

Falling Between Two Stools: The Difficult Emancipation of Bisexuality in The Netherlands¹

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Over the last decade, media attention for bisexuality has increased in The Netherlands. Especially among younger people there appears to be more openness and tolerance for bisexual feelings and behavior. Also, a growing number of individuals seem to identify themselves as bisexual. Has there indeed been a change in attitudes and behaviors involving bisexuality? In order to answer this question, the authors rely on a combination of historical and sociological approaches. First, they offer a historical overview of the sexological conceptualization of bisexuality. Second, they analyze the questions and the results of a number of sociological surveys on sexual attitudes and behavior. Third, the authors present a case study of how bisexual feelings and behavior were interpreted by readers and editors of a Dutch magazine popular among a young female readership.

KEYWORDS bisexuality, Netherlands, sexual attitudes, sexual behavior, sexual identity, adolescents, popular magazines, advice columns

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, media attention for bisexuality—the sexual preference for men and women—has increased in The Netherlands. This is reflected in a variety of media, such as video clips, popular magazines, the Internet, soap operas, talk shows, and other television programs. Especially among younger people there appears to be more openness and tolerance for

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bisexual feelings and behavior. Also, a growing number of individuals seem to identify themselves as bisexual. Has there indeed been a change in attitudes and behaviors involving bisexuality?

Changes in attitudes and behavior can be investigated in different ways. Our argument about bisexuality relies on a combination of historical and sociological approaches as well as discourse analysis. First, we offer a historical overview of the international sexological conceptualization of bisexuality from the late 19th century until the present. Second, we analyze the questions and the results of a number of sociological surveys on sexual attitudes and behavior in The Netherlands, which date from the period 1968 to 2005. In the third part of the article, we present a case study of how bisexual feelings and behavior were interpreted in the period 1989 to 2005 by readers and editors of a Dutch magazine popular among a young female readership.

SEXOLOGICAL CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

Contemporary concepts and categories regarding sexuality do not reflect some given natural order but are the result of historical developments in which psychiatry and psychoanalysis played a major role (Bullough, 1994; Davidson, 2001; Foucault, 1985; Greenberg, 1988; Oosterhuis, 2000; Weeks, 1985). From around 1870 a major change took place in conceptualizations of sexuality considered to be deviant. Attention shifted from behaviors long regarded as sinful or criminal to the presumed abnormal and pathological traits of the perpetrators. Different 'perversions' were in fact named, such as homosexuality, fetishism, exhibitionism, sadism, masochism, voyeurism, pedophilia, bestiality, and necrophilia. 'Bisexuality,' however, was not on this list. Not seen as a separate sexual category until somewhat into the 20th century, bisexuality was mostly linked to explanations for homosexuality (Gooss, 1995, pp. 1–2).

Well into the 19th century, the term 'sexuality' pointed not only to sexual desire or behavior as such, but also to sex in the sense of being male or female. Specific physical features were deemed to determine sex, the corresponding social gender role, as well as the direction of sexual drives. Sexual drive was understood in terms of polarity and attraction between masculinity and femininity (Mak, 1997, p. 244; Oosterhuis, 2000, pp. 40–41). In this context, late 19th-century physicians understood homosexual desires and behaviors as symptoms of a pathological confusion of male and female sex as well as gender. In their view men who felt attracted to men had female sex and gender traits, whereas women who were attracted to women were masculine. In this logic, a homosexual object choice was evidence of a feminine 'soul' in a largely male body, or vice versa. Terms such as sexual inversion, third sex, *sexuelle Zwischenstufen* [intermediate

sexual stages], *conträre Sexualempfindung* [contrary sexual feelings], and psychosexual hermaphroditism, which preceded what was later commonly known as homosexuality, underline the close connection between sex and gender on the one hand and sexuality on the other (Marshall, 1981). This presumed connection was underpinned by the theory of evolution and embryological research, which argued that originally human beings were sexually indeterminate or 'bisexual.' Development of the species (phylogenesis) and the embryo (ontogenesis) would be marked by ever-increasing sexual differentiation. Hermaphroditism, homosexuality, transsexuality, and transvestism were understood as more or less similar deviations of this developmental pattern.

Against this backdrop, bisexuality initially designated mankind's original sexual indeterminacy. The meaning of bisexuality overlapped with that of hermaphroditism, and it primarily pertained to different physical and mental gradations and mixtures of masculinity and femininity. Biologists and physicians referred to bisexuality to explain various deviations (or variants) in the area of sex (hermaphroditism, androgyny, transsexuality, and transvestism) and sexuality (notably homosexuality). However, because of the assumption that sexual desire is about polar attraction between, and mutual complementing of, masculinity and femininity, bisexuality did not develop—like heterosexuality and homosexuality—into a sexual category in and of itself. The prevailing tendency in medical–psychiatric thought about individuals who felt attracted to both sexes was to view their desire as homosexuality *manqué* or pseudohomosexuality.

In the early 20th century, sexologists began to question sexual mixture as a common explanation for homosexuality and bisexuality. In particular, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis played a major role, notably because his conceptualization of bisexuality is ambiguous. In line with medical sexology of his era, he assumed the existence of an inborn bisexuality, in the sense of double sex (having male as well as female traits). On the other hand, he considered bisexuality as a transitional phase in individual psychosexual development, in which the undifferentiated sexual drives are mentally processed, culminating in a differentiated sexual attraction to either the other sex or one's own. Freud never clarified how bisexuality as an undifferentiated sex predisposition and as an undifferentiated sexual desire was precisely interrelated. Likewise, it is unclear whether he postulated an inborn bisexual orientation or a bisexual transitional phase in sexual development between infantile, polymorphous perverse drives and mature, goal-oriented sexuality. Freud was also ambivalent when it came to evaluating hetero-, homo-, and bisexuality. Although he emphatically referred to the homosexual object choice as not pathological, he did not put it in the same category as heterosexual object choice, which continued to be the prevailing norm in psychoanalysis. The bisexual object choice, in Freud's approach, was no more than a transitional phase on the road to heterosexual and (if need be) homosexual

identification (Angelides, 2001, pp. 61–62; Gooss, 1995, pp. 50, 52, 55–57, 62; Katz, 1995, pp. 72–74, 78; Weeks, 1985, pp. 152, 155).

In the course of the 20th century, leading American psychoanalysts in particular explained a homosexual or bisexual object choice in terms of an infantile fixation and neurotic developmental disorder. Problems in the relationship between mother and child would constitute a major cause for the emergence of a homosexual or bisexual preference, whereby the second was seen as a mild and partly latent form of the first, and both were linked to suppressed heterosexuality. More specifically, psychoanalysts viewed bisexuality as a not yet fully developed form of homosexuality, which could still be treated and reversed (Angelides, 2001, pp. 73–75, 78–100; Gooss, 1995, pp. 80–86).

