

RESEARCH IN HOMOSEXUALITIES

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*In the United States most researchers (McWhirter et al., 1990) recognize the enormous influence of the Kinsey scale, that differentiates between homosexuality and exclusive heterosexuality. Kinsey in fact combined sexual behaviour and erotic experiences and found that in this perspective the dichotomy homosexual versus heterosexual was false. The research, historical, psychobiological, cultural, and psychological, follows Kinsey in his notion of homo- and heterosexuality as **sexual** orientations.*

In sexology, homosexuality, conceptually and operationally defined as a sexual orientation, led to theories and research within a format of sexuality. Historical, sociological and psychological studies of homosexuality in The Netherlands tend to a different paradigm, in which homosexuality is seen as a design for living. In this design erotic and sexual attraction is embedded in a broader context, in which it becomes important to study homosexuality in relation to studies of gender and gender development, of family studies and of life-styles and life-style management. It is proposed here that changing social attitudes to homosexuality made this paradigmatic change possible.

Research on homosexual behaviours found itself more difficult to legitimize in Belgium than in other countries. The first initiatives emanated from the 'Federation for Working Groups of Homosexuals'.

Much credit for this undoubtedly goes to Bob Carlier who familiarised scholars and the general public alike with the issue of homosexuality. The threat of AIDS-related problems also triggered in Belgium the need for specific empirical data. Today, the multidisciplinary 'Gay Service Research Project' is most relevant for developing a country-specific knowledge base on homosexual behaviour.

Research on homosexuality in The Netherlands is well documented (Straver, 1976; Duyves, 1986; van Naerssen, 1987). At the end of the sixties it was characterized by a social scientific perspective in which the changing social attitudes about homosexuality were the primary objective. In 1968, 36% of the Dutch population had the opinion that homosexuals had to be restricted in leading their own way of life. In 1980-1987 this figure stabilized around six to seven percent. Until 1971 it was a criminal offense for adult men and women to engage in homosexual acts with people between 16 and 21 years of age, while the age of consent for heterosexual acts was 16. This statute was abolished in 1971, mainly on the argument that scientific

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research showed that people didn't become homosexual by seduction at puberty or in adolescence. The legal situation and the general social tolerance had a great impact on the counseling of people with problems on homosexuality (van Naerssen, 1987). Gradually the image of homosexuality as a psychiatric symptom disappeared completely. In the eighties, the foundation of departments of gay and lesbian studies at the universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam, triggered a diversity of studies on homosexuality. Studies on the etiology of homosexuality disappeared almost completely. Research on gay genes, gay hormones and gay brains is insignificant in The Netherlands (Gooren, 1990). The emphasis is on historical, sociological and social-psychological research.

Social history

Tielman's (1982) "Homosexuality in The Netherlands" describes the Dutch Gay Emancipation Movement between 1911 and 1982. In the same tradition, Warmerdam and Koenders (1987) described the homosexual organization COC (Cultural and Recreational Center) between 1946-1966. Because many homosexuals from this period are still alive, it was possible to document by oral history in detail the discrimination against and the emancipation of homosexuality. Still missing, however, is a broad and thorough study of the homosexual and lesbian subcultures in these periods from a non-political perspective. There are many impressions, accounts and photographs available. Some of this material is analyzed in *Homologie*, a bimonthly, scientific and cultural magazine founded in May 1978.

Hekma (1987) goes further back in time and analyzes how during the 19th century Dutch physicians and psychiatrists, influenced by ideas mainly developed in Germany and France, constructed a homosexual identity with specific bodily and mental characteristics. Men and women accepted these images of gay and lesbian identity. This idea became disputable after the thesis of Müller (1990), who showed that most German physicians relied heavily on the personal statements of their clients, who in their selfconfessions constructed homosexuality themselves. The theoretical issue is, as in other psychiatric cases (e.g. alcoholism, anorexia), who had the power in the discourse, who "invented" the images, the categories, the definitions of the self? It seems that in the 19th century the "making of the homosexual" was mainly an interaction of physicians and their patients. In the 20th century homosexuals discovered themselves as a community and became regarded as a separate group, in some European countries.

