Uncomfortable encounters

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Concluding summary

Central to this research project are Dutch same-sex oriented young people's experiences of living in a tolerant, yet heteronormative, society in which being 'normal' is highly valued. These young people have grown up in a society that is known for its tolerance of homosexuality and where this Dutch culture of tolerance is considered a virtue and part of Dutch identity. In recent decades, homophobia has declined and legal equality has almost been accomplished. Social acceptance of homosexuality has become the new norm accepted by the majority of the population. Processes of normalization have created opportunities for same-sex oriented people to be part of mainstream society and enter public positions while being openly gay or lesbian. Same-sex oriented people can now live ordinary lives.

The academic paradigm about young LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) people as stigmatized and 'at risk' has been challenged by a newer paradigm, one that centers on young people's individualized emancipation and on positive and fluid sexuality, in which a sexual identity is no longer a key feature in people's lives as a consequence of normalization processes (Cohler & Hammack 2007; Diamond 2008; Savin-Williams 2005). This positive and promising paradigm is appealing.

Nevertheless, uncomfortable encounters still occur in many ways. Uncomfortable encounters encompass all interactions that unintentionally or intentially mark a same-sex orientation in subtle or explicit ways, whereas it is unnecessary or should not matter. Such interactions communicate the message that a same-sex orientation is not 'natural,' expected, or part of the normative. Sexual orientation is not irrelevant in society, as studies demonstrate that Dutch LGB young people still report more negative outcomes compared to heterosexual counterparts on psychosocial wellbeing, life satisfaction, victimization, and suicidality (e.g., Collier et al. 2013a; Kuyper 2015a; Van Beusekom et al. 2015; Van Bergen et al. 2013).

The general explanation for these uncomfortable encounters and empirical differences is that Dutch society is still heteronormative in many subtle ways. Heterosexuality is the most common sexual orientation and is implicitly expected. Same-sex sexuality is largely accepted, as long as it does not challenge heteronormativity. As Koen described in the opening quote of this dissertation, in the 'hetero world' people are expected to 'act normal.' Thus, same-sex sexuality can be normalized in mainstream, heteronormative society, but only as long as expressions conform to 'normal.'

Through studying Dutch same-sex oriented young people's sexual orientation experiences, I also explored the relation to gender nonconformity and how these experiences made sense in the context of a heteronormative society. The concepts of heteronormativity and gender nonconformity need to be understood in relation to

the general conceptualization of sexual orientation. In the Introduction, I stated that this conceptualization is characterized by two principles. First, sexual orientation and gender are closely interrelated. Sexual orientation and gender expression are often conflated, for example in stereotypical notions that nonconformity to heterosexuality is associated with nonconformity to dominant gender norms (i.e., gay men are associated with not being masculine and lesbian women with not being feminine). The second principle of the general conceptualization of sexual orientation is that gender is perceived as an exclusive binary: You are either a man or a woman. With homosexuality as the logical opposite of heterosexuality, other sexual orientations or identities such as bisexuality are marginalized.

In the Introduction, I also said that in studying heteronormativity, it is important to acknowledge that gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality are asymmetrically related to each other. I introduced Connell's gender theory (Connell 1992; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) and the re-worked model of Schippers (2007) to provide a framework for how masculinities and femininities are positioned to each other hierarchically. In essence, hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity are constructed as complementary, and they both serve the gender order in which hegemonic masculinity is the normative and singular privileged position. I assumed that the relation between heteronormativity, same-sex sexuality, and gender nonconformity works out differently for young men and young women (Bem 2000; Dewaele et al. 2009; Waldner-Haugrud & Magruder 1996), possibly leading to unique issues and challenges for same-sex oriented young men and women. Therefore, a perspective that acknowledges the multiplicity of gender (e.g., gender identity, gender expression, gender norms) and power dynamics is important in studying the experiences of same-sex oriented young people.

In this research project, I addressed how Dutch same-sex oriented young people experience their sexual orientation and how this relates to gender nonconformity, in the context of the Dutch heteronormative, tolerant society. I focused on four research questions, each of which was relevant to a different part of their experiences.

The empirical studies were based on a mixed methods research project. Quantitative data were collected through an online survey. A total of 1636 same-sex attracted (SSA) young people between ages 16 and 25 living in the Netherlands were recruited through extensive convenience sampling using online and offline general youth and LGB-specific channels. Subsequently, from this sample 38 young people participated in an in-depth face to face interview. In this nested sample, I aimed for maximum variation in terms of gender, age, place of residence (rural or urban; geographically spread throughout the country), and sexual self-identification. I held interviews with 19 young women and 19 young men.

Results per study

In chapter 1, I studied experiences of explicit, uncomfortable encounters in diverse contexts. I investigated what the impact of gender and gender nonconformity is on the degree of perceived experiences of victimization due to the participants' same-sex sexuality in various social contexts. Literature suggests that gender nonconforming men are confronted with more severe rejection than gender nonconforming women (Bem 2000), and that gender nonconformity is more strongly associated with homosexuality in the case of men compared to women (Dewaele et al. 2009; Waldner-Haugrud & Magruder 1996). It could be hypothesized that same-sex oriented young men experience more same-sex sexuality-related victimization than same-sex oriented young women, particularly if they do not conform to dominant gender norms. Anti-gay violence is often portrayed as acts by male groups targeting gay men in the public sphere (Buijs et al. 2011; Schuyf 2009; Tiby 2007). However, empirical studies show an inconclusive picture on the impact of gender (Almeida et al. 2009; Baams et al. 2013; D'Augelli et al. 2006; Katz-Wise & Hyde 2012; Kuyper 2011, 2015a) and gender nonconformity (Baams et al. 2013; D'Augelli et al. 2002; D'Augelli et al. 2006; Kuyper 2015a; Russell et al. 2011; Toomey et al. 2010; Van Beusekom et al. 2015). Moreover, few of these studies examined the effect of gender and gender nonconformity simultaneously, and none compared across social contexts.

