

THE NETHERLANDS: NEITHER PRUDISH NOR HEDONISTIC

Harry Oosterhuis¹

The history of sexuality in the Netherlands of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries differs to some extent from that in other Western European countries. Although there may be some discrepancy between dominant morality and actual social conduct, it is commonly argued that during the period between the late nineteenth century and the 1960s Christian norms and values have influenced sexual thinking and behavior more strongly in the Netherlands than in other countries. Despite the ongoing trend toward secularization that started in the late nineteenth century, in particular among the members of the more liberal Dutch Reformed Church, until the 1960s the Netherlands not only counted as a bourgeois society but also as a typical Christian nation.

The disproportionately large influence of the views of Catholic and orthodox Calvinist groups in Dutch society is to be understood in light of *pillarization*: the close interconnection of religious ideology and sociopolitical organization which for the greater part of the twentieth century covered all areas of Dutch social life, cut across social class, and united groups of people from all walks of life in a common worldview. Following the example of Christian groups, the Dutch social democrats and liberals also constituted specific blocs, but these were not as all-embracing as the various Christian pillars. Although the formation of confessional blocs does not represent a singularly Dutch phenomenon, in the field of public morality they have manifested themselves more prominently in the Netherlands than elsewhere: they succeeded in imposing their restrictive sexual morality on the Dutch population at large. Simultaneously, the pillarization of Dutch society contributed to a more radical sexual revolution in the 1960s - a revolution which has also had a more permanent influence in the Netherlands than in other Western nations. Dutch society, it seems, has made an about-turn in only a short timespan: from puritan to liberal. Whereas the country was known as quite conservative and law-abiding in the 1950s, Dutch liberalism and tolerance have become proverbial since the second half of the 1960s. Abroad, the Netherlands has gained the reputation of being either a sexual paradise or a Sodom and Gomorra.

In this article I will focus on pillarization as a peculiar twentieth-century Dutch phenomenon and on its relevance for the historical significance of the sexual 'revolution' in the Netherlands. I will argue that the seemingly sudden and radical changes in sexual ideology during the 1960s can also be understood as merely an acceleration, as part of a long-term historical development.

Whereas sodomy and prostitution were punishable in the Calvinist Dutch Republic and there had been fierce persecutions of sodomites in the eighteenth century, the French occupation at the beginning of the nineteenth century entailed a separation of

¹ The author is indebted to Ton Brouwers and James Steakley for translating this article from Dutch into English.

sin and crime and a decriminalization of several sexual offences. The *Code Pénal*, introduced by the French in 1811, as well as the new Dutch criminal code of 1886 were based on liberal principles. One of the basic principles of classic liberalism is the assurance of individual freedom vis-à-vis the state through the fundamental separation of, on the one hand, public sphere from private sphere, and law from morality on the other. Sexuality belonged to the private domain, and insofar as there was no force, violence, or public indecency at stake, the state was not supposed to interfere in the sexual life of its citizens. Laws involving public morals were mainly aimed at preventing sexual expression in the public domain and at protecting minors and individuals in relationships of dependence from aggressive or unsolicited sexuality.

Although the liberal bourgeoisie set the tone of Dutch social and political life and the framework of a liberal democratic state was established during the second half of the nineteenth century, the state and several social groups nonetheless became increasingly interested in and preoccupied with various forms of sexuality. Presented as a matter of public hygiene, a civilizing effort was undertaken against the alleged immorality of the lower classes and all other forms of publicly expressed sexuality, such as prostitution and male homosexual behavior. The criminal pursuit of moral offenses was systematized, and doctors began simultaneously to frame sexual conduct in the public sphere as a health issue. Thus, under the aegis of preventive medicine, sexuality entered the sociopolitical domain.

The state's involvement with sexuality grew stronger toward the end of the nineteenth century when Catholics and orthodox Calvinists, who felt excluded from the elitist liberal establishment, initiated an emancipation offensive and gained substantial political influence. In the first two decades of the twentieth century the confessionals took over political power from the liberals, partly as a result of the extension of suffrage. For almost five decades, from 1918 to 1967, the confessional political parties held a majority in parliament, and between 1918 and 1994, they were uninterruptedly represented in the Dutch government as well. The emancipation of orthodox Calvinists and Catholics resulted in Dutch society's characteristic pillarization along religious-ideological lines. With their emphasis on morals and family values, they tried to define themselves against the 'godless' liberals and socialists. As the social presence of the church had been negatively affected by the growing influence of science on the one hand and, successively, the rise of liberalism and socialism on the other, the confessional parties focused their attention more than ever on morality. This emphasis grew even stronger toward the close of the nineteenth century when they were confronted with a number of specific developments in this field which they - as militant Christians - deemed undesirable.