In the 1960s, European psychoanalysts, unlike their American counterparts, developed an interest in Freud's idea that in essence all people have heterosexual and homosexual desires. At the same time, most of them stressed that the existence of this bisexual potential did not mean that all people are in fact bisexual. Differentiation of sexual desire in childhood or puberty would be decisive for human psychosexual development. This perspective enabled a view of homosexuality as a disorder, as well as a basic juxtaposition of heterosexuality and homosexuality, but regardless of the valuation of bisexual desire, it was mostly seen as a not fully developed form or disguise of homosexuality. Although psychoanalysis contributed to a distinction of bisexuality as sexual undifferentiatedness and as sexual object choice, it did not consider bisexuality to be a separate category or identity (Gooss, 1995, pp. 52–68; Marshall, 1981, p. 151).

The results of the influential survey study of human sexuality led by the American zoologist and sexologist Alfred Kinsey in the 1940s and 1950s, presented in *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Beghard, 1953), brought about a major change in the approach to bisexuality. In Kinsey et al.'s behaviorist perspective, the emphasis was on behavior and desire, whereas the meaning of sexual categories and identities was deemphasized. To classify sexual behaviors, he used a continuous spectrum, with heterosexual activities and homosexual ones as extremes and five transitional intervals in between. Kinsey argued that individual sexual desires and behaviors did not always perfectly match each other and could shift during people's lives. Homosexual behavior of presumed heterosexuals proved quite common, whereas a bisexual behavioral pattern, in which people with changing intensity engaged in heterosexual and homosexual contacts, was far from rare. Kinsey's study revealed that heterosexuality and homosexuality, viewed in terms of attraction and behavior, are not separate, clearly demarcated categories for characterizing and classifying persons. Rather, there were only various combinations of heterosexual and homosexual behaviors and feelings. In his view, the frequent occurrence of bisexual

behavior and feeling points to a general bisexual predisposition, which through social–cultural conditioning can be expressed more or less in actual behavior. A tripartite division of hetero-, homo-, and bisexuals, he argued, reflects the continuity of human sexuality as poorly as the dichotomy between heterosexual and homosexual does. Nevertheless, Kinsey's work was highly significant for people who did see themselves as bisexual. The uncovering of the gap between actual sexual behavior and prevailing morality revealed that many people showed heterosexual and homosexual behavior. Moreover, significantly, Kinsey did not describe this as abnormal or pathological (Angelides, 2001, pp. 113–120; Gooss, 1995, pp. 73–75; Kinsey et al., 1948).

In the 1970s, in the wake of the sexual revolution, the second feminist wave, and gay liberation, more attention was directed to bisexuality. Influenced by the women's movement, a growing number of women, as well as men who sympathized with them, defined themselves partly for political reasons as bisexual (Gooss, 1995, pp. 90–91; Weeks, 1985, pp. 16, 19–28, 31–32). Bisexuality also played a role in the emancipation of homosexuals. With reference to Freud and Kinsey, several ideologues of gay liberation submitted that the strict boundary between heterosexual and homosexual, and the interrelated marginalization of homosexuality, were part of a more general social–cultural suppression of a natural bisexuality and androgyny. In practice, however, homosexual emancipation and the development of the gay subculture, particularly for men, did not so much lead to wider acceptance of bisexuality, but to a strengthening of a separate homosexual identity and thus an emphasis on the dichotomy between heterosexual and homosexual. Not the presumed bisexual overlap between homosexuals and heterosexuals but the specificity of homosexuality came to center stage. Within the gay movement and subculture, the emphasis on militant homosexual identity and coming-out soon led to a marginalization of those who understood themselves to be bisexual (Angelides, 2001, pp. 120–128; Gooss, 1995, pp. 90–92).

Still, in the 1970s and 1980s, slightly more room became available for bisexuality as a specific form of sexual experience. A growing number of men and women began to define themselves as bisexual, and some began to organize themselves—separately from the women's movement and gay movement—in discussion and action groups, first in the United States and subsequently in Europe. In 1991, the first International Bisexual Conference, held in Amsterdam, aimed to promote the acceptance of bisexuality as a separate sexual orientation. This self-organization was hardly noticed by the outside world, until in the 1980s the spread of AIDS among gay men prompted growing attention to bisexuality. This attention was related to the fear that AIDS, via bisexual behavior of gay men, would be transmitted to heterosexuals (Angelides, 2001, p. 119; Gooss, 1995, pp. 90–95, 115).

Various empirical studies of bisexuality led to discussions about whether it constituted a specific predisposition and authentic preference or temporary,

passing, and/or learned behavior, whereby a role was played by the time of puberty (as sexually a not yet fully differentiated stage), special circumstances, 'seduction,' or 'choice.' The first possibility (predisposition) implied the existence of a separate bisexual category, whereas the second one (passing behavior) implied that those involved were in fact not bisexuals, but rather hetero- or homosexuals who suppressed their 'true' sexual nature or who arrived at bisexual behavior through special circumstances or personality traits (Gooss, 1995, pp. 102–104, 115, 122, 131–133). Although the scientific views diverged and different forms of bisexuality were distinguished, in 1991 the World Health Organization recognized bisexuality as an autonomous category in addition to homosexuality and heterosexuality.

At the end of the 20th century, it was possible to distinguish six scientific perspectives on bisexuality. The first considers bisexuality as temporary, passing phenomenon: it involves heterosexuals who temporarily, at a certain stage of their life—notably puberty and adolescence—or in certain circumstances engage in homosexual contacts. In the second, bisexuality is seen as a transitional phase from heterosexual to homosexual identification, as a prior stage of homosexual coming-out. The third perspective refers to homosexuals who would suppress their inclination, or so-called defensive bisexuals. These first three approaches postulate a fundamental dichotomy between homosexuality and heterosexuality and consider bisexual behavior as expression of an immature, not (yet) fully differentiated, sexuality. The shared assumption is that bisexuality constitutes no separate sexual orientation and identity; people who see themselves as bisexual would be 'pseudo'-bisexuals by definition.

According to the fourth perspective, that of Kinsey, fixed sexual categories do not exist, and therefore the notion of bisexuality, just like heterosexuality and homosexuality, only pertains to certain behaviors. The fifth approach draws a link (again) between bisexual object choice and sex/gender. For example, the sexologist Charlotte Wolff (1979) argued that bisexual preference is tied to an androgynous desire to cancel sexual difference. Her view, formulated in 1979, reminds one of the late 19th-century concept of 'psychic hermaphroditism,' which referred to a form of homosexuality that did not exclude heterosexuality. The sixth perspective was put forward from the late 1970s onward when some psychiatrists, psychologists, psychoanalysts, and social scientists began to argue that bisexuality is a sexual category and identity in its own right (Friedman, 1988; Klein, 1978; Ross, 1983a, 1983b, 1985; Ross & Paul, 1992; Rust, 1995, 2002). According to some of them, among bisexuals there are many individuals whose sexual object choices stem from features other than sex or gender, such as particular physical characteristics or personal qualities. The psychoanalyst Richard Friedman (1988) claims that puberty is a critical phase in sexual development because at that stage a differentiation of sexual fantasy occurs. In contrast to classic psychoanalysis, however, he feels that the outcome of this differentiation consists of three

possible mature sexual 'fantasy-self-structures': homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual. Once differentiated, orientations would no longer change. In contrast to the first four approaches, the two last perspectives imply an acknowledgment of the existence of a separate bisexual orientation (Angelides, 2001, p. 169; Gooss, 1995, pp. 63–65, 131; Gooss, 2008; Rust, 2002).

