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# A Good Practice

## The Role of Women's Studies in the Coalition of Feminists and the State against Physical and Sexual Violence

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In 1991, as Dutch television viewers waited for the country's most popular evening news broadcast, they received a message from government. 'Sex is natural,' it ran, 'but never self-evident.' The filmed message went on to tell the story of a man who after a date takes an invitation for a cup of coffee to mean something else. After assaulting the woman, he is thrown out of her home. Once back in his own home, he begins to regret his actions. He calls her and the camera pans to a sunny terrace where the two are enjoying ice-cream. All this to the sound of the Rolling Stones chanting: 'You can't always get what you want.' This government information film further reports that one in three women are confronted with sexual abuse at some point in their lives and that eight out of ten perpetrators are known to their victims. A few years later, we see a similar government information film, this time the subject is sexual intimidation. Images of an irrepresible male dog showing an unnatural interest in a man's leg are intended to instill more compassion in men for women. The fact that government approaches the general public on this subject through a mass medium like television and addresses the male section of the population explicitly as responsible here is part of a campaign which is probably unique in Europe. The Dutch government also plays a pioneering role in an international context. For some years, its political representatives have acted as advocates for women's self-determination in matters relating to reproduction and sexuality. In addition, it has lobbied for the recognition of violence against women as a

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violation of human rights, a stand which was again demonstrated at Peking in 1995 (see Berger, 1995). Fifteen years earlier, it had been the action group, the Abominable Snowwoman, which had made the streets 'unsafe' with its giant footprints under the slogan: 'Rid the world of sexual violence.'

How has a feminist street action been elevated to a government issue in no fewer than 15 years, and how did it happen that the state would ultimately address the 'street' through public awareness campaigns via a mass medium like television? To answer these questions I trace the course followed by this feminist action issue in its evolution into a government responsibility. Central to this course is, in my view, the intermediate role – between feminist action and government policies and policy formation – played by the vocabulary and 'know-how' generated by women's studies. Thus, the time frame covered by this article begins after the women's movement had raised this issue through proactive moves, such as the creation of women's refuges in the 1970s. Clearly, I tell this story inspired by the perspective of agenda construction, a political science approach; it studies how wants and needs become claims and ultimately political issues (Cobb and Elder, 1983); we follow the process through which decision-makers recognize the existence of social problems and subsequently admit that they have to do something about them (Kok, 1981). In terms of violence against women and girls, it is clear that initially we are concerned here with an 'external' initiative, by the women's movement; an initiative which would eventually make its way onto the government policy agenda. We are interested in how the problem was defined and possibly modified as it progressed to the heady heights of government issues and which role was played by women's studies in this process.

However, if we shake up the kaleidoscope then we can also tell a tale of shifts in government goals within a framework of equal opportunities issues generating a question on the function of a specific theme in politics. The rapidly growing interest of politicians and ensuing policy on the problems surrounding physical and sexual violence can then be seen as a welcome change in political and policy aims, away from the deadlocked equal opportunities policy on promotion of women's economic independence. I myself could be called a sceptic in this sense, but over the years I have been forced to recognize economic independence has not only remained a political issue and policy area, but also that physical and sexual violence has become an important political and policy issue. This article attempts to highlight the role of women's studies in this process.

## ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA: A STRUCTURAL PROBLEM

The so-called Kijkduin Conference on sexual violence of 1982 would prove a historic event. It was initiated by the secretary of state for equal opportunities, Hedy d'Ancona, a well-known feminist activist and social democrat, who had already left office when she spoke at this conference. Here d'Ancona would follow the lead of the more radical sections of the women's movement when she argued that sexual violence is a structural problem against which government should take action as part of its equal opportunities policy. Abolition of the oppression of women assumes not only policy aimed at economic independence, but also demands policy against violence which does not become impotent at the thresholds of the private sphere. Economic dominance by men and their sexual dominance are two sides of the same coin which imply dependence and subordination in women. In both, d'Ancona argued in her keynote speech to the conference, the core concern is the realization of self-determination rights (Acker and Rawie, 1982). Two elements are of importance here. Not only is a new definition of a problem provided by a government minister – sexual violence is a structural problem – but that new description – a feminist analysis of the problem – is linked to government responsibility.

