are actually not fit to work in defence. Comparing defence personnel with the Dutch population at large is difficult, but the differences appear slight. A negative attitude to homosexuality is found more than average among men, troops, young, operational and religious defence personnel.

*Amateur sport*⁸

Sport is alive in the Netherlands. Where in 1979 slightly over half the population aged between 6 and 80 years took part in some form of sport, in 2003 this applied for more than two-thirds (Breedveld & Tiessen-Raaphorst, 2006, table 4.4). When the Dutch take part in sport today, they often do not do so *with* or *against* others: solo sports have become highly popular, especially among women (Ibid., table 4.6)

Amateur sport is an interesting field for research into the acceptance of homosexuality. A recent survey by Janssens et al. (2003: 46) showed that Dutch gays and lesbians do not (as suggested by Hekma et al., 1994; see also Hekma 1995) participate less in sports than other citizens, but that they do more often hide their sexual orientation. In fact, gay men come out less often in sport than in any other sphere of life (family, friends, work, neighbourhood, etc.). To some extent their reticence is

understandable, as 15% of gay male athletes and 6% of lesbian athletes report having been confronted with anti-gay jokes, remarks, looks, or even outright discrimination (Janssens et al. 2003: 27; see also Hekma et al., 1994; Hekma 1995).

Although the sports participation of homosexual men and women equals that of heterosexuals, it is markedly different. Compared with their straight counterparts, gay men are significantly less often members of a sports club, significantly more often clients of a gym, practise team or contact sports significantly less and practise sports that are popular among women significantly more often. In comparison with straight women, lesbians practise team sports significantly more often, but less often engage in contact sports, and more often in sports that are popular among straight men (Janssens et al., 2003). What do these preferences have to do with sexual orientation?

In order to answer this question, the present study focuses on athletes in one type of team sport and – slightly less closely defined – one type of *individual* sport. Whereas membership of sports clubs has been declining, membership of commercial gyms has risen dramatically, from one in eleven Dutch citizens in 1991 to one in six in 2003 (Breedveld, 2003: 88, table 4.9; Breedveld & Tiessen-Raaphorst, 2006, table 4.7; see also Van Bottenburg 2004). The sports practised in gyms vary widely, but in this study ‘fitness training’ is used as a common denominator. Men and women who train in gyms which specifically target gay clients are left out of consideration here. Of all team sports, soccer is the most popular, but is also typically male-dominated. This seems not to put off lesbian women, but the participation rate among gay men is almost three times lower than among straight men (Janssens et al. 2003, 62-63). There are only two branches of team sports where the participation of gay men and women is equal to that of their straight counterparts: rowing and field hockey. This study focuses on the latter.

Field hockey is by no means an ‘average’ branch of sport. The ratio of highly educated to lower-educated athletes is higher than in any other team sport;⁹ the vast majority of field hockey clubs are also overwhelmingly white, and this seems to be one of the reasons why many white parents prefer them to soccer clubs, where many young athletes have a non-Western background. In one respect, however, these field hockey clubs are quite diverse: the number of female athletes is usually equal to or even slightly higher than the number of male athletes. Moreover, the Dutch field hockey league (like the Dutch rowing league) has seen a higher than average growth in membership since the 1990s (Breedveld, 2003: 308, table B11.1). Unlike soccer or volleyball, in order to play field hockey it is difficult to avoid joining a formal club. That makes this branch of sport all the more interesting for research into the social position of minorities.

8.2.2 Recruitment of respondents

Interviewees were recruited through adverts in staff magazines (for the armed forces and the banking and insurance industry), in GLBT magazines and websites. The adverts referred to a web page with questions and answers on the background, design and confidential nature of the study. They were definitely not aimed solely at men or women with *negative* experiences: ‘We would of course like to know if you¹⁰ have ever encountered discrimination. But we are just as curious to know about all kinds of other experiences, both negative and positive – including ‘inconsequential’ experiences and ‘vague’ impressions.’ The adverts drew many responses, albeit significantly more for one constituent study than the other. Where banks and insurance companies offered to distribute the adverts via internal mailing lists, a large fast food chain refused all cooperation, while other hospitality industry organisations, in common with the trade unions, did not respond or showed no interest.

The researchers made great efforts to reach the widest possible diversity of gays and lesbians in each sector, and succeeded in doing so: the interviewees differed not only as regards sex and age, but also in terms of religion, ethnicity and education level (see table 8.4). The percentage of respondents with a high education level or who lived in one of the four major cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) (63% and 37%, respectively) corresponds remarkably closely with the percentage in a recent survey of Dutch homosexuals (69% and 38%, respectively; Van San & De Boom, 2006, table 3.1). The percentage of ‘ethnic minorities’, by contrast, was much higher (25% versus 5%), and was even higher than in Dutch society as a whole (20%).¹¹ No fewer than eight respondents grew up in Muslim families’. Strikingly enough, men and women who had been brought up as Protestants were also overrepresented (23 of the total of 81 respondents). Roman Catholics, by contrast, were underrepresented (11 of the 81), and Hindus were completely absent from the survey population. The percentage of respondents who had not been brought up with any religion (36 of the 81 = 44%) corresponds roughly with the share of secular citizens in the Dutch population.

The next two sections summarise what the interviewees said about being gay or lesbian in the modern-day Netherlands. First, their self-image and experiences in general are discussed; this is followed (in § 8.4) by a discussion of their experiences at work or in sport. To protect the anonymity of the respondents, pseudonyms have been used. Other characteristics have sometimes also been changed (e.g., Spain instead of Portugal as country of origin), but never their sex or age.

Table 8.4
Respondents by demographic characteristics

	sex		place of residence		age		ethnic background		education level	
	male	female	Randstad (ARHU) ^a	else-where	< 35 yrs	≥ 35 yrs	indigenous	immigrant ^b	high: (hbo/ univ) ^c	low: < hbo/ univ
armed forces (n = 20)	12	8	9 (3)	11	10	10	18	2	12	8
hospitality industry (n = 20)	12	8	11 (8)	9	16	4	13	7	9	11
banking and insurance (n = 20)	14	6	12 (9)	8	8	12	16	4	13	7
sport (n = 21)	13	8	14 (10)	7	15	6	14	7	17	4
total (n = 81)	51	30	46 (30)	35	49	32	61	20	51	30
share (in %)	63	37	57 (37)	43	60	40	75	25	63	37

a Randstad = the densely populated urbanised region in the west of the Netherlands, which includes the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht (ARHU).
b Immigrant = at least one parent born outside the Netherlands.
c hbo = university of professional education; wo = university.