BISEXUALITY IN SURVEY STUDIES

With the exception of the explanation of Wolff (1979), the meaning of the concept of bisexuality has shifted in the course of the 20th century from undifferentiated sex to a particular form of sexual desire and behavior. There is no agreement, however, as to the extent to which bisexuality forms a separate sexual category or identity that is on a par with heterosexuality and homosexuality. At the same time, since the 1970s, the number of individuals who have sex with men and women and identify themselves as bisexual has appeared to be on the rise, even if it still involves a fairly small group. Does this suggest that there has been more social room for bisexuality? Which data are available about the prevalence of bisexual feelings, behaviors, and self-definition?

From the late 1950s, in the wake of Kinsey, survey studies of sexuality were conducted in many Western countries, as was true in The Netherlands. Between 1968 and 2005, Dutch researchers undertook approximately 10 larger and smaller, more-or-less representative surveys about sexual desires and behaviors as well as views about them, whereby youngsters were given attention in particular. The studies undertaken up until 1982 focused on the sexual revolution. In part they are the expression of a freer sexual morality as a wanted, largely unproblematic attainment. From the mid-1980s, surveys also centered on the risk of sexually transmittable diseases, notably AIDS.

We studied the results of 11 surveys, which were conducted in 1968, 1972, 1974, 1981, 1989, 1991, 1995, 2001, 2002 (two surveys), and 2005. The results have been published and discussed in 14 studies.² We focus on the extent to which the results of these studies throw light on (changing) behaviors and views regarding bisexuality. Of course, a survey has limitations as a method of research. For example, it is difficult to determine whether the replies provided point to actual changes in attitude and behavior or instead reflect what was seen as socially desirable. Moreover, the questions and the interpretation and presentation of the survey results by the researchers were based on cognitive and normative assumptions about sexuality common at the time of the survey. The options given to respondents to articulate bisexual behaviors and feelings or to define themselves as bisexual were highly dependent on the questioning. (For example, did the surveys actually include any more or less explicit questions about bisexuality?) Based on these surveys, we do consider not only the reported

bisexual behaviors and feelings, but also and especially the degree to which they could be addressed explicitly.

The four survey studies conducted between 1968 and 1981 did not ask any explicit questions about bisexuality (Dupuis & Noordhoff, 1969; Kooy, 1972, 1976; Kooy, Weeda, Schelvis, & Moors, 1983). But these surveys did have questions on possible attraction to one's own sex during puberty and adolescence, and on the degree to which adults felt attracted to members of the same sex. The researchers observed that physical attraction to both sexes during puberty was not rare, and that homosexual feelings occurred more frequently than commonly thought, even among those who presented themselves as heterosexual. They also concluded that the acceptance of homosexuality increased in the 1970s, especially among young people (Kooy, 1976, p. 47; Witte, 1969, pp. 132–133). If the questions left room at all for expressions of a bisexual preference, this was nullified by how the researchers interpreted them, namely in terms of an underlying heterosexual or homosexual orientation, whereby they seemed strongly inclined to cluster bisexual desire in the latter category. Bisexuality as a separate category or identity was thus excluded. Nor did these surveys reveal any evidence of Kinsey's idea of a continuum between heterosexuality and homosexuality, with room for bisexuality as a pattern of behavior.

The 1989 survey among more than 11,000 high school students between ages 12 and 20 was the first to ask explicitly about possible bisexual self-definition, next to (exclusive or predominant) heterosexual or homosexual self-definition. Among the boys in this sample, 1.3% identified themselves as bisexual and 0.7% as homosexual, whereas among the girls the percentages were 0.8% in both cases. Between 1.5% and 2% of the boys and about 1% of the girls reported actual homosexual experiences. The percentages of the respondents who claimed to have (largely or incidentally) homosexual feelings or fantasies next to heterosexual ones—8% of the boys versus 15% of the girls—were significantly higher (T. Vogels, van der Vliet, & Kok, 1990, pp. 56–57, 61). Compared to the above-mentioned four studies, this survey offered the interviewees seemingly more room to express a bisexual orientation. The researchers observed that having homosexual and heterosexual feelings in this age category was a quite normal phenomenon and that hesitation about one's sexual self-image was inherent to heterosexual and homosexual development. However, in this context they did not mention the possibility of an autonomous bisexual development. Despite the question about possible bisexual self-definition, it seems they viewed bisexuality as a transitional stage in the development of a heterosexual or homosexual identity, rather than as a discrete sexual category.

In 1991, results appeared of a survey study on AIDS prevention, sexual behavior, and risks in The Netherlands. Researchers asked a sample of 1,000 persons between ages 18 and 50 about their sex life. In response to the spread of AIDS, more questions addressed homosexuality than the

earlier studies did. The replies revealed that the share of men (12%–13%) and women (10%) with homosexual desires and/or experiences was substantially larger than the percentage of the men (4) and the women (0.4) who considered themselves (predominantly) homosexual. The respondents' self-definition was mapped by asking them where they would put themselves on a scale of seven categories, ranging from strictly heterosexual via bisexual to strictly homosexual. The percentages of men who defined themselves as exclusively heterosexual or exclusively homosexual were 90% and 1.4%, respectively, whereas for women they were 93% and 0.2%, respectively. Although nearly 2% of the men and 0.5% of the women reported bisexual behavior, none of the male respondents and 0.5% of the women labeled themselves bisexual (van Zessen & Sandfort, 1991, pp. 43–45, 80–81). Among men, then, there was a large discrepancy between bisexual behavior and bisexual self-image. With women these seemed to coincide, if at least it is assumed that the women who indicated bisexual behavior were the same as the women who identified themselves as bisexual. The researchers did not provide any conclusive evidence for the latter, however. Still, their analysis did reveal that men with bisexual contacts largely considered themselves heterosexual.

According to the researchers, who shared Kinsey's view that the hetero–homo bipartition fails to do justice to the realities of sexual behavior and feeling, the observed gap among men between bisexual feelings and behaviors on the one hand and their self-definition on the other suggested a strong social urge toward a choice of partner from either one of the two sexes as well as to either a heterosexual or homosexual identity. Apparently, bisexual behavior and feeling were not seen as a basis for a more or less stable articulation of sexual experience and for a bisexual identity as third possibility in addition to heterosexual and homosexual self-definition. This would largely be due to the virtually complete absence of social frameworks, such as interest groups and a nightlife scene for individuals with a bisexual preference. Oddly, the researchers did not further address the data on bisexuality among women, notably with respect to whether these data suggested a larger degree of overlap between their behavior and self-definition than among men.