In the 1970s, the problem of violence against women became more visible, especially through the establishment of women's refuges. The actual existence of such refuges provided the first indications of the danger within relationships – it was no longer the unknown man in the bushes, but boyfriends and partners who represented the biggest threat to women. Abuse and rape were the first major public issues, other forms of (sexual) violence, such as pornography, trafficking in women and prostitution would follow in the late 1970s. In the 1980s, sexual abuse of girls by relatives and sexual harassment and intimidation acquired greater emphasis. At that time, the (level of) danger of violence in families and in partner relationships was no more than a feminist hypothesis or suspicion. Over a period of some years, the problem began to take on the proportions of a multi-headed monster. It appeared this was a widespread phenomenon in society with radical consequences for women's health. Women's studies, which at the end of the 1970s had just started as a feminist movement in academia, focused on the problem in small-scale studies by first charting women's experiences (Doomen, 1977; Vorrink, 1982; Ensink and Albach, 1983) and more theoretically by analysing social – patriarchal – relationships. Violence here was analysed explicitly as an expression of the power of 'heterosexuality' (Römkens, 1980, 1986).

Secretary of state d'Ancona carried radical (and highly controversial outside feminist circles) but also sketchy insights into an official analysis. At the Kijkduin Conference, sexual and physical violence was placed on a new agenda, that of parliamentary politics. Just as environmental

problems show, a slot on this agenda does not necessarily say anything relevant about actual policy intentions; the slot can also be solely of symbolic significance. The 1982 conference was therefore also of historic importance because here a second political battle was won – the conference signalled the flying start of a whole new area of government policy aimed at prevention, support and public information on sexual violence. Indeed, this policy would become the cornerstone of equal opportunities policy for the 1980s.

The liberal successor to Hedy d'Ancona, Annelien Kappeyne van de Copello, quietly pursued her social democrat predecessor's course from 1983. For Kappeyne, the violation of the body's integrity was under discussion. The policy that would later be developed under her responsibility was labelled revolutionary at that time by feminists.<sup>1</sup> Kappeyne was convinced by the feminist analysis of her predecessor (see, for example, 'An Analysis of the "Women's Question"', by van der A et al., 1982). As a lawyer and liberal, the secretary of state had no trouble linking this analysis with constitutional rights of which integrity of the body is one. By making 'respect' for, that is 'non-intervention' in, the private sphere subservient to this integrity, the concept of marital rape, for example, could become punishable, at least theoretically and ideologically. It would take eight more years before the bill became law in 1991.<sup>2</sup>

At the 1982 conference, the participants – including a small group of feminist professionals such as publicists and academics – were heard, not only on fundamental political issues, but also in their appeal for more knowledge on violence. Action groups were sceptical and criticized the selective invitation policy. Yet, they were also able to identify with the congress's recommendation: academic research on the nature and extent of various forms of violence against women, especially in the private sphere. The same recommendation resulted from a trend study on heterosexuality (Draijer, 1984) and a research programme in the field of women's studies and equal opportunities research, carried out for government (*Eindadvies van de VBEO* [Final Recommendations VBEO], 1983: Part II). Both publications pointed out the Dutch research tradition of overly focusing on the pleasurable sides of sexuality,<sup>3</sup> in response to the sexual liberalization movement. The response to the call for more knowledge on sexual violence was located in various 'places' and thus reinforced a development to which government was committed. Now, authors noted 'gaps in knowledge' and that was a far cry from the language of action, of the streets which had to be 'rid of sexual violence'. Feminist vocabulary developed alongside women's studies research and was reformulated in a language familiar to government.