Other historical studies are forthcoming. On homosexual subcultures in the 18th century (Van der Meer, Free University of Amsterdam), on the social history and the socialization of lesbian women (Schuyf, University of Utrecht), on male homosexuals in The Netherlands in the Second World War (Koenders, University of Utrecht), on the counseling of homosexual problems in the Roman-Catholic church 1930-1970 (Oosterhuis, University of Amsterdam), and on historical and social changes in theories on female sexuality, especially their influences on the images of lesbian erotic

experience (Kraakman, University of Amsterdam). Of special interest are the studies on the construction of intergenerational male intimacy. Sandfort (1987) described how it became an issue in the gay movement between 1946 and 1981 and how the concepts of male homosexuality and male homosexual pedophilia emerged. Brongersma (1988, 1990), one of the leading persons in the movement at the time, exposed his views in a monumental two-volumed work "Loving boys". His main idea is that intergenerational male intimacy has a biological as well as a sociological foundation. At the beginning of puberty, boys are not allowed to interact sexually with girls. In this period the sexual drive is high, so boys have sexual contact in their peer groups and with older men. The man-boy relationships are presented in a theoretical framework that relies heavily on historical and anthropological material. These relations are seen as a "rite de passage", emotionally loaded by the image of becoming male, not homosexual. Maasen (1988) wrote a thesis on (homosexual) eroticism in work and life of Gustav Wyneken, an influential pedagogue in pre-nazi Germany, who was accused of having had sexual contacts with some of his pupils. Wyneken defended the thesis that an emotional-erotic bond between teacher and pupil was natural and necessary. So Maasen situated man-boy relationships in a socio-historical context. The pedagogical relationships between adult men and boys became more personal at the beginning of this century. One wonders whether the whole subject is changing under the influence of coeducation, the development of youth cultures and the acceptance of sexual relationships in early adolescence. Nowadays boys can have sexual contacts with girls and with other boys of their own age, so the motivations for sexual and erotic commitments with adult males disappear.

Sociological Studies

The measurement of attitudes on homosexuality became a routine since 1975 as part of the broader study of cultural changes in the Netherlands. The general impression one gets from this research is that of a country with high tolerance for cultural and sexual minorities. It seems that the situation is stable. Although after 1983 it became generally known that male homosexuals were the main group at risk for Aids, the tolerant attitudes about homosexuality remained stable, nor were there reports of discrimination on a large scale. At the same time, young people still perceive Aids as a homosexual problem: they don't change their heterosexual life-style by using condoms, because they think they aren't at risk themselves (Vogels and van der Vliet, 1990). In the same group contraceptive behaviour is well developed, mainly because most women use the pill (Rademakers, 1991). One comes to the conclusion that homosexuality has indeed become integrated in Dutch society, but in a special way. Accepted, be it as a separate category. They can live their own lives, but their culture is still a subculture, with own recreational possibilities, own magazines, a specific language, a specific tradition. A study on lesbian life-styles is going on at the University of Utrecht (Tiems and Jonker). A critical study on the changes in behaviour of the homosexual male was written by van Griensven (1989). A select

sample of 746 homosexual men, mainly from Amsterdam, was studied for risk factors for the prevalence and incidence of HIV infection and AIDS. The documents show a massive change in sexual behaviour, both in reduction of number of partners and in risky sexual techniques. By comparing this sample with another, already studied in 1980-1982, and by comparing the incidence of HIV-infection, hepatitis B, syphilis and rectal gonorrhoea among homosexual men in Amsterdam in the period 1981-1987, he showed that the process of sexual behaviour change among homosexual men started before the dangers of AIDS became known. Other sexually transmitted diseases induced people to adopt safe sex practices.

From a public health perspective this epidemiological study shows that the Aids epidemic for homosexuals in The Netherlands follows a pattern different from that in the United States, especially New York and the San Francisco Bay Area. It could also mean that the social phenomenon of the modern homosexual as reported in Bell and Weinberg's 1978 famous study on homosexualities had a different character in The Netherlands. Personal friendships and intimacy could be more prominent as characteristics of homosexuality.

Women in lesbian and men in gay relationship

Research on alternative relationships has some tradition in The Netherlands (Buunk, 1980; Straver, 1981; Buunk and Van Driel, 1989). Contrary to the research in the United States the focus is not on differences between alternative relationships and marriages. One tries to understand the structure and dynamics of different forms of relationships. Straver (1981) found different models in a sample of unmarried couples (hetero, homo and lesbian). Some couples structure their relationships in a traditional way with a strong role-differentiation. Other couples accentuate a complete togetherness with a tendency towards independence and there are also couples in which the accent is on self-development. Living together is no longer a condition in developing a relationship. Straver does not present a correlation between these models and the sex-typed relationships (hetero, homo and lesbian).

Schreurs (1990), in her research on women in lesbian relationships, found Straver's models in her sample with the exception of the strong role-differentiation type. Couples who accentuate complete togetherness, report a somewhat higher relationship-satisfaction than the couples living in other arrangements.

Deenen (1991) studied men in gay relationships and found no support for the phasic developmental model of McWirtter and Mattison (1984), who think that, dependent on the time a relationship between men exists, sexual and emotional satisfaction changes. Deenen (1991) found differences between short- and longlasting relationships and a difference between men younger than thirty years and older men. Both variables (relationship duration and age of partners involved) predicted relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction better than the phasic developmental model.