8.3 A group portrait of the respondents

Sexual identity and self-designation

The first question put to the interviewees (after the general questions about their background, education and subsequent course of their lives) was: ‘What do you call yourself as regards your sexual preference?’. The terms used by homosexuals to describe themselves have undergone some changes in recent decades, with euphemistic terms such as *homofiel* (‘homophile’) being joined by sobriquets such as *flikker* (‘poof’), *pot* (‘dyke’) or *nicht* (‘queen’) and foreign terms such as ‘gay’, ‘holebi’ (a Flemish invention) or ‘queer’. By using these names to describe themselves, those concerned indicate the group to which they wish to belong – but also and above all the groups with whom they do not wish to be associated, such as the older generation of homosexuals. The way in which they designate fellow homosexuals also deserves attention – particularly if the language they use has derogatory connotations.

The men interviewed describe themselves almost without exception as *homo* (in contrast to its use in English, this term need not have any derogatory meaning in Dutch; it is roughly equivalent to ‘gay’.) Other terms (such as ‘gay’, *nicht* and *flikker*) were sometimes rejected out of hand. *Homo* or *homoseksueel* turns out to be a fairly neutral term, which young immigrants also feel comfortable with:

[What do you call yourself as regards your sexual preference?] ‘As homo as a horse. [laughs] [...] No doubt about it: born that way – God-given.’ [laughs] [How long have you used that term to describe yourself?] ‘Since around the age of 16, 18. And once I’d bitten the bullet [...]

I thought: I'll make sure I'm a good one!
(Hisham, 28 years old, born in Morocco).

By contrast, there is a marked lack of consensus among women about what they call themselves. 'I am one of the few lesbians who calls herself a lesbian,' says Jane (26). And indeed, Emma (32) confirms that for her, 'lesbian' is an old-fashioned word which makes her think of 'dungarees' and the 1970s. 'When I hear the word "dyke", I think of someone more cool.' Anja (44), on the other hand, says 'I call myself homo. I think "lesbo" and "dyke" are stupid words.' Many women object to any term or label, and use descriptions such as, 'I prefer women.' Suwarni (29) calls herself '...just lesbian. Not "bi" in any case.' But to her students, who often react in a fairly homophobic way, she sometimes says that she is 'bi'. 'They don't think that's as bad. Some of them think it's slightly hip.' Many of the men interviewed also called themselves bisexual until recently, not so much because they also felt attracted to women, but more because they needed time to get used to the label 'homosexual'.

Coming out

Gays and lesbians are often asked: 'How long have you known?', and then: 'When did you come out?'. These questions suggest that being homosexual is a simple fact, and that discovering it and coming out is a one-off, clearly defined event. In reality, however, it is usually process, often a long one, and one which does not proceed in fixed stages. A different formulation was therefore chosen for this study. After the interviewees had said what they called themselves, they were asked: 'How long have you called yourself [xxx]?', and then: 'Who knows that you are [xxx]?'¹²

It was emphasised when recruiting respondents that the researchers also wanted to talk to people who were not open about their sexual preferences: '...perhaps you have not come out because of the way the people around you feel about homosexuality. We respect that, and will do everything we can to protect your privacy.' All interviewees had however informed at least one person about their sexual orientation, and many of them even said that 'everyone' knew (which on closer inspection proved to be not entirely the case).

Only five respondents had so far not told their parents. Of the 76 others, one (Brenda) had told her parents that she liked girls when she was only 13 years old. Beatrijs, Elisa and Suwarni did so when they were aged 15, and Daphne, Karin, Lenn, Ron and Zeeger did so at the age of 16. On the other hand, six interviewees (Ben, Kim, Joris, Yvonne, Olivier and Otto) were 30 years old or more before they told their parents. Otto was actually 38 years old.

On average, the respondents were 21.7 years old when they came out to their parents. There is virtually no variation in this age according to the sex of the respondents, their education level and whether or not they had a religious upbringing (table 8.5). This is striking, because as we know, the acceptance of homosexuality correlates strongly with education and religious belief.¹³ There is however some correlation: the distribution around the average is higher among respondents with

a religious upbringing and a lower education level. This means that some people in these groups were much younger and others much older than the average respondent when they told their parents. A repressive environment can lead young people to hide or deny their sexual orientation, but can also cause them to realise at an early age that they are ‘different’.

Table 8.5
Age at the time of coming out to parents

	number	average age	standard deviation
men	46	21.8	5.42
women (excl. 1 transgender)	29	21.7	5.14
high education level (hbo/wo) ^a	49	20.9	4.29
low education level (< hbo/wo) ^a	27	22.6	6.65
no religious upbringing	36	21.4	4.68
religious upbringing	40	21.9	5.78
indigenous	61	22	5.70
immigrant ^b	15	20.4	2.80
total ^b	76	21.7	5.3

a hbo = university of professional education; wo = university.
b Of the 81 interviewees, five had not come out to their parents. Since all five were immigrants, the average coming-out age in this group is lower than among the indigenous group.

The life stories of the interviewees show that it often took a long time before they were reconciled with the fact that they were homosexual. The actual process depends on all kinds of circumstances. According to Robert (28) it took him a long time to accept that he was gay because he did not know any other gays : ‘...we lived in a village. [...] And in those days I didn’t have access to the Internet.’ Hans (31) knew at an early age that he was gay, but he was 23 before he was ready to tell his parents – and then his younger brother beat him to it: he turned out to be gay as well. ‘Then I thought, I can tell them as well now, but then it’ll all be too much for them.’ Erik (24) grew up in a strict Protestant environment: in church and at school they preached ‘hell and damnation’ about homosexuality. But when he informed his parents at the age of 21, their response was very warm: ‘If the church is against you, then we are against the church.’ Michiel (22), who comes from a similar background, was less fortunate: when he told his parents he was gay, he was banished from the home. Extreme negative reactions such as these are not uncommon, but most parents and friends eventually come round.