The late-nineteenth-century morality offensive of the Dutch confessionals, just like the purity movements in other Western European countries, was not only a response to the emergence of a commercialized, urban entertainment culture and changes in modern literature allowing for more open depiction of sexuality than heretofore, but also to changes in prostitution, the treatment of venereal diseases, birth control, and homosexuality. The orthodox Protestant leadership, which saw itself supported by feminists and socialists alike, initiated the struggle against the medical regulation of prostitution. Medical surveillance of prostitutes, aimed at

preventing venereal diseases from spreading, which was supported by liberal (moderate Protestant) governments, was seen by orthodox Calvinists as an inadmissible vindication of vice and by feminists and socialists as consent to male bourgeois exploitation of working-class women. Around the turn of the century, this permissive liberal attitude toward prostitution, which was backed by members of the medical establishment, was reversed.

The confessionals also reacted strongly against two new developments in the realm of birth control: the rise of neo-Malthusianism and the increased use of contraceptives. The Neo-Malthusian Society ('Nieuw-Malthusiaanse Bond', NMB), founded in 1881 by progressive liberals in support of birth control, was vigorously resisted by Christian purity leagues. Although the NMB favored birth control for social-economic and hygienic reasons, while taking the dominant marriage and family ideology more or less for granted, its antagonists argued that contraception separated procreation from sexuality and charged it with promoting licentious behavior and abortion. The confessionals were equally critical of new views on sexually deviant behavior, homosexuality in particular. Around the turn of the century, liberal medical practitioners no longer repudiated homosexuality in terms of sin or crime, but moved away from the traditional Christian, moral frame of reference by resorting to medical-biological explanations. Confessionals considered this scientific approach a justification of sin. In doing so, they were not altogether wrong, though, for the Dutch Scientific Humanitarian Committee ('Nederlandsch Wetenschappelijk Humanitair Komitee', NWHK), a homosexual emancipation movement founded in 1912 following the German example of Magnus Hirschfeld, based its reasoning on medical explanations of homosexuality: it was congenital, and thus had to be accepted as a natural phenomenon.

The moral laws of 1911 represent a milestone in the twentieth-century history of sexuality in the Netherlands. Initiated by confessional politicians, an extension and tightening of the existing moral laws were brought about. These included regulations against prostitution, pornography, birth control, abortion, and homosexuality (sexual 'acts' between adults and minors of the same sex became punishable by law, while sixteen had been established by law as the age of consent for heterosexual relations; in contrast to Great-Britain and Germany, homosexuality between adults was never criminalized in the Netherlands, apart from the German occupation). Liberal principles regarding the inviolability of the private sphere and the separation of law and morality were partly pushed aside.

More important than the actual suits and sentences was the fact that the new moral laws set the tone for a social climate of repression in sexual matters, in particular because they facilitated preventive control and could be tightened locally by special police ordinances. Although efforts to prohibit sexual emancipation movements like the NMB and NWHK failed, these movements were forced into the defensive and to keep a low public profile. Furthermore, the moral laws provided an opportunity for the confessional leadership to mobilize its constituency to organize against and actively fight immorality at large. Numerous grassroots initiatives sprang up to defend Christian moral values against developments which threatened to undermine marriage, family, and public morality. Whereas liberals considered sexuality a private matter and socialists saw it as secondary to socio-economic

problems, the confessionals viewed sexual morality as a cornerstone of their public image. All sexuality outside of marriage was not only deemed sinful but also seen as a threat to the existing social order. Licentious activity was a subject with broad public appeal that could well serve to illustrate the potential dangers of the outside, non-Christian world as well as to overcome internal social divisions (for the confessional blocs consisted of members of all social classes). For Catholic leaders in particular, sexual issues presented a battleground for unifying their forces and closing their ranks.

Dutch Catholicism and orthodox Protestantism derived their force and stability from the anchoring of their religious and social philosophies in a wide variety of social organizations. The confessionals left their mark in particular on what could be termed the social middle ground where the private and public spheres met: welfare, education, health and social care. Given the relatively large number of Catholic and Protestant organizations that were founded in the 1930s to provide counsel in domestic and marital matters and given the central role of sexuality in discussions on (mental) health, it is only natural that the control of sexuality through intervention in the nuclear family - by priests and ministers, and later on also by physicians and social workers - was considered crucial.