In this study, the impact of gender and gender nonconformity on the degree of perceived experiences of same-sex sexuality-related victimization was systematically compared in the context of parents, extended family, heterosexual friends, school, and strangers in the neighborhood. Because school was considered an important context, the sample consisted of participants aged between 16 and 18 who were enrolled in secondary education. Based on the empirical findings of survey data, I concluded that the picture is nuanced. Same-sex sexuality appeared to evoke different reactions from people in various contexts, and the role of gender and gendernonconformity varied.

In the contexts of parents, extended family, and heterosexual friends, same-sex attracted boys and those who were more gender nonconforming did not experience more perceived experiences of victimization. In contrast, these effects for gender and gender nonconformity were found in the more public social contexts of school and strangers in the neighborhood. Unexpectedly, the degree of gender nonconformity did not have a stronger effect on degree of perceived experiences of same-sex sexuality-related victimization for boys than girls in any of the social contexts. It could be interpreted that for SSA boys and girls, gender nonconformity as a marker of a same-sex orientation evokes a similar degree of reactions in terms of same-sex sexuality-related victimization; or the impact of gender nonconformity on encountering such victimization needs more qualification and differentiation (e.g., specific types of victimization, degree of severity, or characteristics of perpetrators).

In chapter 2, I focused on bisexuality and the lack of, and possible need for, national policy. In the Netherlands, attention to bisexuality in media, policy, and research is scarce, even though there are at least as many people with a bisexual orientation as there are people with a homosexual orientation (Keuzenkamp et al. 2012; Kuyper 2006, 2016). The marginalisation and invisibility of bisexuality appears to be a consequence of the heteronormative conceptualization of sexual orientation as a hetero/homo binary. Through studying the ways in which bisexual young people differ from homosexual and lesbian young people and the unique issues bisexual young people face, more knowledge was gained of whether and, if so, in what ways specific bi-inclusive policy is needed. The study was based on investigating differences between sexual attraction subgroups on various topics, including how they experienced and expressed their sexual orientation, exploring specific issues experienced by bisexual-identified young people, and the views on bisexuality among the interviewees. Furthermore, I discussed what the findings reveal about the heteronormative conceptualization of sexual orientation.

Whereas sexual attraction subgroups reported similar scores on degree of self-esteem, suicidal ideation, and perceived experiences of same-sex sexuality-related victimization, on other issues their experiences were different. Compared to exclusively same-sex attracted participants, the equally both-sex attracted participants were less open to other people about their sexual orientation, levels of perceived acceptance were lower in the case of their mother and extended family, they reported more visibility discomfort, and scored higher on suicide attempts. The lower degree of openness and higher degree of visibility discomfort remained significant after controlling for the self-reported importance of sexual attraction, having experience with same-sex partners, and being younger. Based on quantitative and qualitative outcomes, I concluded that the relative invisibility of young people's bisexual orientation pointed not to a lower relevance or desire to be open, but to the marginalization of bisexuality, which impedes comfortably expressing a bisexual orientation in society. Space for bisexual identities and expressions were limited to forms that did not challenge heteronormativity and the hetero/homo binary: either temporary bisexuality or same-sex sexual behavior between women framed as bisexual or bi-curious. Based on the reactions the bisexual-identified young people encountered and the attitudes toward bisexuality of the other same-sex attracted young people, it was clear that a long-term bisexual identity was not considered a valid sexual orientation in the eyes of many.

Three specific issues impacted the lives of bisexual-identified young people: The marginalization of bisexuality through reification of the hetero/homo binary, difficulties in expressing a bisexual orientation, particularly in relationships, and a lack of bisexual or bi-inclusive communities. These specific issues were all related to the hetero/homo binary, which reproduces the conceptualization of sexual orientation as fixed binary (instead of recognizing it as a fluid spectrum), as well as

to mononormativity (i.e., a norm of sexual orientation focused on only one gender). Participants generally perceived gender as binary.

I subsequently formulated four pointers for more bi-inclusive policies and a shift to move beyond paying mere lip service in the use of LGBT policy, that actually serves the B. First, awareness-raising concerning marginalization, visibility, and bi-specific issues is needed. This also includes attention to biphobia. Second, community and capacity building may increase societal visibility and political representation. Bi-inclusive or bi-specific spaces can offer information, support, and identification. Even if young people may not feel motivated to become active in bisexual communities, these bi-inclusive or bi-specific communities and spaces can reduce societal marginalization, which they may benefit from. Third, instead of policies that endorse equality, sameness, and normalization in which specific issues for bisexual people are difficult to put on the agenda, a comprehensive diversity perspective on sexuality and gender in policy would open up the political arena to new questions and issues. Such a diversity perspective recognizes diversity of experiences including bisexuality, fluidity, change, and non-binary expressions, and provides opportunities to reveal and change restrictive normativities. Such societal messages can be particularly beneficial for young people who are exploring their sexuality. Lastly, comprehensive sexuality and gender education could benefit from a diversity perspective that is bi-inclusive.