All five respondents who have not come out to their parents are non-Western ethnic minority men. Brian, Hisham, Mehmet and Mustafa were raised in Muslim families, while Tariq grew up in a country with a Muslim majority. Tariq (now aged 42) was 26 when he came to the Netherlands. It was only then that he dared admit to himself that he was gay. He now only tells ‘people who are in the same circle’; he does not tell colleagues, let alone his family in Syria: ‘That’s absolutely impossible.’ Hisham (28) is also adamant that his parents should not know, though he has told his brothers and sisters, and their reactions were very positive. Mustafa (aged 23, of Turkish origin) has known since the age of 12 that he likes boys. He told someone for the first time a couple of years ago, when his best friend, a young man of Moroccan origin, commented that Mustafa didn’t look at girls, but at boys:

‘I didn’t admit immediately that I was gay; it was a very gradual process. [...] Last year [...] he said: “It would be best not to tell your parents that you’re gay.” So yes, he knows I’m gay. [How does that feel?] ‘It’s a bit of a cliché, but it actually is a relief.’

Like Tariq and Hisham, Mustafa keeps his homosexuality hidden from his parents, though in fact they seem to know:

‘At a certain point my mother tackled me: “Is there something wrong with you? [...] That ‘boys doing it with boys’ thing – does that play a role with you?” I felt very uncomfortable [...] I didn’t confirm it, but at the same time I made it clear that I just don’t want to marry. [...] I’ve also spoken to my father about it occasionally. He asked “Is that right, that that ‘boys doing it with boys’ thing plays a role with you?” I neither denied nor confirmed it, you might say. He said: “If that’s the case, then you can tell us; then we can go to the Imam or something...” [...] So if you ask me: “Do your parents know you’re gay?” – yes and no, really.’

On closer examination, therefore, it is not always clear whether someone is ‘out’ to their parents, and being out is itself not a perfect measure of the degree to which someone is ‘open’ about their sexual orientation. In some cultures, parents and children have a less familiar relationship with each other than in others. Against this, the children often have a more intensive relationship with each other: some gays and lesbians do not tell their parents, but do take siblings into their confidence.

In settings where homosexuality is explicitly condemned, young people appear to become aware of their sexual preference at an early age. By contrast, it can take a very long time in environments where homosexuality, though not explicitly prohibited (on religious or moral grounds), is considered something that is ‘not done’. This is found to be the case, for example, in secular, highly educated, upper middle-class families which, though not demonstrably conservative, are conformist:

‘My mother ignored it for a very long time. [...] I think that, like any mother, she would like to be able to say: “My daughter is married to a surgeon and drives around in a BMW and lives in a beautiful house in Amsterdam, and she’s pregnant. Oh, and she herself is a lawyer.”

I think it's that that makes it especially difficult for her, the fact that she has to say: "No, she's with a woman." ' (Yvonne, aged 32)

Many interviewees came out after they had been encouraged to do so from someone close to them: a direct question, an insinuation or a joke. 'You'll be a dyke later, when you grow up', was what was said to Brenda (28) when she was around the age of 10 or 11, from a girl who lived in the neighbourhood. She didn't like hearing that and wrote it in her diary. When the diary fell into the hands of her mother years later, it all came out and she was in big trouble. Usually, however, the straight people who provide the push are gay-friendly. Ron (26) was 16 and worked in a shop, when one day his boss said to him: 'You could pay a bit more attention to your work and a bit less to the boys walking past outside.' That same evening he told his parents. In many cases this 'push' comes from someone who is themselves straight. As we saw earlier, straight people have become experienced at recognising homosexuals: the knowing look of 'the wise' (Goffman, 1968, 44) is no longer reserved for the few outsiders who have become initiated in the gay scene for personal or professional reasons (*fag hags*, mothers, artistes, porters and police officers, etc.). As a result of this sharper vision, 'the closet' has become a good deal 'shallower' or 'more transparent'.

Homosexuals are today expected to come out 'honestly' about their sexual preference. If they do not they are, as Erving Goffman (1968) puts it, discreditable: a 'closet gay' is readily thought of as pathetic, cowardly, laughable or hypocritical (see also Seidman, 2002). Coming out is no longer a matter of free choice in the Netherlands today, therefore, but is almost a moral duty; both straight people and gays themselves encourage it, usually with the best of intentions. Anyone who does not want to come out, who doesn't dare to or isn't able to, has to mislead other people (or even themselves). Gerard (19), who came out three months before the interview, denied adamantly for years that he was gay, and tried '...to be a bit more masculine, cycling with my legs apart and so on, so it didn't show too much.' He also tried to lower his voice, but it gave him a sore throat. It's called 'passing'; but Gerard failed.

Participation in the gay scene and movement

'Gay people in the pre-war years,' wrote the American historian George Chauncey in his *Gay New York* (1995, 7), 'did not speak of coming out of what we now call the "gay closet" but rather of coming out into what they called "homosexual society" or the "gay world"...' The gay scene today often still plays an important role in the life of gays and lesbians. Many respondents report having made new friends in gay cafes, bars, clubs or GLBT organisations such as the COC, met lovers and learned to accept themselves. Older male respondents, in particular, stress that the gay scene is useful and necessary. Women and younger gays, by contrast, have less need of it. 'I simply live as a straight person. I don't seek it out,' says Beatrijs (27). At the age of 15 she already had a girlfriend, and told her parents, but it was only last year that she went to a gay disco for the first time: 'What I like about it is that there is never any fighting, there's

just good music and it's very friendly. [...] And you can just enjoy dancing: no one bothers you.'