The exceptional demographic pattern of Dutch society from the late nineteenth century until 1965 reveals the degree to which the confessionals - the Catholics in particular - succeeded in imposing their moral ideology on the population. The decline of the birth rate, which began in the industrialized Western nations around 1875, was more gradual in the Netherlands than in surrounding countries; while in most European countries the birth rate had already decreased to less than twenty per thousand inhabitants by 1950, the Netherlands did not reach this level until 1965. Although the belated industrialization of the Netherlands (which did not occur on a grand scale until the 1950s) offers a partial explanation of this relatively high birth rate, it is nonetheless primarily the result of the disproportionate influence of Christian views on Dutch social and political life. Although the threat of overpopulation was publicly debated, notably in the years right after the Second World War, birth control was, for moral reasons, hardly a subject of discussion, at least not until the 1960s. Liberals and socialists were reticent in this area because they depended on the confessional parties to form coalition governments. Even though the state was not actively seeking to influence marriage and family life, its policies indirectly resulted in a high birth rate. There were legal restrictions on the distribution of birth control devices; married women were discouraged from working outside of the house to reduce the danger of childlessness and 'unhealthy family relationships'; and in 1941, particularly because of Catholic insistence, a child allowance was introduced.

Despite high birth rates and the public appeal and rhetorical zeal of the Christian moralists, the official church view of sexuality lagged behind the actual sexual practices of the Dutch. As conventional forms of social control and religious socialization lost ground because of industrialization and urbanization, the confessionals had to alter their strategy. They became increasingly worried about the loss of faith among their constituencies and about moral decay in general, and, therefore, it seemed imperative to have Christian norms affirmed again and again

from above. In this way, the conflict between religious ideology and social reality grew stronger, which in turn caused new problems and encouraged individuals to find solutions on their own, outside of official doctrine. After all, the repressive moral system could not guarantee that forbidden forms of sexual interaction were not practiced. Although the Church repudiated birth control categorically and permitted the rhythm method only in exceptional cases based on sound reasons, it was already commonly practiced among Catholics - as was *coitus interruptus* - before the Second World War. Moreover, it was not infrequently tolerated by the clergy. Statistical material on enforced marriages shows that having premarital sex was common also among Christians.

It seems likely, then, that the morality offensive of the confessional parties did not so much result in more chastity among the population, but rather in an intensification of attention to sexuality and a guilt-ridden perception of it. In this light it is understandable that experts from the confessional blocs - including, in addition to clergy members, Christian doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and education specialists - displayed much interest in sexual problems. Pillarization was not only a structure for protecting traditional religious values but also a way to ensure that modern accomplishments and new organizational methods in education, health care, social care, science, technology and mass media would serve the interests of Christian communities. Although pillarization was primarily aimed at conserving traditional religious values, it went hand in hand with the modernization of the ways and means of social organization. This explains why the intellectual elites of the confessional blocs were left some freedom of movement outside of the church's patronizing realm. As sexuality became a subject that could be more openly discussed, it was harder to maintain the gap between ideology and reality. After 1945 in particular, traditional moral views came under pressure as a result of the professionalization of health care and the expanding welfare state. Increasingly, this caused internal conflicts in the various blocs between conservative and progressive forces. The net result of the confessional preoccupation with sexuality is that in the post-war period Christian leadership and expertise - as paradoxical as it may seem - contributed significantly to reforming sexual morality in the Netherlands.

Conflict between preservation and renewal is characteristic of the Dutch social climate during the 1940s and 1950s. In order to turn back the allegedly unsettling effects of German occupation and the rapid post-war industrialization, churches, politicians and professional caretakers worked hard for the preservation and healing of family life. The slogan was 'Family Recovery brings Population Recovery'. The desire for security and stability was fed by the need for cooperation on the road to material recovery and by the threat of communism. The result was a moral climate characterized by discipline and austerity. The anxiety about an alleged moral decline represented, in fact, a final flaring up of the pre-war morality offensive. Traditional sexual morality was undermined in the 1950s by the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the Netherlands. More prosperity and the expansion of the welfare state created more individual independence and greater mobility for a growing number of people. The rapid diffusion of television after 1955 broke down the moral isolation of large segments of the population. The widening of the options in terms of

leisure and consumption created more space for self-expression and led to the emergence of an autonomous youth culture. Various pillarized organizations, in particular those in health care, welfare, and the media, gradually took a more independent stance against religious authority. In cooperation with the more progressive members of the clergy, Christian intellectuals tried to adjust the dominant, conservative morality to a changed social situation.