In chapter 3, I explored Dutch SSA young people's processes of labeling a same-sex orientation. Scholars in other Western countries have observed how the trend of normalization of homosexuality impacts on the way young people experience sexual identities and labeling (Nash 2013; Savin-Williams 2005; Seidman et al. 1999). Conventional labels, such as gay and lesbian, compete with non-labeling (i.e., describing but no label such as 'I fancy men' or 'I have a girlfriend') or new ways of labeling (including space for flexibility and change). Savin-Williams (2005) noticed a rise in the number of young people who perceive themselves as 'post-gay,' since they no longer consider their sexual identity meaningful in defining who they are.

Such trends could also be expected in Dutch society. Although society remains heteronormative, it is also proud of its tolerance of homosexuality. Homosexuality has become normalized in many ways. Yet, survey studies point to a widespread use of conventional labeling among young people (Kuyper 2015a; Van Lisdonk & Van Bergen 2010a). In this study, I explored what SSA young people's labeling processes reveal about normalization, tolerance, and heteronormativity. I investigated the use of sexual labels or descriptions, associations with labels, their motivations for their choice, and strategies in their labeling processes.
In their labeling processes, Dutch SSA young people preferred those options that

'neutrally' describe their sexual orientation, such as *gewoon homo*[1] (for men) or non-labeling. Yet, many labels, including conventional labels, had stereotypical associations, mostly related to gender nonconformity. Connotations of gender nonconformity made it more difficult to become normalized. Most young people used labeling strategies that de-emphasized their sexual identity. 'Othering' was another strategy they used in which they described themselves as 'normal' in relation to the 'other' who stressed a sexual identity or was gender nonconforming. The third strategy concerned reinforcing the hetero/homo binary. Questioning, labels representing flexibility, or changing freely between labels were rare, because this would challenge the hetero/homo binary.

Post-gay rhetoric was ideologically appealing to some of them. However, non-labeling was not an outcome of their sexual orientation having become insignificant; rather, it was used to produce normality and to assimilate. I concluded that the labeling processes of SSA young people revealed how the Dutch culture of tolerance is based on an ideology of 'normality.' In a society that values 'being normal' and that promotes sameness and equality, it is difficult to challenge structural gender and sexual inequalities. Moving toward a post-gay society may be appealing, yet this is impossible as long as tolerance is based on an ideology of normality.

In chapter 4, I focused on SSA young men's and women's experiences of visiting gay and lesbian public venues (bars, clubs, and parties), and addressed what this reveals about heteronormativity and gender nonconformity. All the interviewees had visited gay or lesbian public venues, but not all experiences were positive and liberating. Many of them addressed challenges related to implicit norms and expectations regarding appearance, expressing sexual identity, gender expression, and how to approach each other. These venues were not free from normativity. They are organized vis-à-vis mainstream, heteronormative society and produce symbolic gay and lesbian identities with their own norms and expectations. Through studying the gendered sexual scripts (Simon & Gagnon 1984, 1986; Wiederman 2005) that are present in these venues, I aimed to establish what they reveal about heteronormativity and gender nonconformity.

At the cultural level, which concerned normative appearances and expressions of sexual identity, SSA young men navigated between conforming to normative gay appearances – which connects them to gay men – and to hegemonic masculinity, which confirms their status as men and is more highly valued in the heteronormative gender order. Whereas occasionally performing gay could be fun and liberating, being 'too gay' was rejected by many of them. In contrast, in lesbian public venues, the

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[1]*Gewoon* means 'commonly, normally, simply, or plainly' and also contains an intensely, if obfuscated, normative component (Schalet 2011: p. 33).

'lesbian look' was important and conventionally feminine looking SSA young women said that they felt pressure to look 'lesbian enough' in order to be accepted in these venues. At the interpersonal level, which focused on social and erotic interactions, the SSA young men had to get used to the sexualized nature of interactions and being seduced, whereas lesbian public venues were characterized by cliquey group dynamics and subtle erotic communication.

I subsequently theorized that the different scripts and the specific challenges for SSA young men and women in relation to expressing sexual identity and gender conformity in these venues, could be explained by the fundamentally different positions of gay men and lesbian women in the heteronormative asymmetrical gender order. I used Connell's gender theory (Connell 1992; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), re-worked by Schippers (2007), which describes how the asymmetrical gender order is grounded in the notions of multiple masculinities and femininities, the asymmetrical relation between masculinity and femininity, and the privileged position of men and masculinity. Crucial to this is that masculinity is privileged and only available to men, whereas femininity is available to women and men (Connell 1992; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Schippers 2007). It is this asymmetry in which men and women, and therefore gay men and lesbian women, are differently positioned in the heteronormative gender order, which explains the different challenges related to sexual identity and gender expression in gay and lesbian public venues.

In this gender order, gay men can relate to men in the dominant position through their shared status as men and through endorsing hegemonic masculinity. Embracing hegemonic masculinity is not considered a threat to gay identity, as it connects gay men to a shared status as men. Gay appearances are normative in gay public venues, but can also be looked down upon because of lower status of this kind of masculinity in the gender order. In contrast, lesbian women relate to men in the dominant position through challenging the gender order, since they per definition do not conform to being sexually available to men and to hegemonic femininity. In the heteronormative gender order, 'lesbian' comprises characteristics reserved for masculinity (i.e., women as object of sexual or erotic interest), hence a lesbian position contaminates the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity. In terms of femininities, it could best be described as a pariah femininity (Schippers 2007), which is not reconcilable with the heteronormative gender order. This means that hegemonic femininity and lesbian femininity are a threat to each other, with hegemonic femininity embodying heteronormativity and lesbian femininity being a challenge to the heteronormative gender order. In lesbian public venues that celebrate lesbian identities, a woman's sexual identity is not taken for granted and being lesbian needs to be proved by appearing 'lesbian enough.' Looking conventionally feminine is met with suspicion. In conclusion, nonconforming to normative gay and lesbian appearances and to conventional gender

expression has different meaning, because SSA men and women relate in other ways to hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity, respectively.