Both for women in lesbian and men in gay relationships, emotional intimacy is the best predictor for relationship satisfaction. Sexual contact seems to be more

important for men, but it's possible that this difference disappears if one relies on a less strict definition of sexual contact and replaces it by affectionate bodily contact. One can go even further, seeing the whole erotic and sexual attraction embedded in a more general orientation on how to live together. This line of reasoning is also found in the Dutch studies on sexual identity and sexual identity development.

The homosexual identity, psychological studies

In the eighties, several studies were devoted to the process of becoming a homosexual by self-definition (Schreurs, 1986; Soesbeek, 1986; van Steenderen, 1987; van Zessen, 1988; Deenen en van Naerssen, 1988; van Zessen et al., 1989; van Naerssen, 1989; Schreurs, 1990). Some interesting conclusions can be drawn from these studies.

A big difference was found between the development of the self-definition in males and females. More than fifty percent of boys called themselves homosexual at the age of seventeen, for women this percentage was reached around twenty-three. Some differences between the sexes were reported on the age of experiencing the first attractions to persons on the same sex; fifty percent of the boys at eight years of age, while for girls this was fourteen years. These figures strongly suggest that sex and gender are decisive variables in the process of the sexual identity formation. It is possible that for boys in the development of identity the behavioural, psychic erotic and sexual responses are more important for the definition of the self. For girls the attention is more directed to relational characteristics; the identity-formation and the identity management is centered on social, instead of social-sexual aspects. Defining oneself as a homosexual for boys means the coding of the erotic and sexual responses and for girls the coding of feelings of intimacy, bonding and togetherness. These are of course relative differences and one could predict, that as soon as gender-differences in the development become less important, the gap between a gay and a lesbian development of the self disappears. This accounts for the intergenerational differences found by Deenen (1991) and the positive influence of a warm and permissive climate at home on the identity-development (van Zessen, 1988; Deenen, 1991). To put it in a theoretical perspective: in families in which the educational climate is not centered on polarized sex-roles, not only the male-female differences become less important but also the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual differences. What counts is the capacity for the management of social interactions.

Homosexualities and Belgium

The substantial development and international prominence of homostudies in The Netherlands also shows by contrasting it to the situation in Belgium. Research on homosexual behaviours found itself here even more difficult to legitimize than in other

countries. The first initiatives emanated from within the 'Federation for Working Groups of Homosexuals' This resulted for example in surveying the knowledge and attitudes of professionals who were likely to be consulted by homosexuals for advice or help (Vander Linden & Perdaens, 1980).

Most of the credit for this is undoubtedly due to Bob Carlier who familiarised scholars and the general public alike in Flanders with the issue of homosexuality. He took the lead for publishing the first and only volume on 'Homostudies in Flanders', dealing specifically with several dimensions of homosexuality and science (Carlier et al., 1985).

Almost relentlessly, he did his utmost to further stimulate the understanding of and interest in homosexuality as a sexual lifestyle. Mainly taking a historical-contextual perspective on sexuality he critically commented the foreign research literature on homosexualities of which he had an almost encyclopedic knowledge (e.g. Carlier, 1983). As he recently passed away, his comprehensive contributions will be duly missed both in Flanders and The Netherlands.

A few other scholars also contributed to this domain. De Wit (1984) repeatedly addressed the many problems facing the homosexual movement and organisations in Flanders and critically commented on the discussion on the use of intake services dividing the Flemish gay movement. Gijs (1983) tackled the controversial issue of the (psycho)therapeutic reconversion of homosexuality. He invited the Flemish and Dutch Societies for Sexology alike to condemn unequivocally such procedures.

The threat of HIV-infection and AIDS-related problems triggered also in Belgium the need for empirical research among homosexuals. Exploratory work was first done among the homosexual community in large cities. Aide Info SIDA probed in 1986 and 1988 among homo- and bisexual men about their AIDS-related knowledge and attitudes (see M. Vincineau). From 1985 on, Goilay et al. (1990) screened 526 gay men in Antwerp and Brussels, also about changes –if any– in their sexual practice. Lemaire & Nottet (1989) started a follow-up study in Liège with about 200 homo- and bisexual men, focussing on their social representations which generate specific sexual behaviour. In Flanders, John Vincke launched empirical research on homosexual behaviour. Early 1988, a non-representative sample of 263 homosexual men were submitted a written questionnaire. Vincke et al. (1988) investigated the influence of the sexual career and the homosexual network on the non/use of sexual techniques. Moreover, Vincke (1990) delineated the frequency of risk behaviour among this group of gay men in Flanders. Steady condom use was reported by 1 in 3 (receptive anal intercourse) and 1 in 5 (insertive anal intercourse) among the 36% of gays practicing insertive and/or receptive anal intercourse.

In 1989-90, 379 gay men participated in the multidisciplinary 'Gay Service Research Project' (Vincke, Bolton & Mak, 1991). More detailed results have already been presented through a number of congress papers.

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