In the field of marriage, family, and sexuality, the traditional keepers of morality - clergy and members of the medical establishment - had to give way to new experts, including psychiatrists, psychologists, education specialists, and social workers. In contrast to conventional Christian morality and medical-biological thinking, these new experts relied on modern social sciences, especially psychology and education, but later also on sociology. The professionalization and scientification of social care provided a new frame of reference: what had initially been defined in terms of morality was now seen as a (mental) health issue. Normalization and integration based on psychosocial strategies took the place of sanctions and prohibitions, whereas sexual norms were formulated in relation to general human standards involving health, well-being, and personal growth. The emphasis shifted from a moral and biological approach to a more psychological one: sexuality was no longer solely seen in terms of procreation, but also as an autonomous means of communication, as expression and confirmation of a love bond, initially only within marriage but gradually also outside of it.

The shift from a procreation-morality to a relationship-ethics, not only in expert discourse but increasingly in religious discourse on sexuality as well, resulted in the early 1960s in a more flexible attitude toward birth control, premarital sex, and homosexuality. It became possible to have a positive view of heterosexuality or to either vindicate or accept homosexuality, if at least it was expressed in a responsible and meaningful way in a steady relationship. By combining personal development with self-restraint and individual responsibility, this new Christian-humanistic set of norms and values offered a middle way between the denial of sexual urges and unbridled hedonism. Sexuality was still a sensitive issue but it was revalued and seen as a source of personal and relational enrichment. In this respect, the ideological distance between, on the one hand, the reform-minded confessionals of the 1950s, and, on the other hand, the sexual emancipation movements of those days, such as the NVSH and the COC (which served the interests of homosexuals), was not as substantial as it may seem at first glance. The mainstream among the sexual reformists also viewed sexuality as a positive force that contributes to personal growth through relational bonds. Inside as well as outside of Christian circles, sexual reform was more successful and permanent when the romanticized ideal of a steady one-to-one relationship based on love was within reach and there was no real threat to the basic concept of monogamous marriage.

Precisely because the confessional experts based their response to social changes on their specific set of beliefs, which also helped them to translate these changes for their constituency, they caused a change in mentality which during the 1960s affected church authorities as well as Dutch society at large. In this way, the confessional intellectuals helped set the stage for the sexual 'revolution' of the 1960s. Within the organizational structures that were meant to certify a Catholic or

Calvinist identity, ideas gained currency that quickly turned out to be hardly discernable from those of Dutch Reformed or unaffiliated Dutch people. This suggests that a new, broadly shared humanistic set of values had replaced the various belief systems of the separate pillars. It is one of the ironies of history that the reform euphoria of the 1960s was most passionately felt among the new generation of Catholics and Protestants.

The decade between 1965 and 1975 represents a cultural and ideological watershed in post-war Dutch history. Material security and physical safety had been more or less a given for those who came of age in the 1960s, and this was expressed in a new set of values. The protest generation of the 1960s had higher demands regarding the quality of life, focusing on non-material values like personal growth and emancipation, values that were even hardly recognized by the existing pillarized political organizations. One of the fields in which the cultural renewal of the 1960s manifested itself most strongly was that of marriage, family and sexuality. In the early 1960s, one taboo after the other was broken, especially in the arts and media. The radio-talks on sexuality and relationships by the Catholic psychiatrist C.J.B.J. Trimbos for the Catholic network KRO had considerable influence. Television, which entered the living room of the average Dutch household in the 1960s, played an even more stimulating role than radio. In 1963, the year when the pill was introduced, the popular Bishop Bekkers declared on television that birth control was a matter of a married couple's individual conscience, thus distancing himself from the official Roman Catholic view. In a short period of time, a wide variety of information on sexuality flooded the market, from candid sex education booklets, complete with pictures of various 'positions', to all sorts of pornography. The media reported extensively on the sexual underground, for instance, the gay scene, group sex experiments, partner-swapping, and 'erotic panoramas'. Several controversial acquittals involving pornographic issues in the years around 1970 cleared the way for a strikingly permissive attitude. Porno shops and sex theaters enriched Dutch towns.

The force of the sexual revolution was significantly enhanced by developments in birth control technology, especially the introduction of the pill in 1963. Until the early 1960s, contraception was a major taboo in the Netherlands, but in 1965 the government put the issue on the political agenda. The liberalization of laws and the introduction of the pill in the package covered by medical insurance (1971) - so that it quickly found its way to family doctors - made sure that contraceptives were easily available, while a pragmatic approach to sex education certified their effective use. One sign of the effective use of contraceptives by young people in particular was that the number of enforced marriages and babies born out of wedlock, which had risen since the mid-1950s, began to drop starting in 1969. If up to the mid-1960s the number of illegitimate births was relatively low in comparison to the neighboring countries Belgium and Germany because of the strength of Christian morality in the Netherlands, after the onset of the sexual revolution it was low in comparison because of the rapid diffusion of contraceptives, among both religious and secular groups of the Dutch population.