General conclusions

Based on the findings in the empirical chapters, I can draw four conclusions on the impact of heteronormativity, gender nonconformity, and Dutch tolerance in the lives of Dutch same-sex oriented young people.

First, heteronormativity impacted their lives in many ways. In Dutch society, strong and blatant rejection of same-sex sexuality is uncommon and the majority of the same-sex oriented young people did not frequently experience severe, overt types of victimization. Most of the same-sex oriented people in this research project found constructive ways to experience and express their sexual orientation. Nevertheless, Dutch society is heteronormative and the Netherlands cannot be considered a post-gay society. Coming to terms with their sexual orientation, being open to other people, running risks to experience intolerant behavior, or victimization due to their sexual orientation were issues they faced and that heterosexual peers do not have to worry about. In other words, experiencing and expecting uncomfortable encounters because of their same-sex orientation was common.

Instead of being 'out and proud,' for many same-sex oriented young people their labeling processes were characterized by the wish to be considered normal. Normalization was possible for many of them, but it required them to produce normality. They sometimes adjusted their behavior, passed for heterosexual, or covered their sexual orientation. Because of their desire to feel normalized and be part of mainstream society, they may internalize the societal norm of tolerance, which can lead to downplaying intolerance and efforts to produce normality. Many same-sex oriented young people were highly tolerant when it came to accepting uncomfortable encounters, most particularly when such interactions were subtle and considered unintentional.

Second, for a comprehensive understanding of heteronormativity, it is crucial to acknowledge and understand that heteronormativity intimately interconnects with other normativities, and that these normativities mutually constitute one another. Intersecting normativities addressed in the empirical studies were gender conformity, the hetero/homo binary, homonormativity,[2] and mononormativity. Same-sex oriented young people who are gender nonconforming, who are bisexual, who challenge gender and sexual societal normative ideals, or who are sexually oriented to more than one gender experienced discomfort or subtle rejection, felt pressure to conform or conceal, or had difficulties becoming accepted.

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[2]Articulations of lesbian and gay identities that do not contest heteronormativity, but replicate, uphold, and sustain heteronormativity and underlying sexual and gender norms (Duggan 2002; Mepschen et al. 2010).

Same-sex sexuality becomes significant, meaningful, and more difficult to normalize when expressions transgress intersecting normativities that are implicitly associated with being 'normal' from a heteronormative perspective. In other words, intersecting normativities could be regarded as qualifications of what 'normal' means or implies in mainstream, heteronormative, Dutch society. The findings about intersecting normativities have deepened the understanding of how heteronormativity impacts on same-sex oriented young people's lives; and that heteronormativity stretches further than the single norm of being heterosexual or rejecting all other sexual orientations.

Some of the same-sex oriented participants faced struggles and challenges, whereas others lived ordinary lives and did not feel, or no longer felt, much constraint due to their sexual orientation. In terms of sexual orientation, I conclude that a new line of division exists. Whether young people are heterosexual or non-heterosexual is no longer crucial. It has become more complex than that. A new line of division is whether young people can and wish to express their sexual orientation without challenging heteronormativity and intersecting normativities.

Third, studying heteronormativity in the lives of same-sex oriented young people in relation to both gender and gender nonconformity yielded many insights. Although both young men and young women encountered stereotypes of non-heterosexuality being associated with gender nonconformity, they faced different challenges because the relationship between heteronormativity, gender, and gender nonconformity works out differently. I concluded in chapter 1 that gender nonconformity did not impact differently on the degree of perceived experiences of victimization for SSA young men and young women, yet there are other striking differences.

I will briefly address three examples that illustrate how the constellation of heteronormativity, gender, and gender nonconformity reveals different issues and specific uncomfortable encounters for same-sex oriented young men and women. Firstly, whereas young men could be *gewoon homo*, young women did not use this expression. There was no such thing as *gewoon* lesbian (chapter 3). Secondly, while the space for same-sex behavior between women was available in heteronormative society if framed as bisexual or bi-curious, because it was reconcilable with the heterosexual 'male gaze,' similar spaces for same-sex behavior between men were hardly available in heteronormative contexts because the 'female gaze' (chapter 2) does not exist. This is a result of the heteronormative asymmetrical gender order in which women are symbolically men's objects of erotic interest (male gaze). Men, on the other hand are symbolically the subjects of erotic interest. They not are objectified to the same degree as women are (the absence of a female gaze). Although the making of the erotic object is in reality more nuanced, the existence of a male gaze and lack of a female gaze can be better understood with the help of

this theory. Lastly, in gay public venues young men had to relate to being 'too gay,' while in lesbian public venues young women had to prove they were 'lesbian enough' (chapter 4).

The different challenges for same-sex oriented young men and women in gay and lesbian public venues were analyzed by using the gender theory of hegemonic masculinity, hegemonic femininity, and the asymmetrical heteronormative gender order. Studying the different positions of gay men and lesbian women in this gender order, and the different relation to hegemonic masculinity for SSA men compared to hegemonic femininity for SSA women, helped to interpret gender differences.

In the field of sexual orientation studies, I conclude that it is crucial to explore *why* gender differences are (or are not) present and to apply a gender perspective that incorporates multiplicity of gender and power dynamics.