There is very little nightlife specifically for lesbians in the Netherlands; if women do visit lesbian bars and clubs, they are often irritated by the cliquy atmosphere: everyone knows everyone, and gossips about the others. By contrast, almost all male respondents occasionally go to a gay bar – usually more often than to a straight bar. However, lots of young people in particular are also critical of the gay scene, describing it as a ghetto, disliking its 'phoniness', the promiscuity and eccentricity of fellow visitors – especially overtly effeminate gays and leather-clad men. Many respondents also distance themselves in strong terms from gays who push themselves to the foreground at gay events. 'When I watch the Gay Games and Gay Pride, I think to myself: Boys, boys, just act normally,' says Dave (39). He thinks it is 'probably quite unusual for a gay person to say that' – but in fact it is anything but unusual: one respondent after another spoke disparagingly about the 'loud gays dressed in bright pink and swinging handbags' (Michiel, 22), or of men who walk round 'half naked' or dressed from top to toe in leather. As the reason for this aversion, they often say that excessive manifestations of homosexuality will only confirm the prejudices of outsiders.¹⁴ As an example of the work of Erving Goffman (1968, 131-132), this difficult relationship with flamboyant fellow-gays is a familiar phenomenon in groups with a spoiled identity:

'It is in his affiliation with, or separation from, his more evidently stigmatized fellows, that the individual's oscillation of identification is most sharply marked. [...] The sight may repel him, since after all he supports the norms of the wider society, but his social and psychological identification with these offenders holds him to what repels him...'

Many gays and lesbians do however say that they enjoy the gay scene and events such as Amsterdam Canal Pride, but that their enjoyment is spoiled when they view it through the eyes of the straight outside world. – something that is difficult to avoid now that gays are much more visible in public. This is an unintended consequence of the increased visibility of homosexuality: because straight people today know much more about the gay scene, gays and lesbians feel they have to explain how they relate to it.

Hostile reactions

Respondents were not only asked how their family and friends, colleagues and fellow sports participants reacted to them, but also whether they had ever received unpleasant reactions from strangers. Many of them (especially women) had occasionally been insulted, while a few had also encountered mild forms of physical violence or threats. The perpetrators were almost always young people.

These findings correspond with those of a recent survey of 776 homosexuals (Van San & De Boom 2006). More than half the respondents (55%) had sometimes been laughed at or insulted because of their homosexuality; 17% had been bullied

or taunted, 12% had occasionally been threatened with physical violence and over 3% had actually been assaulted. Of those who had been laughed at, threatened or assaulted, more than 70% reported that the perpetrators were strangers. Those who had been bullied or taunted, by contrast, almost always (80%) reported that they knew the perpetrator. A third of the victims who had a clear picture of the perpetrators reported that they had been aged under 18, while another third reported that they were aged between 18 and 30. Almost half these victims (47%) reported that all perpetrators had an indigenous Dutch appearance, but of those who had been threatened or assaulted 56% and 50%, respectively, reported perpetrators with a foreign appearance – especially ‘Moroccans’ (or ‘Moroccans and Turks’). Strikingly enough, only a small number of victims mentioned perpetrators with a Surinamese or Antillean appearance. A sizeable majority of the respondents said they sometimes (17%) or frequently (2%) felt unsafe; this applied particularly for women (23%), young people (27%) and the low-educated (26%). One in three had begun behaving more cautiously in order to avoid problems – for example by avoiding certain locations.

Many gays and lesbians are confronted with violence not just on the streets, but also at school. Several reports have appeared recently on the problematic position of homosexual teachers and pupils in schools (see esp. Inspectie van het Onderwijs 2005; De Graaf et al. 2005; Tielman 2003). If they do not keep their sexuality hidden, they quickly become the target of negative reactions. To the displeasure of the Education Inspectorate (Inspectie van het Onderwijs), most schools have no policy whatsoever to ensure their safety. Some school governors even say that they are not aware of any homosexual pupils and teachers, without wondering why this should be so. This report does not devote specific attention to education, but the interviewees did sometimes refer to experiences at school. Suwarni (29, born in Sri Lanka) teaches at a fairly elite secondary school in a large city, and initially was quite open about the fact that she had a girlfriend. She was not very happy with the effect:

‘Those girls, young girls, you know, they thought it was dirty and weird. [laughs] They started telling the whole school, so now lots of other pupils also know.’ [How do you feel about that?] ‘At first I didn’t mind that they knew, but I do mind the way they reacted.’

Suwarni also heard from a colleague that homosexuality is not normal – though he meant this in the statistical sense. Lenn (19) was aware at the age of 11 that he (also) fancied boys:

‘One day I was in conversation with my class teacher and he said that I had to keep it quiet – that it was dirty and so on. And since then I’ve known that I was different. [...] I then suddenly became very uncertain. I stopped hanging around with my classmates. I started binge-eating, so I became very fat. [...] I avoided doing anything with men or boys. [...] I stopped taking part in school sport: I used to think up all kinds of excuses.’

Hisham (28), by contrast, learned at primary school (and a Catholic school at that) that homosexuality was perfectly normal. Moreover, one of the teachers was openly gay.

Many respondents only mentioned in passing the hostile reactions they had had to their sexual identity. Gays and lesbians themselves appear to feel that discrimination is simply part and parcel of being gay – even in a country which boasts its tolerance. Although homosexuality is ‘normal’, that only applies if homosexuals behave ‘normally’. Many respondents distance themselves explicitly from the ‘demonstrative’, ‘loud’, ‘provocative’, ‘stereotypical’, ‘butch’ or ‘queer’ behaviour of some of their fellow-gays, claiming that they not only bring problems on themselves, but give a bad name to the whole community. These concerns are understandable, but also indicate how vulnerable the feelings of self-worth of gay men and women are. Moreover, ‘queer’, for example, proves to be a fairly wide-ranging concept: some respondents understand it to mean not only ‘effeminate’, ‘extreme’ or ‘flamboyant’ behaviour, but also to include almost every public expression of homosexuality. Heterosexuality is evidently still the norm in public; deviating from that norm is asking for trouble:

‘...I think I regularly look at myself to ask: How do I project myself? How do I come across? [...] I can behave in such a way that people who don’t know me think: It wouldn’t surprise me if that young man was gay. You can elicit a reaction like that; that’s just the way it is.’
(Gert-Jan, 26)

8.4 Experiences at work and in sport

Hostility

Physical violence by colleagues was only reported by a few men working in the hospitality industry. Michiel (22), who takes part in fighting sports, saw how a slender homosexual waiter was terrorised by a colleague, and intervened: ‘I walked past and suddenly had something in my hands.’ None of the women had ever been attacked – let alone perpetrated violence themselves.

