

claims that the relationship between Adam and Eve is the foundation of civilization. The bible also explicitly states that a man should not lie with a man as he lies with a woman. As a society that rests on Christian foundations, marriage in America must be restricted to heterosexuality in order to preserve its moral and social coherence. Those who are against gay marriage also believe that heterosexual marriage provides the right moral environment for a healthy family. Marriage encourages family values such as monogamy, respect for authority, and the importance of the differences between men and women. Homosexuals are stereotyped as being unable to have stable relationships and dangerous to healthy gender development in children. For many critics, homosexuality is the very antithesis of a healthy family and society.

The pro-gay marriage side argues that, whether or not gays and lesbians want to marry, they should have the right to decide. The argument from the anti-gay marriage side that marriage is a religious matter is misleading. In fact, marriage is a civic or legal relationship between the two individuals and the government. Marital status confers more than 1,400 government-recognized rights and benefits. Individuals may choose to have a religious marriage, but the institution of marriage is a secular legal affair. Moreover, it is important to note that those who argue for gay marriage continue to define marriage as, ideally, a long-term, loving commitment that should be valued and respected. Other than having a same-sex partner, they believe that many gays are already in such long-term relationships or wish to commit to relationships based on shared love and commitment. Also, pro-gay marriage advocates argue that, since the right to marry is viewed as part of being a first-class citizen, denying this right to gays consigns them to a second-class status.

There is a third party to the gay marriage debate, the so called "queer" position. The term "queer" is less a sexual identity than a viewpoint that questions the privileging of certain specific social norms, identities, and institutions as normal and beyond question. Queers are critical of marriage because it is the one intimate arrangement that the state sanctions as natural and preferable. What's wrong with this? Queers argue that, by conferring recognition and rights on marriage, the state renders all other non-marital relationships as inferior. A state-recognized institution of marriage creates a division between marriage, which is respectable, good, even ideal, and other intimate and family arrangements which are less than ideal, if not viewed as deviant and abnormal. Queers also make the compelling point that it's not only gays and lesbians who are disadvantaged by associating marriage with many exclusive benefits, but the poor and many non-white people are disadvantaged because less of them marry. In sum, queers do not advocate the inclusion of gays and lesbians into the institution of marriage, but the extension of full marital benefits to all who need them.

The controversy of gay marriage is complicated, and, as I hope to have shown, it affects people of all sexual orientations. Fortunately, whether or not gays are eventually able to marry, the dispute does not stop us from deciding who we choose to love, in what ways, and for however long.

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## Gay men and lesbians in the Netherlands

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Since the 1970s the Netherlands can be regarded as one of the most liberal countries with regard to sexual politics. It transformed from a country that was strongly religious and conservative in sexual morals to one that is highly secular and liberal in affairs of sexual morality. Around 1970, the Dutch changed from positions that rejected divorce, pornography, prostitution, homosexuality, contraception, teenage sexuality to more liberal views on all these topics. The change of climate was followed by a change in laws. Divorce was made easier, pornography and prostitution were decriminalized and contraception was made generally available. The criminal law, containing different ages of consent for homosexual and heterosexual sex (21 versus 16 years), was changed; both were set at 16. Contraceptives were made available to all postpubescent women in the 1970s and became part of medical care provisions.

Amsterdam has known a vibrant gay culture since the 1950s and its Red Light District has become a major tourist attraction. In 1973, gays and lesbians were allowed to serve in the army. Marriage was opened for same-sex couples in 2001, the Netherlands being the first country to do so. Prostitution became legal in 2000. However, street prostitution is strictly controlled in the towns where it is permitted, and many city councils have forbidden it. The existing bordellos are regulated for reasons of safety, health, policing and taxing. Cities cannot outlaw them, as prostitution is regarded as normal labor.

Why exactly these changes took place in the Netherlands during the sixties and seventies is not entirely clear, but they have had such a tremendous impact. The liberal sexual culture of the Dutch is partly a result of a political culture that is based on the idea of the separation of state and church. Sexual affairs are viewed as the private business of Dutch citizens and should not be regulated by the state. The Dutch inherited this secular model of political culture from the French.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s had a powerful impact on the Netherlands. In part, this relates to a broad change that occurred in the Netherlands, the so called depillarization of society. Until the 1960s, the Netherlands had a type of social organization in which all citizens were members of a distinct community or "pillar" – Roman Catholic, Protestant or Humanist. These "pillars" were encompassing for the individual. For example, each had its own schools, church, media, political representatives, and culture. This community-based social order collapsed in the sixties as a result of increased social and spatial mobility, individualism, creeping secularism, and the rise of a national media. The two social groups (pillars)

that had been most in favor of a strict sexual morality, the Catholics and the orthodox Reformed Calvinists, were influenced by psychiatrists and social workers to reconsider their sexual beliefs and values. In the course of the sixties, these religious orthodox groups relaxed their ideas of sexual morality. This change of opinion among the more orthodox groups made it easier for the majority of the population to support a liberal sexual morality.