Finally, one of the points of departure for this research project was that Dutch society is generally tolerant *but* heteronormative. Indeed, same-sex oriented young people perceived society and their environments as being tolerant in general, and their lives were impacted by heteronormativity. However, I have come to the conclusion that this assertion needs to be revised. A more accurate observation is that heteronormativity is *shaped by* Dutch tolerance, which is grounded on cultural notions of normality. This striving for normality fosters polarization between 'normal' people and 'other' people who are not. The pride in Dutch tolerance of homosexuality as a national virtue glosses over experiences of intolerance and the more subtle ways the heteronormative society pressures young people to act normal.

In the following, I reflect upon what the findings imply for the further study of gendered heteronormativity, and the study of intolerance and subtle stigma. Finally, I make a suggestion, based on the findings, pertaining to what should be the next step toward further unravelling heteronormativity, which I argue, requires a comprehensive diversity perspective.

Implications for the study of gendered heteronormativity

Heteronormativity and gender expression
A point of departure in this research project was to study heteronormativity and the relevance of gender nonconformity in the experiences of same-sex orientated young people. Connotations of homosexuality with gender nonconformity were apparent in many ways. Whereas many same-sex sexuality labels comprised a link to gender nonconformity, most same-sex oriented young people preferred labels that did not entail such a connotation. At schools and in the neighborhood, gender nonconforming

SSA young people experienced more perceived victimization due to their same-sex sexuality than gender conforming SSA young people, which shows that gender nonconformity could be perceived as a negative marker of homosexuality. Scripted normative gay and lesbian appearances in gay and lesbian public venues comprised some stereotypical gender nonconforming expressions.

Nonconformity to sexual orientation implied nonconformity to gender expression, both in mainstream society and among same-sex oriented people. Among same-sex oriented people, gender policing was used as a sanctioning measure to those who were considered 'other.' Stryker notes that 'in seeking to be normative, gays and lesbians gender police their community, marginalizing and stigmatizing any difference and construing it as inferior' (Stryker 2008, in Robinson 2012: p. 333).

Thus, same-sex oriented young people's gender expression is interpreted in terms of their sexual orientation, both in mainstream society and among themselves. Hence, to capture the impact of heteronormativity and uncomfortable encounters on the lives of same-sex oriented people, it is important to study the role of gender expression and societal intolerance of gender nonconformity. In the Netherlands, Bos, Van Beusekom, Baams, and Collier have started to develop an interesting body of research on gender expression and gender nonconformity in relation to victimization, mental health, and relations with peers and parents (e.g., Baams et al. 2013; Bos & Sandfort 2014; Collier, Bos, & Sandfort 2012; Collier et al. 2013b; Van Beusekom et al. 2016; Van Beusekom et al. 2015; Van Beusekom, Roodenburg, & Bos 2012).

The entanglement of gender and sexual orientation should also be taken into account. In a Flemish study, lesbian and bisexual women reported more perceived cross-gender sanctioning (i.e., being sanctioned for gender nonconformity) than gay and bisexual men (Dewaele, Van Houtte, & Vincke 2014). An explanation could be that same-sex oriented women have difficulty determining whether sanctioning or victimization experiences are linked to their gender or to their sexual orientation. These victimization grounds could be more difficult for them to disentangle than it is for men (Schuyf 2009). Are they victimized as a woman, as someone with a same-sex orientation, or as a same-sex oriented woman/lesbian (the intersection of gender and sexual orientation)? Dewaele and colleagues suggested that non-heterosexual women could be more sensitive to gender-related sanctioning compared to sexual orientation-related sanctioning (Dewaele et al. 2014: p. 1610).

Studying the impact of transgressing conventional gender identity and expression norms in relation to victimization or wellbeing contributes to new insights relevant to the emancipation of same-sex oriented and/or gender nonconforming people, and ultimately to all of society. The national Gender Diversity Alliance, recently initiated by civil societies, researchers, and activists, could serve as a catalyst to put gender

diversity higher on the political and research agenda. The gender transformative approach could be a useful approach, since it aims to change gender norms in order to create more space for flexible and diverse expressions. This approach has proved effective in questioning and changing limiting gender and sexuality norms and in fostering behavioral change among men and boys (Barker et al. 2010; Cense, De Blécourt, & Oostrik 2016).

In conclusion, since sexual orientation and gender shape each other and are highly interrelated, it is encouraging that research and policy on same-sex sexuality, gender expression, and gender equality continue to move forward together.

Intersecting normativities
In the Netherlands, many tolerant people do not perceive a same-sex orientation in itself as transgressing normality, but associations with other intersecting normativities still impact same-sex oriented young people's lives through subtle intolerance, discomfort, or being made to feel marginalized. To understand the diverse impact heteronormativity can have in people's lived experience, it is crucial to study heteronormativity in relation to other normativities regarding sexuality, gender, relationships, and lifestyles. Although I addressed several intersecting normativity's – such as gender conformity, the hetero/homo binary, homonormativity, and mononormativity – there are a lot more normativities that could be relevant in further unravelling heteronormativity.[3]

Research focused on intersecting normativities could contribute to explaining differences within the group of same-sex oriented people in experiencing intolerance, discomfort, or marginalization. An example in this research project was that bisexual oriented young people experienced unique issues that homosexual oriented young people did not face due to the importance of mononormativity in Dutch society. According to Van Anders, attraction to only men or only women, what other scholars call monosexual (Barker et al. 2012; Maliepaard 2015a), 'is conceptually more similar than attraction to both' or attraction 'outside normative gender/sex binaries' (2015: p. 1190). Thus, sometimes a division on the basis of sexual orientation as in heterosexual versus non-heterosexual or heterosexual versus bisexual versus and gay/lesbian, could be less significant for explaining differences than other divisions, for example the division between monosexual orientations (heterosexual, lesbian, gay) versus non-monosexual sexual orientations (bisexual), or conventional relationship styles versus

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[3]In a ground-breaking article on sexual orientation, Van Anders (2015) listed many more gender/sex and sexuality normativities, including binary normativity (fitting in the hetero/homo binary or sex/gender binary), parenting-related normativity (developing healthy families, becoming a mother or father), sexual normativity (being sexual in conventional ways), and conventional lifestyle normativity (fitting into 'huisje-boompje-beestje,' a Dutch expression which literally means 'little house–little tree–little animal/pet' and symbolizes leading a conventional family life).

non-conventional relationship styles.