To develop government policy it turned out to be necessary to gain insight into the differences and similarities of various forms of violence. After all, in the first feminist analyses traffic in women and incest,

molestation and pornography, prostitution, rape and assault are all clustered under the (sexual) violence label.<sup>4</sup> It would appear necessary to differentiate according to the nature of the violence, the relations within which the violence occurs, the implied sociopsychological mechanisms. Moreover, in the first instance there were no more than indications of the extent of the problem. Naming violence against women as a structural problem was in the first place a political matter, but at the same time met a feminist need to understand the overall coherence of women's oppression. Government was helped on track and recognized the importance of the problem, but could only start its policy against (sexual) violence by initiating research to gain insight into its precise character.

Accurate data were needed for the development of equal opportunities policy, but also to convince the other two concerned ministries, Justice and Welfare, of the seriousness of the problem. At the initiative of the Equal Opportunities Policy Coordination Directorate (part of the Ministry of Social Affairs), the other two ministries underwrote the 1982 conference recommendation – to undertake research on physical and sexual research against women and girls. This resulted, partly encouraged by questions in the Second Chamber, in a government initiative for a number of studies, including two major research projects which would incorporate representative surveys in the private sphere of families and relationships. One study examined sexual abuse of girls, another explored physical and sexual violence in heterosexual relationships.<sup>5</sup> The commitment of the ministries mentioned to the fact that research on the problem was needed bound them – in principle – to the results and to the 'policy relevance' of those results. Thus, they would take joint responsibility for the political and policy consequences to be drawn from the results. In addition, this move also created the basis for potential policy by the governing coalition.

Feminists, women's studies researchers and female or feminist politicians and civil servants responsible for emancipation came together in their need for more information and insights. The result of this coalition was not only the fact that sexual violence as problem became a political issue and the subject of government policy, but also that this subject was included in the (co-funded by government) research agenda. The remarkable continuity in policy-making on emancipation from the socialist-feminist and the liberal secretaries of state symbolizes this new and broad-based coalition. In 1981, power inequality between the sexes was still considered a matter of Hedy d'Ancona's personal conscience, and was scrapped from the prime minister's cabinet's Queen's speech (see Meinen and Nijon, 1992: 70ff.). Her successor Kappeyne's formulation as 'violation of the physical integrity of women' was more easily accepted as it was couched in and validated by the language of civil rights highly respected in government. The political goalposts were shifted through this cross-party and effective move by two female politicians. Based on

this new definition of the problem, civil servants were able to get down to work. Continuity in policy was thus extended by Kappeyne's four-year tenure because, following some political shifts, it was now achieved at a different, policy level. The definition of the problem lost its patriarchal power dimension, but on the other hand gained acceptance because the physical integrity of women in the private sphere became an accepted object of government's intervention. So the misuse of power by men in the private sphere, a cornerstone of patriarchy, ultimately came up against the law.

### ON THE PUBLIC AGENDA: NUMBERS AND RELATIONAL DYNAMICS

The results of the two research projects on sexual abuse of girls and on physical violence in heterosexual relationships, which were presented in 1988 and 1989 respectively, were items on national news broadcasts and were the focus of much mass media attention. The research on girls' sexual abuse by relatives brought to light the following information: one in seven women had experienced sexual abuse during childhood or adolescence; for half of these, the sexual abuse had been severe and of long duration. A quarter of these women had been abused by someone outside the family, such as a neighbour or teacher; two-thirds of the cases were limited to one incident. In total, one in three women had been involved in a more or less severe form of sexual abuse.<sup>6</sup> The study on physical and sexual violence in partner relationships found the following.<sup>7</sup> One in five women experienced physical violence from their partner; half of these women (one in nine) were confronted regularly with recurring grievous violent behaviour; one in 13 women were forced to have sex by their partner.<sup>8</sup>