Other, non-physical expressions of gay-hostility from colleagues were only reported by military personnel, and especially navy personnel. On board a frigate with several other men, Joris (49) became the target of an ongoing bullying and defamatory campaign. When he let his colleagues know that he found it unacceptable, they said he ought to be able to take a joke. Whilst serving on a minesweeper, Erik (24) was told that homosexuality was a sickness, and that AIDS had been caused by ‘you lot’.

In the banking and insurance sector, such explicit expressions of hostility appear not to occur, although Frederik (52) did hear a young colleague referring to a lesbian couple as ‘two of those dirty slags’. He didn’t say anything at the time, but: ‘A short while later he had to attend a performance review interview with me, and he came into my office sweating – it was pouring off him.’ Colleagues had told him that Frederik himself is also gay.

Hostile reactions in the hospitality industry come mainly from customers. Ron (26) had a hard time of it when he began working in a bar five years ago which was frequented by building workers and caravan-dwellers. At first they wouldn't have anything to do with him; some of them even stayed away when he was on duty. 'But now I am almost put on a pedestal. 'You can touch anything, but don't touch our homo.'

Almost none of the respondents had ever encountered expressions of gay-hostility in sport. The exception is Tariq (42), who grew up in Syria. In his gym he overheard a group of young Moroccan-Dutch men, whose conversation was peppered with anti-gay expressions: 'Dirty homo', and so on. [...] And then: in Arabic! If I hadn't heard it in my mother tongue, it might not have sounded so bad.'

'Homo!'

As shocked as Tariq was to discover that fellow sports participants used words like *homo* as an insult, many other Dutch people seem to find it perfectly normal. It crops up commonly in each of the four sectors studied here.¹⁵ In the hospitality industry and the world of hockey, words such as *homo*, *flikker* ('poof'), *nicht* ('queer') and – to a much lesser extent – *pot* ('dyke') are used so frequently that the respondents hardly hear them anymore. 'It's so much part and parcel, it would be impossible to get rid of it,' says Glen (49, born in the Caribbean). Today he himself is not averse to calling others *vieze flikker* ('dirty poof'). Ria (27) used to work for a caterer where the boss's father was apt to rant about 'filthy homos. One day his son found him – a married man – with another man, both with their trousers round their knees.

Gays themselves appear not to be too bothered by this use of language (and that is just as well, if they do not wish to be known as party poopers). They regard it as a non-specific, good-humoured expletive – akin to words such as 'wimp', etc. However, in many cases it does not leave respondents unmoved, '... because it suggests that gays are weaker,' explains Frits (40), 'And I can imagine that if you're 17 years old and full of doubts and all you hear is 'Homo!', 'Homo!', 'Homo!' as something negative, you won't be inclined to come out of the closet.' If a team-mate calls you a homo, that's nothing more than playfulness, feels Gert-Jan (26); but if someone on the opposing team does it, 'then it has different connotations' – especially if you really are gay. Frits (40) was once called a *homo* by someone from another hockey club: 'My team resolved it very neatly: they gave him a good hiding. I didn't have to do anything.'¹⁶ In the hospitality industry, terms such as *homo* are sometimes also used in a targeted way, generally late in the evening, by customers who have had one too many. Michiel (22) shrugs his shoulders then and says: 'OK, this stupid poof will pour your Bacardi and coke.' Or he simply stops serving. The latter is a weapon that Edo (26) and his gay colleague also used against a group of troublesome guests: 'They left, grumbling. Thrown out of a bar by two poofs. They didn't like it at all'.

Getting physical

In the builders' local where Ron (26) works, his straight colleagues have devised a practical joke: when they see an attractive man, they give him a beer and say: 'It's

from him.' The man then immediately begins to blush, and Ron also feels embarrassed. Most of the other jokes between gay and straight colleagues or team-mates are less original: lots of clichéd puns or *double entendres*. 'And I act as though I think it's funny, too, of course. But then you think: All those girls have studied – and look at what they think is funny.' (Suwarni, 28, hockey player). The jokes among men mainly involve genitalia and sex – in particular anal penetration. When colleagues of Dirk (26) have to bend over to pick something up, they say: 'Dirk, don't move!' Meanwhile, straight, male customers make physical 'advances' to him as a joke: 'When I'm collecting glasses, they lift up their shirts and say: "Look at my lovely boobs," and pinch my backside.' Glen (49) once had a boss who used to stroke his curly hair or – and this went too far for him – grasped his nipples. 'Jokes' such as these, about which it is always said that they 'are harmless', suggest that gays are sometimes regarded as public possessions. Lesbians seem to be more successful in keeping colleagues and customers at a suitable distance.

Physical contact between colleagues is sometimes unavoidable in the hospitality industry – for example behind a bar where there is not much room. Erik (27) recalls that his colleagues were initially uncomfortable with this. Strikingly enough, not only office staff, but also military personnel, make little mention of physical proximity between colleagues and the discomfort that can be associated with this if one of them is a homosexual. In gyms, many gays and lesbians try to avoid physical proximity to fellow-clients of the same sex. They anticipate possible accusations and find getting undressed with members of the same sex – precisely because it can be a source of sexual excitement – as uncomfortable: 'I try not to look at boys. [...] I don't want to give gays a bad name.' (Hisham, 28). Javier (27, born in Chile) says he usually showers at home, because the facilities in the gym are not very good:

'It isn't because I don't want to be naked. [...] Especially because people don't know that I'm gay.' [Would it make a difference if people did know?] 'A bit, but I would still take a shower.' [What difference would it make?] 'Well, then I'd be afraid that they wouldn't like sharing the dressing room and the shower with me [...] When it gets too close, people don't like it [...]: "Oh no, not that".'