Six years after the large-scale study of high school students in 1989, a similar study was conducted among some 7,300 high school students between ages 12 and 18. In this survey, 7% of the boys and 6% of the girls indicated an ability to fall in love with a boy or a girl, whereas 4% of the boys and 6% of the girls expressed a desire for making love with a person of the same sex. Compared to the study from 1989, there was a decline of some 50% as to the share of young persons who indicated to have bisexual desires, but there was little change in the figures on mainly or exclusively homosexual feelings, experience, and self-definition (Brugman, Goedhart, Vogels, & van Zessen, 1995, pp. 23, 26, 74). Comparison of the two surveys among high school students is problematic, however, because of differences in the

questions posed and the studies' presentation. Not only does the term 'bisexuality' hardly occur in the latter study, it also barely pays attention to bisexual behavior whereas no questions are asked about bisexual self-definition. It is hard to escape the impression that in the mid-1990s there was less attention devoted to bisexuality as social–sexological research object than in the late 1980s. This has to do perhaps with the insight—based on epidemiological research—that chances of transmission of HIV from homosexuals via bisexuals to heterosexuals are small, which is why there was less urgency to do a study of bisexuality. The observed decrease of reported bisexual feelings is perhaps partly an effect of this changed research perspective.

The attention to bisexuality is equally quite limited in a report about sexological counseling, therapy, and welfare work, put together by staff from The Netherlands Institute of Social and Sexological Study (Nederlands Instituut voor Sociaal Seksuologisch Onderzoek [NISSO]). The report relies on research results from three surveys. They reveal among other things that of the adult men and women about 0.3% and 0.2%, respectively, had had sexual contact with men and women in the previous year. None of these men and 0.5% of these women called themselves bisexual (Vroege, Nicolai, & van de Wiel, 2001).

A study published in 2002 reported on a survey of 1,600 high school students and their sexual behaviors, views, and risks. The most striking result involved the number of native and non-native (especially Islamic) young people with homosexual experiences (3.5% and 7.8%, respectively), whereas none of the young people from an Islamic background called themselves homosexual or bisexual. Moreover, they displayed much less tolerance vis-à-vis homosexuality than native youngsters did. Bisexuality was not addressed any further (Fulpen, van Bakker, & Breeman, 2002). Likewise, a 2002 'exploration' of the sexual behavior of youngsters, which was again triggered by concerns about a rise in the number of cases of venereal diseases and an increase in unsafe sex, provided no new data on bisexuality. This study did not confirm the increase of bisexual behavior (and therefore also of the risk of AIDS) as observed by youth welfare workers (T. Vogels, Buitendijk, Bruil, Dijkstra, & Paulussen, 2002, pp. 5, 28, 70–72).

In 2005, another large-scale survey among young Dutch people was performed that compared well to that of 1995. This survey of approximately 5,000 individuals between ages 12 and 25 included questions on sexual behaviors, preferences, and attitudes. Strikingly, the researchers paid attention to the connection between belonging to a sexual category on the one hand, and being in love, "taking to someone" (feeling sexually attracted to someone), sexual fantasies, sexual experience, and relationship formation on the other hand. This differentiated approach, which did not address self-definition and identity, resulted in the percentages on the frequency of bisexuality and homosexuality—terminology not used explicitly in the questions—presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Frequency of Homosexuality and Bisexuality Among Youngsters Between Ages 12 and 25

| | | Boys | Girls |
|--|--|------|-------|
| Being able to fall in love with same sex | Same sex and opposite sex | 1.9% | 3.0% |
| | Only same sex | 1.1% | 0.6% |
| Fantasizing about same sex | Sometimes | 2.9% | 11.3% |
| | Often | 2.5% | 1.9% |
| Experience with making love to someone of same sex | No, but I would like to try it | 5.7% | 13.1% |
| | Yes | 4.5% | 6.1% |
| Taking [a liking] to same sex | Same sex and opposite sex | 0.1% | 0.5% |
| | Mainly or only same sex | 1.9% | 0.8% |
| Sex partners | Last relationship partner was same sex | 2.1% | 1.4% |
| | Last sex partner was same sex | 3.2% | 1.3% |

N = 5,000.

Source. De Graaf, Meijer, Poelman, & Vanwesenbeeck (2005, pp. 67–68).

It can be deduced from these data that bisexual feelings, desires, and experiences occurred more often among girls than among boys and that for homosexuality, with the exception of experiences, the reverse is true (cf. Weinrich & Klein, 2002, pp. 118–130). The researchers also determined the extent to which the scores on the various questions were interrelated. For boys and girls, scores on “taking to” (having an attraction to) show the strongest correlation with other indicators of sexual orientation. Respondents who indicated that they (partly or exclusively) take to (feel sexually attracted to) their own sex predominantly also have more same-sex crushes, fantasies, experiences, and partners. The researchers concluded that “saying to take to one’s own sex” forms the best indication for belonging to the homosexual and bisexual category—which would apply to 2% of the boys and 1.3% of the girls—just like “saying to take to the opposite sex” offers the clearest indication for belonging to the heterosexual group (de Graaf, Meijer, Poelman, & Vanwesenbeeck, 2005, p. 69). Strikingly, the researchers, in considering their study outcomes, arranged the combined homosexual and bisexual category in opposition to the heterosexual category without any further explanation, whereas the survey questions and answers permit a distinction between homosexuality and bisexuality. In this respect, it is equally striking that in general girls score a higher percentage on questions that appear to indicate bisexual feelings and behaviors, whereas more boys than girls, according to the researchers, can be put in the combined homosexual and bisexual category.

To what extent have the 11 Dutch sex surveys generated information on developments regarding bisexual feelings, experiences, and self-definition among young Dutch persons (in particular) over the past 40 years? And what can be said about tolerance vis-à-vis bisexuality?

It is not possible to establish whether the frequency of bisexual behavior went up or down. Not all surveys asked explicit questions about such behavior, nor was it defined clearly or described in the same way in successive studies. Consequently, respondents were not given the option to report it or could report it only to a limited degree. The same applies to bisexual feelings and, with the exception of the 1991 survey, even more strongly to bisexual self-definition. It seems that the prevailing and tacit assumption is that bisexuality forms no separate category or identity next to heterosexuality and homosexuality. Many researchers were inclined to conceive of bisexuality as a developmental phase during puberty and adolescence or as part of a more essential homosexual orientation. The attention to bisexuality in the late 1980s and early 1990s was largely based on practical considerations: concerns about the spread of AIDS from homosexuals to heterosexuals via bisexual behavior. With the exception of the 2005 study, the attention to bisexuality decreased again between 1995 and 2005, even if it remained possible to identify bisexual behavior and feelings to a smaller or larger extent.