The extent of the problem had been comprehensively underestimated; the general public and the media became 'over-focused' on the potential extent of the problem and thus with the data and percentages generated by the studies. Columnists in print media heckled this preoccupation with figures, while frantically attempting to shoot down the veracity of those same figures: the research methods must have been faulty; the reliability of the interviewees' memories was questioned; the victims were fantasizing. A widespread public debate spread rapidly in the daily papers and current affairs magazines, followed at a distance by professional journals. Response to critics came first from feminist commentators and researchers, whose evaluation of the problem was soon supported by a number of eminent male medical specialists, such as gynaecologists and psychiatrists (van Hall and van Dantzig). These were men of long and eminent reputation which predated the debate. Their evaluation could not be



dismissed as feminist prepossession. A similar development occurred in this public debate, albeit on a much greater scale, to that which had happened at the Kijkduin Conference in 1982: the criticism, based on disbelief and fear, came from men who had pioneered the sexual liberation movement. They feared a 'new chastity'. The results of these studies could signify an infringement of the newly won freedoms, whose male bias had already been demonstrated by feminists.

In spite of public commotion around the prevalence and scale of sexual (and physical) violence, government continued to undertake policy and research on this issue, a course of action underpinned by the findings of these studies. In 1998 and prompted by the findings on sexual abuse, government took a highly remarkable step: the three subsidizing ministries – Social Affairs, Welfare and Justice – adopted a joint standpoint on the research which would serve as a basis for policy in the areas of sexuality and violence to be presented to parliament. The three ministries concerned advocated additional government effort in prevention and public information, in discovering, reporting and subsequent intervention following sexual abuse, and in help and support to both victims and perpetrators. Finally, more expertise in this area was considered necessary and should be encouraged, while organizational consequences for social work were drawn. A comprehensive programme of so-called primary and secondary prevention was thus established (TK, 88–9, 21158, No. 1; *Standpunt van de Ministeries*, 1989). Such a privileged and guiding role in Dutch parliamentary political relations rarely falls to a research project.

The general public and media focused almost exclusively on the data. An important finding in both projects was the fact that the occurrence of both forms of abuse is not linked primarily to a specific socioeconomic group, region or in families or partner relationships with a specific religious background, but this finding received less attention. The idea that these types of violence occur primarily, and even exclusively, in lower classes or anti-social families appeared to be based on prejudice. Characteristics other than the sociological typing of families and relationships emerge: when 'incest' occurs, families also suffer from an anti-sexual and emotionally impoverished climate. The children concerned are often subject to ill-treatment in addition to the sexual abuse (Draijer, 1988). These families are often 'closed off', they live in social isolation and in enmity towards the outside world; they are often families with a controlling and dominating father and a mother who is often passive, ill or psychologically absent (Mijlof, 1991). Social isolation is also characteristic of the relationships of women who are the victims of partner physical or sexual violence. Moreover, they are frequently confronted with force and social control, not by their fathers, but by their partners (Römken, 1989; see also Mastenbroek, 1995). Together these form distinguishing

aspects of relationships in those families and relationships where men can exert sexual and physical violence. Thus, we must look more precisely at the psychology, the implied relationship and family dynamics, which are not the exclusive preserve of a specific socioeconomic or cultural milieu. Eight in ten perpetrators are known to their victims: in girls, fathers, uncles or teachers are concerned; in women it can be partners, friends or, for example, social workers or clergymen. This means that abuse or violence takes place in relationships, and precisely in the most intimate relationships sexual and physical violence is not limited to a single incident. This conclusion leads to a number of highly relevant questions: why are men able to continue the abuse?, and, why are girls and women unable to stop the abuse? An important insight is that in these life-determinant relationships women and girls are caught in their feelings of loyalty and co-responsibility, guilt and feelings of shame.

The results of both projects supported government policy; at the same time, they created problems for that policy. The conclusion that physical and sexual violence is a serious and extensive problem provided government with the validation for further policy development and measures. However, the conclusion that violence should be linked to a processual and long-term dynamic in relationships remained an insight which showed to be more difficult to apply as a basis for policy. It would take some more years before this relationship dynamic – via a different concept – became manageable for government policy through the mass media information campaigns.