Many respondents who go to gyms seem to feel as if they are trespassing just by using the dressing rooms and showers; they are afraid that, simply by their presence, they will offend others. This problem rarely occurs in hockey, since the players do not shower: they arrive, play, have a few drinks and go back home in their sports kit. Whatever the reason for or cause of that custom may be, the consequence is that the players only ever see each other in their 'uniform' – i.e. their sports kit. This blurs differences between individual players, affirms their sense of belonging, marks the difference between sport and everyday life, and thus promotes an exuberant mood – but it also takes away the will or perhaps even the courage of individual players to 'stand before your team naked', as Frits (40) puts it. The conformist group culture

which holds players back from getting undressed is the same culture that prevents some of them from coming out of the closet.

Sexualised atmosphere

Eric Dunning describes sport as a 'male preserve' (Sheard & Dunning, 1973), but many hockey clubs also function as heterosexual hunting grounds: matches are followed by drinking sessions, where many male and female players end up in each other's arms (see also Tiessen-Raaphorst & Breedveld, 2007). Hockey is 'an enormous hetero-sport', observes Olivier (42): 'Beer and women.' The conquests over the other sex dominate the conversations between team-mates and club members. 'Even I know more men than women at the hockey club,' recounts Yvonne (32), 'even without really trying.' This strong heterosexual dominance means that players who are not straight can be a little out of place. The team-mates of Suwarni (29), who knew that she had a girlfriend, suggested that kissing boys is just as much a part of the hockey scene as drinking beer and smoking. Flirtations between men are not appreciated, as Quincey (28) discovered during a hockey party:

'I was walking round and I was grabbed by a boy (I was a bit drunk myself) [...] and then he started kissing me. People around us were looking as if to say, "What's going on here?!" For the rest of the tournament it was the hot gossip. [...] Now I wouldn't be so quick to do it [...] No, that's not done.'

In some hockey clubs and some bars straight men do enjoy it if women kiss each other. 'It's only because it opens up the possibility of a threesome for them.' (Beatrijs, 28) In some establishments, bosses even encourage female staff to do it in order to entertain customers. The art of serving the public often includes tempting the customers. Brenda (28) doesn't give any sign in the disco that she has a girlfriend, so as not to spoil the illusion of availability. Everywhere in the hospitality industry the conversations are impregnated with sex. Strikingly enough, this also applies for the banking and insurance sector: here, too, colleagues talk (and gossip) a great deal about private matters such as sex and relationships. Sex is also a popular topic of conversation in the military, usually in a coarser fashion than in settings where large numbers of women are employed. All in all, it is remarkable how blurred the distinction between work and personal life has become.

Minority within the minority

'When women are on board, there's no problem,' says Joris (49). Hockey players also report that there is more tolerance in their circle than in football thanks to the presence of women; '... because they are more inclined to protect gays. [...] "I'm gay." – "Oh." And then you can chat with them about men.' (Frits, 40). But according to Quincey (28), women are actually less tolerant than men.

The respondents report few actual experiences with ethnic minority colleagues. One reason for this seems to be that members of non-Western ethnic minorities have

up to now often been employed in lower-ranking positions in the hospitality industry and the banking and insurance sector, where they are the subordinates of the gays and lesbians interviewed. In the armed forces, however, their number is growing rapidly, and several interviewees remarked in passing that this is having an effect on tolerance. Members of non-Western ethnic minorities are very rare in hockey clubs, but they are prominently present in some gyms. None of the respondents report open clashes, though some do mention frictions. Lenn (19), who himself has Indonesian roots and whose friends are all from ethnic minorities, notes that the Turkish visitors to his gym look askance at gays. Arend (48), by contrast, has never heard a bad word about homosexuality in his predominantly ethnic minority gym – but that is no surprise, since most of the clients do not speak Dutch to each other.

Gays and lesbians who themselves have a non-Western background often keep quiet about the fact that they are homosexual at work or in sport (sometimes because they do not want their family to hear about it). Those who are open about it sometimes comment that straight members of the indigenous population find it easier to deal with their sexual than their ethnic identity. A striking difference compared with indigenous gays is that they do not distance themselves from ‘fairies’ or other ‘non-conforming’ fellow-gays – perhaps because they are more aware of the power of discrimination and prejudice, or because they are judged primarily because of their ethnic/religious identity.

In each of the four sectors studied, lesbians appear to have an easier time than gay men. In the armed forces, for example, they do not encounter problems so much because they are gay, but more because they are women (Adolfson & Keuzenkamp, 2006). According to Suzanne (32), the armed forces may not be gay-friendly, but they are lesbian-friendly – especially towards lesbians who become ‘one of the boys’. This difference is very marked when it comes to hockey: lesbian hockey players are not called names and sometimes even appear to feel encouraged by the stereotypes about sport and homosexuality. In their case, those stereotypes are favourable: lesbians have a reputation for being tough, manly and therefore sporty. In addition, they have many role models whom they can take as examples: sport is one of the few social sectors where lesbians have a much more prominent presence than gay men (Elling, Knoppers & De Knop, 2001). Yet some of the women interviewed here do not feel entirely at ease in their sports club or gym. None of them described sport as a place of refuge.

Preferred settings

As we saw earlier, gays and lesbians are heavily overrepresented in some branches of sport and underrepresented in others. The same is found to apply for working environments. In the banking and insurance industry, people who are openly gay seem to be found mainly in customer services, marketing and administrative posts – departments where lots of women also work – but scarce in the commercial departments. Thomas (30) who has a senior position at a finance company, says: ‘I think I would lose my authority if I were to come out.’¹⁷ In the hospitality industry, gays

are often employed as waiters and receptionists ('front of house' positions) and are rarely found in the kitchens or cleaning services. The high staff mobility in the hospitality industry means they can easily move on to gay-friendlier places. In the armed forces, gays are found mainly in the logistical and medical services. They appear scarce in operational combat units – or are afraid to come out, perhaps because they will no longer be able to find someone willing to share a small tent with them?