The surveys' limited attention to bisexual self-definition and identity (formation) may be explained not only with reference to the researchers' assumptions and the more general social invisibility of bisexuals, but also in relation to the fact that bisexuality is hard to categorize. What makes someone a bisexual: behavior, desire, feeling, or fantasy? To consider a person as bisexual, what should be the frequency of these factors or their degree of overlap or durability? The last survey is the only one that (possibly) offers a beginning for answering such questions, even though self-definition is not touched on and the researchers ultimately combine homosexuality and bisexuality into one category.

Despite the abovementioned limitations of the series of surveys, we believe they reveal a trend regarding the prevalence of bisexuality among young people in The Netherlands. The scores regarding four questions posed in several surveys using various wordings suggest that from 1989 there was an increase of what we characterize as 'diffuse' bisexuality. Table 2, which lists the scores on answers to these questions in five different surveys, reveals an increase in the relative percentages of respondents who indicated having bisexual fantasies, experiences, and desires (overlapping with homosexual ones). This increase was markedly stronger among girls than among boys (cf. Weinrich & Klein, 2002, pp. 134, 138). However, with respect to exclusive bisexual self-definition, for which the scarce survey data show substantially lower percentages, there was a downward trend.

The increase of diffuse bisexuality that we deduce is based on a very limited number of questions in a limited number of surveys, in which mostly no clear distinction was made between homosexuality and bisexuality. This is why some reservations are called for. What seems absent in particular in these survey studies is clarity about the meanings that respondents

TABLE 2 Frequency of 'Diffuse' Bisexuality in Five Survey Studies of Sexuality

| Question | 1989 High School Students (R) N = 11,000 | | 1991 Adults (NR) N = 1,000 | | 1995 Young People (R) N = 7,300 | | 2001 High School Students (NR) N = 1,600 | | 2005 Young People (R) N = 5,000 | |
|---|---|------|-------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|------|---|------|------------------------------------|-------|
| | Boy | Girl | Man | Woman | Boy | Girl | Boy | Girl | Boy | Girl |
| Sexual fantasies about same sex—sometimes to very often | 3% | 6% | | | 8% | | | | 5.4% | 13.3% |
| Experience with having same-sex sex I would like to try it with | 1.5–2% | 1% | | | 1.4% | | | | 4.5% | 6.1% |
| Calls oneself bisexual | 1.3% | 0.8% | .0% | 0.5% | 4% | 6% | 0.2% | 0.2% | 5.7% | 13.1% |

R = representative survey; NR = nonrepresentative survey.

themselves associate with bisexuality. As a result of guided survey questions and the assumptions of researchers, the interpretations of those involved remain outside of their scope.

BISEXUALITY IN YOUTH MAGAZINES

The study of the meaning of bisexuality calls for qualitative analysis of empirical materials with information about how those involved interpret their bisexual feelings, fantasies, or behaviors. We undertook such a study on the basis of the content of the advice column in a popular Dutch magazine for teenage and adolescent girls, which until 1995 appeared as *Popfoto* and *Popmagazine* and from 1995 as *Fancy*.³ We examined its advice column in volumes 1989 through 2005 to find the occurrence of problems regarding bisexuality and the meaning that letter writers and experts attribute to bisexuality. Before addressing these concerns, we first provide some information about the magazine, the nature of advice columns, and the research method we apply.

The media play a major role in views and representations of sexuality, especially among young people. Many sex surveys were held on the initiative of, and with help from, such lifestyle magazines. Such mass-market magazines, next to television and the Internet, constitute a major and most valuable source of information precisely because they offer room for personal articulations of sexual feelings and experiences. This applies in particular to girls (de Graaf et al., 2005, pp. 83, 90). Many popular magazines carry an advice column to which readers can send questions that deal with personal problems, after which experts provide answers that are printed as part of the same column.

Popfoto/Popmagazine/Fancy, which over the years appeared monthly or biweekly, was aimed at Dutch girls between ages 14 and 17. In 2007, it sold more than 92,000 copies each month. This magazine has long carried an advice column—variously titled *Just Tell It*, *What Should I Do?*, and *Making Love and You*—in which different experts, mostly psychologists, address questions from readers. In the period under study, a frequent concern of the readership applied to issues of sexuality and relationships.

In determining the content of an advice column, based as it is on a selection from all letters received, various factors play a role. Most likely, priority is given not to the need of those who pose the questions for a solution to their problems, but to the editorial considerations concerning the recognizability and the general informative and entertaining value of the issues addressed for the magazine's readership. The column's actual content in turn has a selective effect on the kind of problems that readers present to the magazine's expert. Depending on the recognizability of the problems addressed or their similarities with one's own set of experiences, an advice

column's questions will stimulate readers more or less to write the magazine's experts about their own problems (Brinkgreve & Korzec, 1978, p. 19; cf. van Lieshout, 1993, p. 70).

In our case, it is possible to view the advice column as a meeting place of laypersons and experts, a platform for the articulation of problems that are more or less representative for the target group of *Popfoto/Popmagazine/Fancy*. Most letters are published in an abbreviated or edited version, rather than integrally. As such, it is meant to serve as a stepping stone for a longer argument by the expert, in which she comments on the letter writer's problem from a wider perspective. The expert sets the tone for how problems are discussed and also has the last say. In this way, her narrative perspective is dominant, whereas the point of view of the letter writer is embedded in it. This does not exclude the letter writer from speaking directly to the reader: As a genre, the advice column starts from direct speech by the person who poses the question, as a way to involve readers in her problem.

What are the meanings of bisexual feelings and behaviors for the letter writers themselves and how do these relate to the meanings given by the experts? Below we address the issue of whether those who pose the question can also have a subject position regarding the problem they raise (aside from their object position—from the perspective of the expert—in the narrative text of the advice column). The response to this concern is important in particular with an eye to the leeway allocated by the advice column to bisexual self-definition and the presentation of a bisexual identity.

It is possible to map interpretations with the help of social-constructivist discourse analysis. Texts—such as academic treatises, stories, novels, and letters, but also popular magazine articles—not only mirror cultural meanings but also shape them (Bal, 1990; Herman & Vervaeck, 2005; Meijer, 1996). These meanings are largely grafted onto culturally determined assumptions about how the world is arranged. Such patterns of thought take on specific shapes in discourses. In our analysis of the advice column in *Popfoto/Popmagazine/Fancy*, cultural assumptions and in particular scientific views about sexuality influence the interpretation of bisexuality. These can be part of the perspective of the expert and the perspective of the layperson who poses the question (or of his or her environment). Given the academic background of expertise, scientific discourses on (bi)sexuality seem at stake in particular—discourses that we discussed in the first part of this article and that at the level of the text, so we assume, co-shape the world as it appears in advice columns. We stress that discourse analysis is not an objectifying method, but an interpretive one. Our identification of certain discourses is guided by our preexisting knowledge of the history of the scientific conceptualization of bisexuality.