#### ON THE RESEARCH AND POLICY AGENDA: MULTIPLE POWER AND GROUPS AT RISK

The stubborn common-sensical attitude of 'didn't she lead him on?' was quickly revealed by feminists as part of the blaming the victim mechanism. However, the feminist response, in fact the same proposition in reverse, namely every woman is a potential victim of physical or sexual violence, and the underlying patriarchal analysis, are equally inadequate: they cannot explain why one woman is and other women are not actually hit by sexual or physical violence. The feminist patriarchal analysis was in need of revision in the late 1980s (see Draijer, 1988: 203ff.). The proposition became topical of whether certain women were more vulnerable and how that happens. Which groups are at more risk, and on what grounds? And in which situations and relationships are women more vulnerable? The question on distinguishing characteristics in perpetrators became topical in the same way: which (group of) men in which situations or relationships represented a potential danger? After all, what applies to women victims also applies to perpetrators: the patriarchal analysis is

also inadequate to distinguish actual perpetrators of physical and sexual violence from their fellows who do not perpetrate such acts. Within women's studies, researchers in subsequent studies asked why certain groups of women were at more risk, a question which is not asked in a patriarchal analysis. In analytical terms, the new questioning implies a refinement and more nuance in the applied power concept which can no longer be all embracing: one-sided power and dependency relationships are exchanged for an historic or specific and interactive approach (of relationships).

Shaping government policy now became easier, not least because the questions were more precise – as were the potential risk groups and situations – than appeared possible in the first instance based on the insight into the interwoven psychodynamic of physical and sexual violence. Following indications from women's assistance and social work, government now focused more on vulnerable groups of women and potential perpetrator groups, and again commissioned research, but among these already defined groups at risk, such as female migrants and refugees, and, for example, women and girls with a physical or mental handicap (*Emancipatie in het WVC-beleid*, 1991). It concerns women in especially dependent situations and exceptionally unequal relationships. For migrant women, that could be dependency in terms of residence permits whereby a divorce could result in deportation. Research shows the extreme denial of the occurrence of sexual abuse or physical violence in one's own group, which represents an additional impediment to talking about it or fleeing from violent relationships (see Deug, 1989; Lalmahomed, 1995). Additional risks are present for women with handicaps, research demonstrates, through the following factors: they more frequently find themselves in help-dependent situations, where health workers could exceed boundaries. Moreover, perpetrators make use of their physical limitations and of the prevalent prejudice that these women lack sexuality (Pijpers and Turkenburg, 1993, 1994; see also Kolk and Grünell, 1994). In terms of perpetrators, the ministry responsible for mental health care set the tone in the late 1980s by reminding certain professional groups, such as social workers and therapists, of their special responsibilities (*Seksueel geweld en het WVC-beleid*, 1988; see also GHI Bulletin, 1988). Female clients in social work situations, during medical examinations, therapy sessions or in psychiatric institutions are all in dependent situations and relationships and are, therefore, vulnerable: the extent to which that vulnerability is abused by therapists is the subject of research (see Aghassy and Noot, 1990; Glaser and Staver, 1991).

Unlike the vulnerability of these groups of women, the following example is less immediately obvious: it is not the client who is at risk, but the worker. Family helps are at great risk of being sexually intimidated by the male occupants of the houses where they work (Dijkstra,

1992; Gremmen, 1995). The organizations involved here claim one in three female home-helps have experienced sexual intimidation. An intriguing conclusion from this research is that dependent male clients intimidate and sexually attack women on whose work they are dependent. This kind of research provides specific insights into the workings of power and gender in sexual violence: his dependency on her work can be put in the balance. Why? Because the work has little status? Because it is carried out in the man's home, in his castle? Because institutions tend more quickly to protect the needy client rather than the female employee?