Of course, the sixties also witnessed the rise of the youth, student and feminist movements that supported sexual choice and variation. The relative strength of the sexual reform movements, and the lack of resistance by religious and political authorities, resulted in a rather easy transition to a liberal sexual culture. Parallel to this development, Dutch society became highly secular (nowadays 50% of the population are non-believers) while the religious pillars and parties lost their predominant position. A fundamental value change occurred, resulting in the fact that since the 1980s the Dutch are among the most "post-materialist," liberal people of the world. There is a new, moral majority of a clear progressive signature.

### The rise of a gay and lesbian movement

In 1969, psychiatrist Wijnand Sengers declared that homosexuality was not a pathological problem, but that homosexuals nevertheless could have psychological problems just like heterosexuals. His research concluded that he could not find one convincing case of a homosexual whose sexual orientation had been changed to heterosexual. It would be better to help homosexuals to adapt to their preferences and social situation, which included referring them to gay organizations. He was not the first to declare that homosexuality was not a disease, but this time his profession accepted this position. He set out to help homosexuals.

At the same time, priests and clergymen set out to tell the public that the homosexual should be accepted. There was still a discussion whether homosexuals should live a chaste life, but the general feeling among clergy was that they should be accepted. In 1971, the parliament decided to get rid of the only existing criminal law targeting homosexuals. Until the sixties homosexuality was generally considered to be a sin, crime, and disease and now, within 10 years, it was none of these things. This was a radical change.

These changes led to discussions in the gay and lesbian movement about their social and political goals. Generally, the movement favored the aim of social integration and acceptance. However, the Federation of Student Working Groups on Homosexuality and later the lesbian groups, Purple September and Lesbian Nation, and the male group Red Faggots, criticized integration as the chief goal of the movement. These more radical groups advocated that society be changed allowing for greater visibility and acceptance of sexual and gender variation. The issue of whether gays and lesbians should seek assimilation or social change remains a point of debate to this day. The heterosexual population may have embraced gays and lesbians in their roles as sons and daughters, and as comedians on television but, radicals argue, isn't Holland still overwhelmingly heterosexual?

Actually, a homosexual movement in Holland began as early as 1946, but it really took off in the sixties. Initially, the major organization was the Culture and Recreation Center, which, in 1964, became the Dutch Society for Homophiles COC and in 1971 Dutch Society for Integration of Homosexuality COC. It became a serious cultural and political force that attracted general attention. In 1967, the Schorer Foundation was established to provide psychological care for homosexuals. Before the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, the movement had already succeeded in becoming a part of society and the government. Gay

and lesbian groups were established in political parties, trade unions, universities, the army and the police, medical care, and the churches. And, with the AIDS crisis, and its rippling effects throughout society, the government, medical authorities and representatives of the gay movement met and set up a committee that would prepare medical care, prevention activities and counseling. Gays and lesbians were becoming part of the government. Soon, the first openly gay politicians were elected and the agenda of gay rights was now on the agenda of the state.

Since the early eighties, the annual gay parade has moved from Amsterdam to other towns, following the logic that such a demonstration of gay and lesbian visibility was more important for people in the provinces. When it was held in 1982 in Amersfoort, centrally located on the Dutch Bible Belt, local youth attacked gays and lesbians and unprecedented violence broke out. It created uproar in Dutch media and politics and led to the enactment of gay and lesbian anti-discrimination policies on a local and national level. Soon there passed an Equal Rights Law (1993) that extended equal legal, social security, housing, pension, legacy, and asylum rights to gays and lesbians.

In many respects, AIDS proved a turning point. Cooperation between the gay and lesbian movement and local and national authorities took place. This cooperation followed the Dutch model of bringing representatives of "minority" groups or communities into the government with the aim of eliminating discrimination or establishing tolerance and equality. In this case, gays and lesbians were appointed to take responsibility for political decisions regarding AIDS and gay/lesbian rights. The system worked generally well, but raised dissenting voices. Nonetheless, openly gay men and lesbians were represented in various political bodies. Eleven of the 150 Dutch MP's (member of parliament) in 2000 were openly gay or lesbian. The question remains though what this type of political representation means for establishing real equality and acceptance.

Since the early 1980s a strong subculture – more for gays than for lesbians – developed: gay and lesbian sport clubs got for instance a strong stimulus from the Gay Games that were held in Amsterdam in 1998. In general, it was non-political groups that flourished, such as organizations for hikers, traditional dancers, lovers of old timers, book clubbers, and so on.

### Same-sex marriage

When the issue of homosexuality and marriage first hit the Dutch media in 1968, it was estimated that about 90,000 homosexuals were in straight marriages. Although doctors had often advised homosexuals to marry to get rid of their homosexual desires, this strategy was seen as wrong from the late 1960s on. Marriage would not change sexual orientation and married homosexuals made their partners, children and themselves unhappy.