Same-sex oriented people may internalize intersecting normativities, too. It is, therefore, relevant to study their own attitudes toward gender nonconformity, gender as non-binary, bisexuality, non-conventional sexuality, relationship styles, or family structures and link this to how they perceive their own sexual orientation, and experience and cope with actual and expected uncomfortable encounters. For example, people who feel attracted to both men and women may have more issues coming to terms with their bisexuality if they prefer monosexuality than people who consider sexuality and gender as fluid. Also, same-sex oriented young people who dream of eventually having a traditional married family life may have more problems with their sexual orientation than those who do not have this dream. Even though married family life is within reach for Dutch same-sex oriented people, some people may associate same-sex sexuality with alternative lifestyles.

Theoretically, the concept of intersectional normativities goes hand and hand with theories on sexuality and gender and echoes the theoretical relationship between sexuality and gender. They are separate categories, yet they mutually constitute each other and are often conflated. Likewise as with gender and sexuality theorists who criticize research which aims to ascertain which of the two are more pivotal (e.g., Jackson 2006; Richardson 2007; Taylor, Hines, & Casey 2010), I argue that it is more meaningful to focus on the interrelations between sexual orientation, gender, and heteronormativity as dynamic and contextual, creating the possibility to research the different constellations of prominence and impact in different settings (Jackson 2006; Richardson 2007). Richardson coins the concept of 'patterned fluidities' to describe how 'the scope and the strength of the relationship between sexuality and gender are important to imagining how easily their relationship can be refigured' (2007: 465-466).

The concept of intersecting normativities parallels intersectionality in the pursuit to view and analyze people's lived experiences in their complexity of interactions between social categories – or in this case, normativities – and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power (Davis 2008: p.68; Taylor et al. 2010). It is in that perspective that I acknowledge the limits of the scope of my empirical studies, which have not touched upon the intersection with class, race, and other important social categories.

Heteronormative asymmetric gender order
Gender differences in the challenges experienced in gay and lesbian public venues were interpreted through theorizing them from the perspective of the heteronormative, asymmetric gender order (in chapter 4; Connell 1992; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Schippers 2007). The gender order offers a theoretical framework to explore heteronormativity, sexual orientation, and gender differences, while acknowledging

the different meaning of gender nonconformity for men and women because of their different relation to hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity. The strength of the theory is its potential to interpret gender differences in relation to power dynamics and gender asymmetry. Instead of essentializing or naturalizing heteronormativity and gender differences, this gender theory provides the conceptual tools to explore processes of how heteronormativity and gender differences are reproduced and how structural inequalities are perpetuated (Schippers 2007).

Here, I interpret two gender differences addressed in the general conclusions and pose three new questions to illustrate the potential of the theory of the heteronormative asymmetrical gender order. First, the gender difference that some SSA young men labeled themselves as *gewoon homo*, whereas the option of *gewoon* lesbian was not available to young women (chapter 3) can be explained by the different position of *homo*/gay and lesbian in the gender order. Whereas *homo*/gay is considered part of this order (though subordinated or inferior), a lesbian position challenges the gender order and cannot be symbolically normalized as *gewoon*. In chapter 3, SSA young women associated the label 'lesbian' with being ugly, unkind, masculine, and feminist; all connotations that cannot be aligned well with hegemonic femininity and that jeopardizes being attractive to heterosexual men, the locus of the asymmetrical gender order. In the gender order, 'masculine' is reserved for men; it contaminates the gender order if enacted by women.

Second, bisexuality has a different meaning for men and women in the gender order. Among SSA women, the label 'bi' was sometimes used to not exclude men and to not distance themselves from heterosexual women, which could be perceived of a lesbian position in mainstream society (Fahs 2009; Willis 2012). A similar logic of SSA men opting for a bisexual position in mainstream society to not exclude women or distance themselves from other heterosexual men, was not present at all (chapter 2). Whether men are considered part of the gender order is not determined by a gay or bisexual orientation. Nor do SSA men worry about a 'female gaze' and excluding women. In contrast, the distinction between being bisexual or lesbian was more prominently addressed by SSA women. A bisexual position offers a place in the heteronormative gender order, whereas a lesbian position does not. Vice versa, in lesbian public venues, a bisexual position could be troublesome, since bisexual women are associated with being sexually available to men, and as such embrace the heteronormative gender order. Whereas among SSA men, bisexuality was largely marginalized and the label 'bisexual' was rarely adopted, they did not raise the issue that it mattered whether visitors to gay public venues are gay or bisexual.