These examples show that power and dependency in (certain) relationships are always present, but that local research tailored to situations is needed in order to discover specific characteristics; clearly, power (to impose sexuality) and dependency or loyalty conflicts within relationships are always relevant, but must be localized precisely and continually. If the point of departure is that most male therapists behave themselves or that more often than not women with a handicap are treated decently, then the question why does it happen to one woman and not to another? remains unanswered. Perhaps this question cannot be answered at all. Nevertheless, a refinement of the power concept is needed to fathom the existence of more vulnerable groups of women and potential perpetrators; dependency or power inequality between the sexes appear in themselves to offer inadequate explanations. This conceptual development in research runs parallel to the results of more general, theoretical debates within women's studies on the concept of power. This debate circles around the question of whether power relationships between the sexes concern a specific type of power, and in my view leads to the provisional – and not uncontroversial – conclusion that power processes between men and women are not special in nature (see Leijenaar et al., 1987; Gremmen and Westerbeek van Eerten, 1988; Vogel, 1988).

This discussion and conceptual development can also be perceived in the way government is redefining sexual and physical violence. In 1991, the background to violence (which should be studied) is no longer linked exclusively to power inequalities between the sexes, but to power inequalities per se. This thinking in terms of inequalities – between adults and children, doctors and patients, and so on – leads to a redefinition of sexual violence as violence which is expressed in a sexual way, regardless of who it is perpetrated upon. In this way, according to van Delft et al. (1994: 83), the number of specific (victim) groups targeted by government increases. The main opposition in the policy on physical and sexual violence – that of men vs women and girls – could become less defined as a result. In the remainder of this article, however, it appears that if we want to understand and combat sexual violence, we must focus not only on specific power relations, but should certainly

take into account dominant patterns in a society which encourages sexual boundary excesses in men and boys. Recognition of the significance – throughout all special power relationships – of a dominant heterosexual pattern and the implied relational dynamics between the sexes will become the basis for the government's mass media information programme. In order to understand this step in government policy, we continue our story on multiple power and groups at risk, this time among the perpetrators of physical and sexual violence.

### PERPETRATORS AND THE DOMINANT HETEROSEXUAL PATTERN

Like government policy, feminist research focused initially on the phenomenon of violence and its – predominantly female – victims. Although men are responsible for the violence or abuse, but prompted partly by the prevailing patriarchal analysis, their guilt does not immediately evoke questions (for study). Bert van Herk, founder of the action group Men against Sexual Violence, an organization which raised little response in its target membership – males – is the first in the Netherlands to bring up the issue of the extent to which sexual and physical violence is part of the dominant heterosexual script (van Herk, 1985). It is a question through which men as a category could again become the subject of research but without being fossilized as patriarchy. Van Herk criticized the existing tradition of clinical studies among the small group of convicted perpetrators in which their pathological characters are the centre of analysis and thus their extreme exceptionality. He attempts to place the more broad-based, the more day-to-day sexual violence which usually never makes the courts in the perspective of current images of and messages on male heterosexuality.

In the early 1990s, we knew with some certainty that the majority of perpetrators of physical and sexual violence were so-called 'normal' men from all socioeconomic milieus. Around half of the perpetrators of sexual violence are under 25 (Spanjaard, 1992). A more vulnerable group at risk is the girls and boys who embark on their first – sexual – exploration. It appears that initial sexual contacts are not concerned primarily with innocent experiments, which – as is often assumed – are part of the ordinary puberty experience. More than one-third of enforced uninvited experiences are rapes; one-quarter of cases relate to assault (Marneth, 1991). Lack of experience leads boys and also girls to lean heavily on the dominant sexual script in which men initiate, dominate and exceed boundaries and women anticipate, adjust and give in. This colours their negotiations on 'how far to go': her role is to guard boundaries, his is to exceed them (Marneth, 1990). Moreover, it is a pattern

which is maintained by group behaviour, both by girls and by boys, as the study by Cremer (1995) shows. In the group, the boys are tough and the girls submissive, the great ladies' man or the innocent young thing and never the slut. Thus, both gender stereotyping and the double standard are reinforced in the day-to-day interaction of groups of boys or girls. As they indicate so clearly poor interaction between genders, these research results emphasize the importance of research on the perception, experience and actions of boys and men, in which understanding is still not the same as excusing. It appears that a combination of uncertainty and a dominant heterosexual pattern and its implied relational dynamics among boys and girls encourages – very serious – sexual boundary excesses in men and boys.