Between 1989 and 2005, the advice columns we studied contained 44 explicit questions about bisexuality, of which 42 were from girls and 2 from

boys. In this same period, the share of questions on bisexuality in the advice column went up from 0.5% to 4.5%. Until 1993, the term 'bisexual' did not occur in the letters; afterward, one half of the letter writers with such concern made use of it. In particular, in the years 1996 to 1999 and 2003 to 2005, bisexuality received much attention. Of the 44 letter writers, who in relation to their sexual feelings somehow experienced problems with themselves and/or their environment, 30 only reported bisexual feelings (crush, desires, fantasies, and dreams), and from 1995, 12 also reported bisexual behavior (meaning that simultaneously or alternately they have heterosexual and homosexual relationships or contacts), whereas 10 letters are instances of bisexual self-definition (of which nine appeared in the years 2002–2005). From 1995, the reporting of bisexual behavior increased and from 2002 this equally applied to bisexual self-identification.

Many letters show evidence of inner confusion and uncertainty. A case in point is the following:

I NO LONGER UNDERSTAND MYSELF

I am eighteen and for some time I have been thinking I am not hetero. I constantly look at girls and women, but I am also really in love with a boy. . . . I no longer understand myself and am bewildered about my feelings. Warmly, a confused girl. ("Vrijen en Jij," 2004a)

Several girls are so upset that they ask about how they can get rid of their sexual feelings:

GIRLS' FANTASIES

I am a fourteen-year-old girl. . . . How do I get rid of those fantasies about girls? Am I bisexual? ("Vrijen en Jij," 1996a)

Many questions are aimed at understanding bisexual feelings, in particular regarding a possible homosexual identity or the reactions from people in their environment. As one girl wrote:

I THINK ABOUT BOYS *AND* GIRLS

Then I often think of sex with boys, but also with girls. Do you think that I am lesbian? ("Vrijen en Jij," 2004c)

Ten girls reported not so much having a problem with themselves, but with the (possible) reactions from their environment. Let us quote two examples:

HOW DO WE START A RELATIONSHIP?

We are two girls and we have a crush on each other. . . . We do not know how to tell it to our friends. Should we prepare them or so? Best regards from two bisexual girls. ("Vrijen en Jij," 2003)

LESBIAN

I have been feeling rather uncertain of late. I think I am lesbian or perhaps I am even bisexual. . . . My biggest fear is how I should tell others. . . . I don't know what to do with this. ("Vrijen en Jij," 2001)

The questions from letter writers are to be understood against the background of certain conventional assumptions and also, perhaps, scientific notions regarding (bi)sexuality. Their problems with themselves and their environments are connected to the conflict between their feelings and/or behaviors on the one hand, and the discourses (implicitly) used by them or their environment on the other. Traces of three patterns of thought recur in the letters time and again. The first centers on the crucial importance attached to a clearly demarcated sexual identity as an essential dimension of personhood. Its absence, in the view of many letter writers, is the cause of feelings of insecurity, confusion, disorientation, and hopelessness.

The second, broadly shared assumption consists of the idea that there are two mutually exclusive sexual categories: heterosexual and homosexual, whereby the latter counts as inferior or less desirable. Bisexual feelings seem to entail that letter writers do not place themselves unequivocally in either one of these categories, which gives rise to insecurity about their identity. Thereby they display a great reluctance to define themselves as homosexual:

I DO NOT WANT TO BE LESBIAN

I have been having an irksome feeling for a long time. I take to boys and to women or girls. . . . But I do not want to be lesbian at all. I want to be normal, just like other girls in my class. Isn't there some sort of therapy, so that I may get rid of it? It makes me feel depressed. Warm regards, a fourteen-year-old girl. ("Vrijen en Jij," 2002)

Although about one third of the letter writers display a sense of a bisexual category and identity, explicit bisexual self-definition occurs in ten cases only.

In particular in the letters of girls who have a sexual relation with a boyfriend as well as a girlfriend, a third pattern of thought regarding sexuality surfaces. The problems they experience pertain mainly to their environment and more in particular to their heterosexual partner. Many of these letter writers hide their homosexual relation from those around them. Some feel

guilty about their double relationships, and most anticipate problems with their heterosexual partner and their environment. Consider the following examples:

A BOYFRIEND *AND* A GIRLFRIEND

Should I tell my boyfriend that I am in love with my best girlfriend (I also feel guilty about it). ("Vrijen en Jij," 1996c)

SPECIAL GIRLFRIENDS

We are two girls . . . and we have a special relationship. . . . It is a strange situation. . . . and one of us has a boyfriend. Do you know a way to stop it? We already tried a few times, but unsuccessfully. ("Vrijen en Jij," 1997b)

WE STILL DO IT WITH EACH OTHER

We are two girlfriends and since two months we both have had boyfriends we love dearly. . . . We still go to bed with each other every so often. We do not dare tell our boyfriends; we fear they will abandon us. ("Vrijen en Jij," 2004b)

I AM BISEXUAL

I have a fun relationship with a boy *and* a girl. . . . My boyfriend does not like it and I do not know if I can go on with it. ("Vrijen en Jij," 1995)

Although such letters hardly show any problems among same-sex lovers, double relationships seem to cause problems for heterosexual partners. They have trouble accepting their partner's double relationship and seem inclined to view it as a sign of unfaithfulness and adultery. This suggests that heterosexuality much more than homosexuality is linked to the norm of (serial) monogamy and that homosexual relations offer more room for simultaneously sustaining multiple relationships.

The cultural assumptions of the letter writers and/or their environment and the interrelated meanings of bisexuality seem to have much influence on the degree to which they (may) present themselves as a bisexual subject. The three above-mentioned patterns of thought limit the possibilities of letter writers to present themselves as such and actively to give meaning themselves to their bisexual feelings and behavior.

Which discourses resound in the advice provided by the experts? To what extent do they allow letter writers to present themselves in the advice column as a bisexual subject?