Through AIDS and the urgent medical problems it created, gay men had learned the importance of legal recognition for issues such as housing, social security, hospital visits, pensions, and inheritance. Although some social institutions and businesses offered something like domestic partnership benefits, these benefits did not include national rights and benefits. After several years of steady social and political pressure, "registered partnerships" were established for both same-sex and other-sex couples in 1997. Giving full marital rights was a step too far for the liberal-socialist government at that time. But three years later its successor administration decided to open up marriage for same-sex couples and give them the same rights as other-sex couples. The first marriages of gays and lesbians were celebrated in Amsterdam on April 1, 2001. The large majority of the population now supports gay

marriage, and even the Christian-democratic party, which initially opposed the law, now accepts it and has even an openly gay married man as MP.

### The question of identity and politics today

When it comes to identity, most gays and lesbians in the Netherlands prefer to keep it low key. They will often say, "my homosexuality is just one part of my personality." However, the attention in the media to critical pronouncements by imams on homosexuality, and a growing awareness of antigay violence, especially among recent immigrant communities, makes it clear that homosexual emancipation is an ongoing project: legal change has not guaranteed social change. Some gays and lesbians will now be open and visible, while others decide to stay in the closet out of fear of consequences, for example, teachers.

The absence of strong sexual identities parallels the lack of spatially concentrated gay and lesbian communities. The bigger towns in the Netherlands have their "gay districts," mainly places where bars are located. These locations, however, are always used for other public functions as well. The Amsterdam leather district, for example, is in the Red Light District where English hooligans, tourists and the people who come for the world of prostitution sometimes mix uneasily with the leather men. Although many gay men live in the inner cities, they have not created "ghettos." This is difficult because housing associations and urban authorities distribute most housing in cities. Most Dutch gays and lesbians also have little inclination to live in exclusively gay or lesbian neighborhoods. The same holds true for social life. Partly as a result of Dutch tolerance, gay men and lesbians often choose to live in places that are gay-friendly. Also in the Netherlands gays and lesbians tend to migrate from places where they face intolerance and discrimination to places that are more gay-friendly. This lessens the necessity for them to create their own organizations. The main field of special socializing, apart from the world of bars, has become sport. Even in this sphere, most sports organizations will proudly declare that they welcome straight people.

Also, gays and lesbians are under pressure from straight people and the media not to create separate organizations because "we are so tolerant that you don't need them." This is the common line when gays and lesbians organize their own institutions and events, for example with the Gay Games in 1998. Since the decline of the time when the Dutch were organized into distinct communities (pillars), liberal and progressive Dutch have been critical of attempts to create separate communities by Muslims, ethnic minorities or homosexuals.

With the opening up of marriage for same-sex couples there are no provisions in civil or criminal law that discriminate against homosexuals. The legal fight for gay rights is effectively at an end. As a result, most Dutch citizens believe that homosexual emancipation is finished. They argue that there is no longer any need for a movement. But these legal changes have proved no guarantee for social acceptance of gays and lesbians. Several reports made clear that teachers have become less willing to come out of the closet and that gay men have to face verbal and physical abuse in certain urban neighborhoods, especially those with a high percentage of ethnic minorities. The self-congratulatory complacency that has become a landmark in Dutch discussions on homosexual emancipation appears to be unrealistic. Homosexuality is still a problem. Authorities such as school boards or policemen continue to refuse to defend gay and lesbian rights. Since the Gay Games, many straight and some gay people say that gays and lesbians should not be so open so as not to offend others. And, some people say, that given the availability of bars and discos and marital options for gays and lesbians, they don't need to flaunt their sexual expressions in public

A chief source of conflict around homosexuality concerns the Muslim community. Keep in mind that about 10% of the Dutch population are recent immigrants. The major groups are Surinamese, Turks and Moroccans. Almost all of these immigrants are Muslim. Within the Muslim religious community homosexuality is condemned. The first ethnic party with a political program, the Arab-European League, has identified three main targets: prostitution, homosexuality and alcohol. Not only has the Muslim community challenged the Dutch culture of tolerance but it has made being gay very hard for Muslim individuals. Recently, they have established their own bars in Amsterdam. Gay Muslims also established a successful foundation "Yoesuf," which provides information on Islam and homosexuality, organizes workshops and offers social support.

### Sexual attitudes now

The Dutch are highly ambivalent about the gains of the sexual revolution. They are citizens of the country that most profited from it, but often people complain that "we have gone too far" or "perhaps we should return to the morality of the fifties when Holland was a safe and pleasant country." Gay cruising areas have become controversial and as the public demands their closure, some city governments comply. Women who are "promiscuous" are still labeled "sluts." Erotic postcards, that staple of the Amsterdam tourist industry, had to be removed from visible places on the streets after complaints of some tourists. At the same time, women prostitutes who are visible in Red Light Districts are spared criticism. The reputation of Amsterdam as a gay or sex capital is somewhat in decline. Tourist Information Boards are reluctant to provide the relevant information although half of the visitors to Amsterdam come for the Red Light District or gay venues. Notwithstanding all changes that have occurred in the field of moral politics, the Dutch continue to feel unease and ambivalence when it comes to the day-to-day concerns of sexuality.

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