In an overview study, Spanjaard cautiously indicates three socio-psychological and cultural factors linked to committing sexual violence. He points out the significance of socialization of boys into men. In this process, an important place is occupied by prevalent attributes of masculinity – independent, dominant and active, all elements which are valued highly in society. In contrast, feminine attributes – weak, vulnerable and submissive – rate low evaluation. Having power, in the sense of control, plays a central role in the development of a male identity and in interaction between boys and in their interaction with girls. Finally, he points out the prevalent attitudes to sexuality and violence: the use of force to gain sex – something men assume they are entitled to – is accepted by men (Spanjaard, 1992). The broad acceptance of force by men is elaborated in the study entitled 'Between Seduction and Rape' (Beelen, 1989). The project shows the myriad (coercive) strategies and means used and considered acceptable by men to persuade their partner to have sex. Beelen's subsequent project took as its hypothesis that rape is not an abnormal or marginal phenomenon; its aim was to study rape as a commonplace phenomenon embedded in daily interaction. He wanted to explore male motives in applying coercive strategies: how do they validate and rationalize their actions? This project, formulated in the late 1980s, did not receive funding at that time; the relevance to policy was not (yet) recognized by the concerned Ministry of Welfare. Moreover, there was a dilemma: should research on men be funded from women's emancipation budgets?

In 1995, not only was this dilemma tackled at government level, but the relevance of this type of research was also recognized. Studies on perpetrators became part of the Ministry of Social Affairs' research programme, which has jurisdiction over emancipation policy. The emergence or repetition of violence

... can probably be seen in the context of 'scripts' or 'scenarios' of behaviours prevalent between men and women. For a better understanding of the (re)production of sexual violence, a reversal of the usual approach is

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desirable, that is from a victim to a perpetrator and interaction approach. The research on this different approach will be used as basis for the development of preventative policy. (*Onderzoeksprogramma SZW 1995*, 1995: 16)

The main point here is primary prevention of sexual violence. In other words, ridding the world of sexual violence. And that was one of the aims and slogans of the first radical feminist action groups. The extent of and assistance to victims was likened to mopping up under a running tap, while government policy focused initially on secondary prevention – victim help and support – alongside increasing women's and girls' ability to defend themselves (see also van Delft et al., 1994). In the meantime, an exhausting amount of feminist energy has been put into victim support and assistance, while from 1991 government has added its voice to opposing sexual and physical violence through public information campaigns, including those via the mass media. These campaigns address those primarily responsible – men and boys as potential perpetrators. Before government was prepared to take responsibility for that message, a mass of research material collated without direct support from the authorities had to be generated to underpin the link between the dominant heterosexual pattern, the daily interaction or relational dynamics between the sexes and the broad acceptance by boys and men of coercion.

#### THE WOMEN'S AND MEN'S STUDIES AGENDA

By allowing the subject of sexual and physical violence onto the political agenda, by initiating research and by addressing professional bodies on the subject, the Dutch government has turned a feminist action issue into an issue of general interest. Obviously, this does not mean it is not without controversy, but that applies to more political subjects. The beginnings of this process of acceptance by government was clearly prompted by a feminist politician who was secretary of state for emancipation policy for less than a year. Yet, in that brief period, she brought an action issue in from the street to the corridors of power and established it on the political agenda. Her successor was able to find the right formulation which would gain support from the liberal Christian governing coalition. The definition of the problem lost its patriarchal power dimension, but on the other hand gained ground because the physical integrity of women in the private sphere became an accepted object of government's intervention. So the misuse of power by men in the private sphere, a cornerstone of patriarchy, ultimately came up against the law. Kappeyne, the liberal successor to the social democrat d'Ancona, not only found the right formulation, she also pursued the initiated policy consistently, both in policy and in research. Through their carefully considered memoranda referring to



research results, civil servants, often with a feminist movement background, ensured the political light remained green and that continuity and acceptance were preserved in the ministries involved – Social Affairs, Welfare and Justice. The mass media's disbelief couldn't break this broad and coherent cooperation. In this way, a previously unofficial 'private terrain' became a new responsibility for government, and thus a policy area.