With respect to studying gendered heteronormativity, the theory of the gender order could be applied to several questions to be addressed in future studies. First of all, one of the main findings presented in chapter 1 about gender differences in the degree of

perceived experiences of victimization across contexts (i.e., compared to SSA girls, SSA boys reported a higher degree in the context of school and neighborhood, but not of parents, extended family, and friends), remains difficult to interpret without information about the 'perpetrators'' perspective. How does their perspective and behavior relate to the gender order and how is context relevant in the theory of the gender order? It would be interesting to conduct an additional study about intolerant attitudes toward same-sex sexuality and the motivation to express intolerance (i.e., victimization) across contexts, and the relevance of gender and gender nonconformity, interpreted by the theory of the gender order. Second, more generally, to further unravel gendered heteronormativity, it would be fascinating to study heterosexual young people's attitudes toward homosexuality, bisexuality, and the relation with gender nonconformity, and to compare between young men, women, and non-binary (i.e., those who do not identify as a boy or girl) people. Lastly, the study of heteronormativity could be further explored by using the theory of the gender order to interpret the impact of intersecting normativities. For example, if the 38 interviewed same-sex oriented young people were to be interviewed again, some of them would probably be in the life phase of considering parenthood. It would be interesting to explore whether these same-sex oriented men and women encounter different reactions when they become parents. Do they receive different kind of responses or questions and encounter other legal issues? And is their status as mothers or fathers differently shaped by their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, the characteristics of their partners, and relationship style?

Implications for the study of intolerance

In a society in which tolerating homosexuality has become the norm and many Dutch perceive themselves to be tolerant, people may downplay expressions of heteronormativity or intolerant attitudes or behavior toward same-sex sexuality. Picavet and Sandfort (2005) observed in a qualitative study that Dutch LGB youth 'deproblematized:' They claimed that everyone in their social environment reacted positively to their coming out, while they still faced difficulties related to their sexual orientation. Their findings resonate with most same-sex oriented young people's accounts in which they emphasized high levels of perceived acceptance and few negative reactions, yet they also have gone through a process of coming to terms with their sexual orientation and used selective concealing, covering, and passing strategies (see chapter 3). Dutch same-sex oriented young people may 'internalize' this general norm of tolerance or emphasize being accepted and 'normal' through using a post-gay rhetoric, while downplaying the strategies they use to foster normalization and avoid uncomfortable encounters.

It is important to acknowledge that recognition and report of intolerance and victimization due to same-sex sexuality depends on people's own views and coping strategies. Whether individuals appraise an encounter or situation as victimizing is

impacted by their perceptions of the dominant view and cultural representation of same-sex sexuality as positive or stigmatizing, their level of stigma consciousness, their level of group identification with an LGB identity, and their belief in an intolerant or just world (Dewaele & Van Houtte 2010; Major & O'Brien 2005; Son Hing 2012). For example, people may be more likely to report victimization if they believe that unequal treatment is never acceptable and are motivated to pinpoint inequality. Yet, people may downplay intolerance, uncomfortable encounters, and victimization and be less motivated to report such experiences if they perceive victimization as a personal failure to be normal, illustrated by argumentations of conditional justification of intolerance such as 'If you want to be treated as normal, don't emphasize difference.' Stigmatizing experiences can be more harmful to and impact the self-esteem of people who believe in meritocracy (i.e., the world is a just place, and hard work – in this case, efforts to be normalized – are rewarded) (Son Hing 2012). For them, denying or downplaying stigma and intolerance could be a coping strategy.

There are many coping strategies, ranging from, for example, adaptive and non-adaptive strategies (Dewaele & Van Houtte 2010) to disengagement strategies (flighting or avoiding) and engagement strategies (reflecting or fighting) (Major & O'Brien (2005). Among the same-sex oriented young people, those who liked living in their small hometown were more likely to choose to blend in and to adopt strategies of normalization, whereas young people with cosmopolitan, liberal world views had created their own circle of open-minded friends and had in many ways withdrawn from, or were critical of, heteronormative society. The latter group was not represented well in this research project.

To better understand the report and experiences of same-sex sexuality-related intolerance, victimization, and uncomfortable encounters, it is essential to also include participants' own views regarding intolerance and victimization as well as their coping strategies. Aside from overt victimization, subtle types of stigma or victimization could be explored, too, in order to map a more complete range of negative or ambiguous encounters as a consequence of heteronormativity. Qualitative methods could be used to improve survey studies through exploring what experiences same-sex oriented people would describe as uncomfortable, stigmatizing[4], victimizing, and discriminating, which types they would report in survey studies, and which views regarding intolerance and heteronormativity impact their report of perceived victimization.

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[4]Stigmatization and victimization are often used interchangeably but are different concepts. Stigmatization refers to attributing a characteristic to a person or group of people that marks them as different and leads them to be devalued in the eyes of others. The concept of stigma includes reference to power (Major & O'Brien 2005: p. 395). Here, victimization refers to intolerant behavior towards another person, in this case based on stigmatization of same-sex sexuality.

The concept of visibility management can add a relevant perspective to studying the impact of intolerance and stigma on the lives of same-sex oriented people. Visibility management refers to 'regulating disclosure for the purposes of maintaining privacy and minimizing stigma, harm, or marginalization' (Lasser, Ryser, & Price 2010: p. 416). This concept is broader and encompasses more than coming out. It includes a range of strategies such as selective concealing, passing, and covering, and is related to disclosure and coping (Dewaele et al. 2014). The interviewed same-sex oriented young people often used a combination of these strategies. Exploring the visibility management strategies of same-sex oriented people may reveal more expected or actual experiences of stigmatization as a consequence of heteronormativity than measuring perceived or actual victimization. When studying visibility management, gender expression and perceived cross-gender sanctioning are also important to take into account (Dewaele et al. 2014).