The most influential discourse, which resounds in the advice from experts in particular in the years 1989 to 1997, is the logic—strongly colored by psychoanalysis—that bisexual feelings and behaviors are to be considered as an undifferentiated transitional phase during puberty or adolescence, which normally culminates in mature sexuality, meaning a differentiated heterosexual or homosexual orientation and identity. During youth, bisexual feelings are seen as normal, natural, and passing in this context. For example, one expert reacts as follows to a letter writer who indicates that she feels attracted to a boy and girl and no longer knows whether she is straight or lesbian:

No wonder you are so upset. . . . It is quite normal not to know whether or not you are lesbian or straight; many young people do not know this yet. Because your sexuality is still developing and you consciously or unconsciously start experimenting with sex, it can happen that you also take to people of your own sex. . . . Suppose that eventually you prove to feel more for girls, so what? That is just as normal as when you would take to boys. (“Vrijen en Jij,” 1996b)

Although the question clearly reveals that the person involved feels attracted to a boy and a girl, the expert refers only to a homosexual and heterosexual category to which she “eventually” will belong. In this perspective, a bisexual identity is unthinkable—while also the hierarchical difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality is upheld in most cases. If the homosexual feelings and relations of letter writers tend to be downplayed and put into perspective, for instance as merely temporary or as rather insignificant experimenting behavior, this is almost never done with respect to heterosexual desires. Two “desperate girlfriends” who call on the expert of *Popfoto/Popmagazine/Fancy* because they do not know what to do with their relationship since one of them also has a crush on a boy receive the following advice:

It is not strange to explore sex with your best girlfriend. It is familiar and cozy. . . . Often such things simply go away again. It does not yet mean that you’re lesbian and therefore it is quite normal that you also have a crush on a boy. (“Wat Moet Ik Doen?,” 1994a)

A second discourse, which first surfaced in the advice rubric in 1993 and from then on gained somewhat higher prominence, assumes that there are three mature sexual identities. When replying to a question of one letter writer on whether perhaps she is bisexual, the expert writes:

Whether it is a boy or a girl who makes you feel aroused does not matter. When you are slightly older, you’ll find out what you like best. When you happen to take to girls, or boys *and* girls, so what? It’s just fine.

Don't you worry about it; it is nothing unusual. ("Wat Moet Ik Doen?," 1994b)

This approach has led the experts of *Popfoto/Popmagazine/Fancy* to take bisexual feelings and relationships among youngsters more seriously, even though their valuation of heterosexual and homosexual relations of youngsters still differs. This last aspect is perhaps connected to the fact that in this second discourse—as in the first—puberty is considered an undifferentiated developmental phase, in which feelings and behaviors may still change substantially. The presumption that in adulthood a heterosexual orientation occurs most frequently (and is also most desirable) influences the logic here.

A third discourse, which appears prominently in the advice column under study as of 2002, starts from the idea that all people have more or less bisexual feelings and that they are found somewhere along a sliding scale between exclusive homosexuality at one end of the spectrum via bisexuality to exclusive heterosexuality at the other end. This seems inspired by Kinsey's approach. For example, in response to a question of a "confused girl," the expert suggests she may be bisexual:

Nearly nobody is one hundred percent hetero; most people have a bisexual side. It is hardly strange, then, to feel yourself attracted to girls *and* boys. Especially in puberty most people are quite preoccupied with their feelings about love, sex and being in love. Experimenting with sex, with boys *and* girls, is often part of it. There are many people who can fall in love with men and women. ("Vrijen en Jij," 2004a)

Because of the implication that many people have bisexual feelings, this discourse appears to entail larger recognition of bisexual desires and behaviors, but probably it does not widen the possibility for bisexual identity formation. Moreover, this discourse has often been mixed with the idea of bisexuality as passing stage of puberty, an idea that is dominant in the first discourse.

Apart from these three discourses, a fourth can be identified that occurs less frequently and less explicitly. This one assumes that bisexuality among girls is triggered by a lack of satisfactory heterosexual contact. Lesbian desires would automatically vanish once girls maintain a satisfying sexual relationship with a male partner. In expert responses, this discourse occurs twice in our sample, in 1996 and 1997:

And once you come with your boyfriend, it may well be that you feel no need any longer to have sex with your girlfriend. ("Vrijen en Jij," 1996c)

It is quite understandable that two close girlfriends get to a point that they start experimenting with each other. . . . The issue is, as you yourselves indicate already, that having sex together is much nicer than with your boyfriend. If that was not the case, you would have stopped before long. ("Vrijen en Jij," 1997a)

In this approach, in which (from a developmental angle) heterosexuality is deemed superior to homosexuality and bisexuality, is no room for bisexual subjectivity.

The four discourses we traced in the experts' reactions can also be found in medical-sexological conceptualizations of (bi)sexuality, covering a history of over 100 years. It involves scientific discourses that in different guises seem to be taken up again, whereby they take turns and sometimes intermingle. As indicated, from 1989 to 1997, the psychoanalytical discourse was dominant. It starts from the existence of two mature forms of sexuality, whereby bisexual feelings in puberty are seen as part of a person's developmental phase. Beginning in 1993, this discourse received competition from another psychoanalytical discourse, in which a threefold differentiation is central. Until 2003, this alternative discourse increasingly gained ground, after which it was replaced by the Kinseyan continuity discourse.

The discourses we identified do not always occur in experts' texts explicitly or unequivocally. In most instances, in fact, they remain more or less implicit and sometimes, especially between 1995 and 1999, when the classic psychoanalytical discourse made room for the differentiation discourse, they were used side by side or as a mixture. Of course, the ways in which a discourse resounds can be ambiguous or multi-interpretable.

Above we indicated that in the advice column the expert's point of view prevails. This does not preclude, however, the possibility that the discourse employed by the expert would be codetermined by the person posing the question. The expert, it turns out, often articulated her answer and its implied discourse in line with how the person posing the question formulated her problem regarding bisexuality. In many instances, just a few meaningful words in a letter determined the discourse adopted in the expert's reply. Only after a letter writer introduced the term bisexuality in the advice column in 1993, the expert used it in her advice as well. In the years 1989 to 1993, many letter writers who claimed to feel attracted to both sexes did not ask whether they were bisexual, but whether they were lesbian. The term 'bisexuality' did not occur in their vocabulary. Likewise, the expert did not raise the possibility of bisexuality and interpreted the 'lesbian' feelings of the letter writers based on classic psychoanalytical discourse. However, when in 1993 one writer asked if perhaps her feelings for both sexes were bisexual, the same expert made use of Kinsey's continuity discourse. When one year later another letter writer linked her feelings to homosexuality, the expert again resorted to the psychoanalytical discourse. In the subsequent three years the expert used the term 'bisexuality' only when letter writers used it first. From 1996, more and more letter writers referred to 'bisexuality' or 'bisexual,' and from then on the expert equally used this vocabulary, also in responses to questions that did not use this terminology.

The following examples likewise show that the formulations of the letter writers guide the experts' choice of a specific discourse. From 1989 to 1994 letter writers only reported sexually ambiguous feelings, dreams,

and fantasies, not sexual contacts or relationships. The expert reacted by suggesting a wait-and-see approach (instead of actively trying out things), because after some time it would become clear anyway whether they were homosexual or heterosexual. "When you grow older, you automatically find out which sex you take to," as one advice columnist puts it ("Wat Moet Ik Doen?," 1994b). When subsequently from 1996 a growing number of letter writers referred to bisexual behavior, the expert no longer advised them to just wait and see as their sexual development evolved; instead, she encouraged them to active sexual experimenting and use their experience to draw conclusions about their sexual identity:

It may well be that you are bi, but perhaps you are lesbian, or only hetero after all. It is also possible that you find each other very special, but beyond that never take to girls. Sometimes it takes a while before you find out. Trying out different things may help you thereby. ("Vrijen en Jij," 1997c)

Even if the expert in the advice column figures as the dominant narrator, this does not yet mean that she imposes her own perspective. When a letter writer introduced new terms or a new angle, which no longer fitted the expert's discourse used so far, this expert deployed a new discourse taking the letter writer's formulations into account. The only difference perhaps was that experts articulated a certain discourse more explicitly than those who posed the question. Because the expert advice reflected a discourse implicitly present in the letters, it seems that not so much the expert, but the letter writers themselves, provided the impetus to shifts among the dominant discourses.