Women's studies scholars played a decisive role in defining the problem (differently). When women's studies had signalled 'gaps in knowledge', it subsequently filled in these gaps. Initially, government provided the space and financial means for this. These were fully utilized immediately: women's studies scholars researched the problem, redefined the problem, gave an indication of the extent of the problem and explored the serious consequences for women. Thus, women's studies became a interlocutor to be taken seriously in the field of subsidized research, a field to which government is committed. But, similarly to other fields, research here does not only produce answers, it also generates new questions. Based on its own research, women's studies scholars have exchanged a patriarchal analysis for a more dynamic power analysis which no longer places women (as victims) against all men (as perpetrators). Women's studies scholars have subsequently carried out more precise research on specific relationships and situations in which women can be hit by violence and men can become perpetrators. The introduction of multiple and mutual power relations is reflected in the concept of groups at risk in government policy. In this way, government has expanded its focus to cover a variety of groups at risk and situations which can be risky. The discerned significance of the psychodynamic in (family) relationships in which physical and sexual violence recurs has in time been recognized by government as relevant to policy. The importance to policy of research on perpetrators from a sociopsychological rather than clinical psychological perspective has also been recognized, but only after some time. This became apparent in the preparations for mass media public information programmes in 1991 where interaction between the sexes is linked to a dominant heterosexual pattern. In all special power relations, gender remains a decisive and unravelable factor.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, a review by Doomen of memoranda issued in 1983, 1984 and 1985, in *Tijdschrift voor Vrouwenstudies*, 1986: No. 2).
2. From 1970, a government commission was engaged to revise moral legislation in order to ensure potential victims rather than 'good morals' were protected. It published its final report in 1980; a further 11 years were



- needed before a number of its proposals led to changes in the law (see also Goldschmidt and Holtmaat, 1993: 164ff.).
3. In the wake of the sexual liberalization movement government provided a subsidy in the late 1960s for the establishment of a research institute aimed specifically at the study of sexuality. The institute's reports exude an atmosphere of – albeit from a male perspective – openness and curiosity about sexuality, a subject that had received almost no attention in Dutch research until that date.
  4. Prostitution and pornography as sexual violence were quickly disputed. My perception is that after a number of years (of discussion) a consensus was reached that limited the violent nature of the forced circumstances under which prostitution and pornography with adults can take place. Over the years, government has subsidized both the Red Line, a prostitutes' trade union, and the Anti-Traffic in Women Foundation.
  5. A third study focused on sexual intimidation; the aim was to make visible sexual violence in work situations and women's options for resistance (de Bruijn and Timmerman, 1986; see also Timmerman, 1990). A fourth project looked at (the lack of) therapeutic openness in existing psychological and psychiatric counselling (Frenken and van Stolk, 1987).
  6. Draijer (1988) defines sexual abuse as follows: if sexual contact occurs against the will of the girl, or if she cannot refuse these contacts because of emotional pressure, physical or relational ascendancy or force and/or (the threat of) violence from the perpetrator. This is a 'strict' definition: there must have been actual physical contact.
  7. Physical violence is defined by Römken (1989) as actions which represent an invasion of a person's physical integrity and/or inflict pain or injury against the will of the victim. She talks of 'forced sexuality' if physical violence is used to induce women to sexual intercourse.
  8. See Draijer (1990), Langeland and van der Vlugt (1990), Langeland and Draijer (1991) and Römken (1989, 1992). For boys, the estimate is that between 5 and 10 percent experience some form of sexual abuse, sometimes from relatives, but usually from men or older boys outside the family. Female perpetrators are an exception (Spanjaard, 1992; Dijkstra, 1995).

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