In a tolerant society such as the Dutch one, power dynamics and the consequences of normativity can easily be denied, and drawing attention to such processes can be considered radical or trivial. Hence, it is important for researchers to be aware that attitudes or expressions of intolerance may falsely appear to be absent or rare. Studies on tolerance show that it is crucially important to distinguish between the principle of tolerance and the practice of toleration (Oberdiek 2001; Van Doorn 2015). People are generally willing to support principles of tolerance, whereas they may react intolerantly when facing the practical implications of their tolerance (Van Doorn 2015). Indeed, in Dutch society, abstract and cognitive attitudes are generally positive (Kuyper 2016), whereas being confronted with explicit expressions of same-sex sexuality affection is met with more ambiguous or even negative attitudes (ibid.). Van Doorn's (2015) study on tolerance indicates the importance of focusing on the practice of tolerance (i.e., behavioral components), since prejudice toward a group has a stronger impact on tolerant behavior than on general tolerant attitudes.

Attitudinal survey studies in the general population are a good method to assess explicit attitudes, but may not capture subtle intolerance and preferences for heterosexuality. Implicit association tests and vignette studies may be useful to reveal more subtle intolerance, heteronormativity, and intersecting normativities. To explore and reveal subtle intolerant behavior or discomfort with specific same-sex sexuality expressions or intersecting normativities in people's daily lives, methods such as qualitative conversation analysis (used by Kitzinger 2005), field experiments, and participatory observation could be useful.

In this respect, Kitzinger's concept of 'everyday heteronormativity' (2005) is promising. She noted that 'while LGBT activists are campaigning against blatant oppression and overt discrimination, at the same time all around us a

heteronormative social fabric is unobtrusively rewoven, thread by thread, persistently, without fuss or fanfare, without oppressive intent or conscious design' (2005: p. 478). Her aim is to 'make visible (and thereby to enable us all to challenge) some of the mundane quotidian actions that result in the routine achievement of a taken-for-granted world that socially excludes or marginalizes non-heterosexuals' (2005: p. 478).

The knowledge that race, ethnicity, migrant, and whiteness studies developed by addressing issues of intolerance, changing power dynamics, and normativities is valuable, because of their parallels. Wekker describes the difficulty of raising issues of racism in Dutch society, which appreciates egalitarianism, since charging others with racism means that 'they deeply break with this supposed egalitarianism' (2016: p. 79). She cites Prins, who addressed this paradox: 'If you want to be equal to us, then don't talk about differences; but if you are different from us, then you are not equal' (2002, in Wekker 2016: pp. 15-16). As is the case with structural racism, addressing structural heteronormativity in the Netherlands is also a complex matter. Whereas racial or ethnic discrimination is generally disapproved of in mainstream society, the structural character of white normativity and white privilege is a highly sensitive issue to bring up in Dutch society (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Wekker 2016). Similarly, blatant or overt discrimination and rejection of, and violence against, same-sex oriented people is disapproved of and considered problematic by the majority of the Dutch population; however, the message about a deeper structural heteronormativity and intolerance toward various kinds of same-sex orientation expressions is a lot more difficult to address. Some of the developed theoretical and analytical concepts in race, ethnicity, migrant, and whiteness studies, such as color blindness, culture of ignorance, and white/heterosexual privilege, could contribute to heteronormativity studies and I suggest attention should be paid to these bodies of literature (e.g., in the Netherlands: Davis & Nencel 2011; Essed & Trienekens 2008; Ghorashi & Ponzoni 2014; Wekker 2016).

Look to the future: Unravelling heteronormativity and a diversity perspective

For decades, the Netherlands has been considered an international frontrunner in tolerating homosexuality. As I concluded, many same-sex sexuality expressions can be normalized and many same-sex oriented young people felt 'normal.' Yet, this research project also showed that, not all expressions can be normalized and being same-sex orientated can result in becoming involved in uncomfortable encounters. Moreover, a focus on normalization concentrates on 'normal' and 'other' people, and this perpetuates existing sexual and gender normativities and leaves the heteronormative fabric of Dutch society intact.

I suggest that in addition to focusing on same-sex oriented people (or sexual minorities or LGBTI people), research should start unravelling heteronormativity though focusing on intersecting normativities and the experiences of heterosexual people. A shift toward a more inclusive perspective beyond sexual orientation or LGBTI would promote reflection on the heteronormative nature of society, tolerance, and normality. I call this a comprehensive diversity perspective, since it promotes the visibility of differences, marginalized groups, and blind spots, and encourages reflection on underlying power dynamics and experiences of majorities.[5] Ghorashi and Ponzoni (2014) note that in an inclusive approach to diversity, there is space for difference instead of neutralizing differences. Differences and diversified identities are recognized and attention is paid to normalizing and marginalizing processes (Richardson & Monro 2012).

A comprehensive diversity perspective on sexuality and gender raises new questions. What are the privileges of being heterosexual? How is heteronormativity reproduced in dominant discourses and through intersecting normativities? What do the experiences of non-binary people reveal about restrictive gender, sexual, and sex normativities in society? What does 'normality' imply and how can restrictive ideologies on 'normality' be replaced by more inclusive ideologies?

One of the benefits of a comprehensive diversity perspective is that it allows more space for non-binary, hybrid, and fluid experiences without fixing on new identities (and adding new letters to LGBTI). A comprehensive diversity perspective may also open up the political arena to new issues, such as the acknowledgement and celebration of diversity in sexual orientations, gender and relational expressions, and the structural impact of heteronormativity and intersecting normativities. In a society that acknowledges sexual orientation, gender, and relational diversity and fluidity, young people would not feel the need to 'know,' 'choose' or hide their desires if these contest societal normative ideals based on normality. Such a society allows more space for comfortable encounters and experimenting with fluid or non-binary sexual and gender expressions, without fixing identities or creating new binaries.

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[5]This perspective on comprehensive diversity is based on Ghorashi & Ponzoni (2014); Richardson & Monro (2012), and Van Anders (2015).