That the expert adjusted her discourse to the problem definition of letter writers may be in part related to the fact that *Popfoto/Popmagazine/Fancy*, as a commercial publication, tried to attract and retain the largest possible readership. To this end, the magazine's staff (and in particular the advice column's expert) take on the role of the reader's intimate friend. The expectations of not only the letter writers but also and especially the readership have a large influence on the form and content of the expert's advice. As trusted intermediary, she needs to take seriously the questions posed by the young letter writers; she must be geared to their sense of experience and provide support. The tone of the reply should not be confrontational or moralizing and the advice should be articulated in language that is accessible to readers. The genre convention of 'the expert as friend,' which appears to apply in general for advice columns in contemporary mass-market magazines, reflects the democratization of such columns since the 1960s and 1970s (Brinkgreve & Korzec, 1978; van Lieshout, 1993).

In the meeting place of the democratized advice column, then, letter writers take the lead role in the interpretation of bisexuality. This does not

mean, however, that they automatically create room for explicit bisexual self-definition and identification. As mentioned above, only 10 of the 44 letter writers express such an identity. That nine of them appeared in the advice column between 2002 and 2005 possibly suggests that the number of girls who adopted a bisexual identity had increased. But most letter writers did not so much understand their sexual ambiguities in terms of identity and asked the expert to interpret their sexual feelings and behaviors. The expert rarely took the initiative to interpret such diffuse bisexuality in terms of the existence of a bisexual category next to heterosexual and homosexual preference. The ability of the letter writers actively to give meaning themselves to their sexual feelings and behaviors and thus to defy certain cultural assumptions and conventions regarding bisexuality to a large extent determined the room they managed to create for bisexual identity formation (and its reinforcement by the expert). For the time being, this space seemed limited, even though the advice column under study also reflected an increased tolerance of bisexual feelings and behaviors, if only by making them discussable.

CONCLUSION

The history of the scientific conceptualization regarding bisexuality shows that since the 1980s there has been some recognition and acceptance of bisexuality as a separate sexual category and identity. This development is perhaps related to an increasing number of individuals who view themselves as bisexual and also express this in public, a development linked in part to the influence of the sexual emancipation movements. However, this tendency is not simply reflected in the results of the Dutch sex surveys we discussed. In these surveys, attention to bisexuality surfaced in the early 1990s. Prior to that, it was barely possible in reported survey results to identify people with bisexual desires, fantasies, and behavior. Our cautious conclusion based on the surveys is that in the years 1989 to 2005 there was perhaps an increase of the occurrence of diffuse bisexuality among young people between ages 12 and 25, an increase that is slightly stronger among girls than among boys. This increase is expressed in the reporting of desires, fantasies, and behavior, but it does not manifest itself in bisexual self-definition—hence, we speak of ‘diffuse’ bisexuality. This finding is largely corroborated by our analysis of the advice column in *Popfoto/Popmagazine/Fancy*, which reveals that from 1989 Dutch girls between ages 14 and 17 increasingly expressed bisexual feelings, fantasies, and behavior. In addition (and this is new compared to the surveys), beginning in 2002 there were several instances of bisexual self-definition, albeit on a limited scale.

Does the latter point to a growing acceptance of bisexuality as an autonomous sexual category? An affirmative answer to this question seems

premature. Some questions in the advice column suggest that one of the factors that often impede bisexual identity formation could be that sustaining two sexual relations (heterosexual and homosexual) is at odds with the norm of (serial) monogamy, which is closely linked to heterosexuality. Although in many cases homosexual partners accept the presence of the other, heterosexual partner, in general the heterosexual partner does not accept the sexual relationship with the homosexual partner.

Also, the fact that more conceptual room has emerged for bisexuality among young people in The Netherlands does not automatically imply that the same applies to adults. For a longer time, scientific and cultural discourses have left room for bisexuality among young people, also because many of these discourses interpret it as a temporary sexual orientation. It seems doubtful, however, that most of the discourses that today circulate regarding bisexuality among young people will also be employed for defining the meanings of bisexuality among and by adults. Despite the possibly increased openness regarding bisexuality, as a sexual category it still has hardly any scientific or social underpinnings. It is questionable whether such basis will emerge in the (near) future. The emerged visibility of bisexuality and bisexuals is the outcome of a historical process to which scientists, bisexuals themselves, and social changes contributed. Based on our case study of one advice column, it might be concluded that the growth of the discursive space for the social embedding of bisexuality as sexual category will be largely dependent on the ways in which those involved—young people in this case—themselves give meaning to their feelings and behaviors and continue to cultivate them in their further life.

NOTES

1. This article was translated from Dutch. The original version was published as Lipperts, A., & Oosterhuis, H. (2010). Tussen wal en schip: De moeizame emancipatie van biseksualiteit [Falling between two stools: The difficult emancipation of bisexuality in The Netherlands]. *Tijdschrift voor Seksuologie*, 34, 3–18.

2. Margrietenquête (1968; see Dupuis & Noordhoff, 1969), Jongeren en Seksualiteit (1972 and 1974; see Kooy, 1972, 1976), Sex in Nederland (1981; see Kooy et al., 1983), Jeugd en Seks, Gedrag en Gezondheidsrisico's bij Scholieren (1989; see A. G. C. Vogels, van der Vliet, Danz, & Hopman-Rock, 1990, and T. Vogels et al., 1990), Seksualiteit in Nederland: Seksueel Gedrag, Risico en Preventie van AIDS (1991; see Liebrand-Cup, 1991; van Zessen & Sandfort, 1991; and T. Vogels, van der Vliet, & Danz, 1991), Jeugd en Seks (1995; see Brugman et al., 1995), Seksualiteitshulpverlening in Nederland (2001; see Vroege et al., 2001), Lang Leve de Liefde (2002; see Fulpen et al., 2002), Jongeren, Seksualiteit, Preventie en Hulpverlening: Een Verkenning van de Situatie in 2002 (2002; see T. Vogels et al., 2002), and Seks onder je 25e (2005; see de Graaf et al., 2005).

3. Our choice to focus on this magazine—we also considered analyzing advice columns of two other magazines for youngsters, *Yes* and *Break Out!*—is largely based on practical considerations: continuity of the magazine's publication as well as of its advice column (especially regarding the period 1989–2005, in which, as the surveys tell us, there was an increase of diffuse bisexuality); the availability and accessibility of the editorial archive; and the editorial policy regarding attention to sexuality in general and homosexuality and bisexuality in particular.

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