Generally speaking, openly lesbian women, and particularly openly gay men, are rarely found in settings where mutual rivalry is high. This also applies for sport. Inez (43), for example, says the following about hockey, a sport which she practised at the highest level: 'I think it's a hard world. People are very judgemental. [...] So you have to be strong, both verbally and mentally. You have to look good, be well dressed – everything has to be just so. Otherwise you're just a "wimp!" or an "idiot!'. People are unbelievably judgemental and ready to put you down.' Such group pressure is of course absent from fitness training, but to a certain extent this is also a competitive sport. As visitors to gyms can watch each other continually, they cannot avoid measuring themselves against each other. In such indirect 'tests of strength', homosexuality is not uncommonly experienced as a source of discomfort, uncertainty or shame – as something that requires 'information management' or 'tension management'(Goffman, 1968).

Coming out at work or in sport

The vast majority of the respondents have come out to their present colleagues or fellow sports participants. The reactions they received were almost always friendly, sometimes warm. When Olivier (42) finally came out four years ago, he was exuberantly congratulated and praised by his fellow hockey club members: 'You then feel like a little boy, all embarrassed, but I also thought it was cool.' Because he had come out to all his friends and acquaintances at once (he had sent them an email), they felt free to talk to him openly about it: 'The bartender said: "Hey, homo! Would you like a beer? You've earned it." That was nice of him.' According to many respondents, openness is virtually unavoidable: 'People only make an issue of it if you're secretive about it or uncertain about it or something. That's when they make something of it, because people simply smell that there's something going on.' (Quincey, 28). None of the respondents working in the hospitality industry have kept their sexuality secret; only three banking and insurance employees have done so, five defence personnel and two or three hockey players. Gert-Jan (26) was introduced to his present team by a gay friend, so he suspects that they know. All these 11 respondents are men, and three of them (Mehmet, Brian and Hisham) are Muslims.

Coming out is a periodically recurring issue for defence personnel: because they are relocated every two to three years, they constantly face the same decision. During international missions abroad many do not come out, or only do so to other Dutch military personnel. For example, in Bosnia Dave (39) became '...a master of circumvention. [...] Friendly, but distant...' Secondment abroad is also not always easy for

bank and insurance employees. 'My great fear when I took this job was that I would have to go out in the evenings with all these unknown English people and talk about family life...' (Alfons, 50).

Only a few respondents have such intensive contacts with clients. To foster customer loyalty, they are expected during business dinners to talk not only about business, but also about personal matters. On the other hand, they have to be aware of the client's sensitivities. They therefore adopt a cautious approach. If their boyfriend or girlfriend is mentioned in the conversation, for example, they refer to them as 'my partner' – and do not correct their guest if they refer to 'he' instead of 'she' or vice versa. But if the company organises an outing for clients, staff and partners, some of them do take their loved one with them – sometimes at the insistence of their straight colleagues: 'You should just take him. What kind of bullshit is that? Just take him with you.' (Ben, 35)

Strictly speaking, of the eight respondents involved in fitness training only Daphne (29) and Zeeger (18) have come out in their sport; the other six do not socialise with other gym users, but regard their gym more as a public space: [*Who knows that you are gay?*] 'Everyone. [...] But I don't tell anyone at the gym.' (Arend, 48). Although they have little contact with fellow gym users, they all sometimes spot other gays in the gym. This does not apply for male hockey players: in their clubs, which sometimes have around a thousand members, they generally do not know a single gay. Frits (40) and Olivier (42) took part in the Gay Games in Sydney, however, and since then have been members of Pink Hockey, a national network competing with its own teams. Both greatly enjoy playing with other gays, coming out as a team, and '...taking the piss out of someone for being straight. For a moment the world is the other way round.' (Frits, 40).

Notes

- 1 This sample is mixed in terms of age and ethnicity, but better educated and urban residents are more strongly represented than in the Dutch population in general. As no data are available on the average education and urbanisation level of all homosexuals in the Netherlands, we cannot determine whether they are overrepresented here. A high proportion (69%) of the respondents in the survey by Van San & De Boom (2006) were also highly educated, and no fewer than 23% lived in Amsterdam.
- 2 In the survey by Van San and De Boom (2006, table 3.15), 60% of the respondents reported that violence against gays had increased 'somewhat' in recent years; 11% said it had grown 'strongly'. 22% said it had remained the same.
- 3 GPs play a key role in the Dutch health care system; before consulting a specialist, patients first have to visit their GP.
- 4 15% of the men and 10% of the women did not agree with the statement: 'I don't have a problem with my homosexual or bisexual feelings.'
- 5 This section and the following information on the banking and insurance industry is based on the chapter by Farid Tabarki in Keuzenkamp et al. 2006 (pp. 167-191).
- 6 This section and the following information on the hospitality industry is based on the chapter by Gert Hekma in Keuzenkamp et al. 2006 (pp. 141-166).
- 7 This section and the following information on the armed forces is based on the chapter by Linda Mans in Keuzenkamp et al. 2006 (pp. 192-220). See also Adolfsen & Keuzenkamp 2006.
- 8 This section and the following information on sport is based on the chapter by David Bos in Keuzenkamp et al. 2006 (pp. 111-140). See also Bos 2007.
- 9 Breedveld 2003:256, table 10.1. Van Bottenburg (2004) counts field hockey among the 'status sports': it is associated with the lifestyle of the upper class, who used to have a virtual monopoly on it.
- 10 Use was made in these texts of the informal 'you' form ('jij/jouw/je/jullie' rather than the formal 'u/uw').
- 11 Three of these respondents have their roots in Suriname or the Netherlands Antilles, two elsewhere in Latin America, five in Indonesia and one elsewhere in Southeast Asia, two in Morocco, two in Turkey, two in the Middle East, two in other European countries and one in North America.
- 12 The Dutch version of the interview protocol and the FAQ can be consulted at www.scp.nl.
- 13 There does seem to be some correlation with ethnic identity: the ethnic minority respondents came out at a slightly younger age on average than the indigenous respondents. This picture is distorted, however, because the five respondents who had not come out to their parents (and are therefore not counted here) are all from ethnic minorities.
- 14 Some of the gays and lesbians interviewed by Van San and De Boom (2006, 52) were convinced that tolerance in the Netherlands was declining because of the wide media attention devoted to extreme phenomena such as cruising areas, dark rooms and the leather scene.
- 15 This does not occur in gyms, however – hardly surprising, because visitors barely talk to each other.
- 16 According to Erving Goffman (1968, p. 169), this is a familiar pattern: 'When the in-group deviant is attacked by outsiders, the group may well rally in support; when the group isolate is attacked, he is more likely to do his own fighting.'
- 17 Sander (27, officer) says literally the same thing.

9 Just doing what comes naturally

When marriage between couples of the same sex was legalised in 2001, the emancipation of gays in the Netherlands appeared complete. Many gays and lesbians shared that view. At the same time, however, reports began appearing of displays of intolerance and violence. Research among homosexuals in the Netherlands reveals that a substantial proportion of the respondents sometimes (17%) or frequently (2%) feel unsafe because of their homosexuality. And roughly 40% say they have come to feel more unsafe in recent years, primarily because they have the feeling that certain groups have begun adopting more hostile behaviour towards gays (Van San & De Boom 2006).

The picture is therefore double. On the one hand, the rights of homosexuals today are virtually equal to those of heterosexuals and acceptance of homosexuality is the norm. On the other hand, there are worrying signals and a substantial proportion of the gay community have the impression that their safety is diminishing.

At the request of the previous Cabinet, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP carried out a study to obtain greater clarity regarding the acceptance of homosexuals in Dutch society. This was done together with researchers from Universiteit van Amsterdam and Rutgers Nisso Groep and published their findings in the report *Gewoon doen* ('Just doing what comes naturally'). *Out in the Netherlands* contains an extensive summary of that report, where possible with updated information and a few additions. This concluding chapter recaps the main findings once more.

The opinion polls reveal a broad acceptance of homosexuality in general; 'live and let live' is the motto. There is also a fair amount of support for equal rights, though this is by no means universal; a substantial section of the public have objections in particular when it comes to the forming of relationships (marriage) and care for children (adoption). There are even more negative views on the non-verbal display of sexual preferences – especially kissing in public – by lesbians and, in particular, gay men.

The in-depth interviews with gays and lesbians and even the Internet survey show that homosexuality as such is generally accepted, though there are caveats. For example, the norm today is that homosexuals should come out regarding their sexual preferences. If they do so, they are generally given a friendly reception and earn respect, especially if after coming out they continue to lead a normal ('straight') life. Both gays and straight people think it better if homosexuals come out; if they do not do so, there is something wrong. Coming out today is therefore not a matter of free choice, but is almost a moral duty. Gays who openly admit their homosexuality are generally glad that they have done so – though their openness and visibility do also mean that they have to deal with more negative reactions.

Openness is expected, but is also expected to be kept within bounds and follow a certain pattern. If a man keeps his homosexual preferences quiet, he is a 'closet gay'; if he displays his homosexuality in public, he is readily accused of being a 'militant homosexual' – even if he dresses and behaves in an explicitly masculine way. Gays and lesbians also distance themselves from their peers who do not 'act normally'. Demonstrations such as the annual Canal Parade in Amsterdam appear to give many gays and lesbians not only feelings of pleasure and pride, but also of vicarious shame. This suggests that heterosexuality is still the norm in public life: the behaviour of gays and lesbians is measured against that of straight men and women. The interviews show that many gay men in particular make an effort to comply with that norm. The norms for women are less rigid: thanks to the women's emancipation movement in the 1960s and 70s, they have much more freedom than in the past to dress and behave as they wish. This may explain why lesbians appear to experience fewer problems than gay men. Another reason is that they are less visible in society. For example, Dutch lesbians do not have an extensive nightlife culture and there are few well-known Dutch women who have openly stated that they prefer women. Moreover, gay women are not infrequently the subject of sexual fantasies by straight men.

Recent incidents of homophobic violence notwithstanding, physical violence against homosexuals appears not to be a frequent event in the Netherlands. Although the reports on incidents in gay nightlife areas in Amsterdam are increasing, it is not clear whether they mark a real increase. There are however indications that the perpetrators of such serious forms of violence are often Moroccan-Dutch or Turkish-Dutch youngsters (Surinamese or Antilleans perpetrators are rarely mentioned). In incidents of bullying and baiting, by contrast, which are much more common, the perpetrators are usually indigenous Dutch and are known to the victim (Van San & De Boom, 2006, table 3.7).

Negative attitudes to homosexuality are found more than average among the less well educated, men and especially among religious people. Among the indigenous population, religiousness is the main determinant of a negative attitude. Of those who go to church at least once a week (11% of the population), 51% exhibit negative attitudes to homosexuality. Also young people have more difficulty with homosexuality. Despite the lack of data to enable young people to be compared with adults, research among young people and the experiences of school teachers show that negative attitudes are more common among the younger generation.

This study contains the first large-scale investigation, based on a random sample, of the attitudes to homosexuality of the four largest ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. Those attitudes are found to be substantially more negative than those of the indigenous Dutch, especially among first-generation immigrants and those who attach great importance to religion. However, several qualifying comments need to be made with regard to this finding. In the first place, the majority of non-Western ethnic minorities support the motto 'live and let live'. They are probably more toler-

ant in that regard than their 'relatives' in their country of origin – and in many other immigration countries. In the second place, there are wide differences between the different ethnic minorities. The attitudes of Turkish Dutch citizens differ widely from those of indigenous citizens, but the attitudes of Surinamese respondents are almost identical to those of the indigenous Dutch. In the third place, although the share of these ethnic minorities in the total population has grown in recent years, the opinion polls do not suggest a reduced acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands. This may be because these groups are underrepresented in regular opinion polls and because repeated separate studies have not been carried out in these population groups. At present it is therefore not possible to make any statements regarding a possible backlash. What is however clear is that sex and sexuality (and in particular homosexuality) have become important themes in the public debate which has been ongoing for several years in the Netherlands about the integration of non-Western ethnic minorities, and in particular Muslims.

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