Around 1970, there was a general consensus among Dutch politicians about the desirability of family planning and, by implication, the necessity of free access to

contraceptives. Although Rome condemned the use of contraceptives in the 1968 encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, most Dutch Catholics, just like the Protestants (with the exception of the orthodox Calvinists), had no scruples about putting aside the official views of their church. The wide availability of effective contraceptives facilitated successful family planning. During the 1970s, the Netherlands was the world's leader in terms of the quantity of contraceptives used. Whereas before 1965 the Netherlands was among the European countries with the highest birth rates, in the late 1960s the Dutch followed closely in the footsteps of countries with low birth rates, like Denmark and Sweden. Between 1960 and 1975 the birth rate - the number of live-born children per thousand inhabitants - dropped from 20.9 to 13.0, and in the period between 1955 and 1981 the average number of children in each household declined down from 3.0 to 1.6.

Precisely because of the availability of effective contraceptives, unwanted pregnancy became harder to accept. Therefore, abortion could emerge from the realm of silence and secrecy. In the early 1960s, it was openly debated by doctors and members of the legal profession, but already by the late 1960s more and more policlinical help was provided, leading to a rapid shift in the mindset from 'no, except' to 'yes, except'. However, this did not lead to an increase in the number of abortions. The demand for abortions even dropped after 1971, when the first Dutch abortion clinic opened its doors, and stabilized at a low level by 1974. The increase in premarital sex did not cause a rise in abortions. Together with a decline in illegitimate births and enforced marriages, this indicates a widespread use of contraceptives. Abortion was not considered as a replacement for contraception, but rather, and probably even more so than in earlier decades, as a last resort. Although article 251 of the criminal code, which prohibited abortion, was given such a broad interpretation during the 1970s that ending a pregnancy was no longer a pressing issue, this medical procedure was still a controversial political and ethical matter. Not until 1981 did the Dutch parliament vote in favor of an amendment which permitted abortion on medical and social grounds provided a consultation between doctor and woman takes place and a required three to five-day reflection period is observed. However, this did not go far enough for the women's movement which viewed the right to abortion as touchstone of woman's autonomy.

The ensuing heated debate on abortion, in which both supporters and opponents referred to the rights of the individual (of the woman as well as the unborn child), presents a clear example of the politicization of sexuality that was caused by the sexual revolution. Already before the second feminist wave had declared the politics of the personal, the fusion of Marxism and psychoanalysis by such German thinkers as Herbert Marcuse and Wilhelm Reich offered a theoretical framework for understanding individual and psychological phenomena as an integral part of socio-political relationships. Not surprisingly, the societies for sexual reform and for the integration of homosexuality (NVSH and COC) also tied their aims of sexual emancipation to a more general social reform. In the mid-1960s, the COC stepped out of its hiding place and publicly argued for the social integration of homosexuality through a process of mutual adjustments in both society and the homosexual minority. But when it became clear in the 1970s that this process was not advancing swiftly, the gay and lesbian movement radicalized: the activities of separatist groups

like *Paarse September*, the *Flikkerfront*, and the *Rooie Flikkers* were inspired by the aim to confront and provoke the general public. The gay movement was enriched by a flowering subculture: since the 1960s Amsterdam was not only a magic kingdom for hippies but also a Mecca for homosexuals.

During the second half of the 1960s, the NVSH became a potent social force. By this time, the society for sexual reform had over 200,000 members and more than sixty consultation offices for family planning across the country. It also published its own information booklets and broadcast its own programs on television. In contrast to the NMB, which focused only on birth control, the NVSH, founded in 1946, also aimed at ending repressive moral legislation, improving scientific knowledge of sexuality, and developing a more open and positive approach to sex education. The right to a more satisfactory sexual life was seen as a condition for improving society at large. The NVSH's basic view was that a healthy and fulfilling sexual lifestyle was an intrinsic part of the process toward personal growth and that neither the state nor society had the right to determine the dominant norm in the area of sexuality; instead, it had become a matter of personal choice and individual responsibility. However, the substantial growth of the NVSH (from over 26,000 members in 1946 to 202,000 in 1966) was attributable not to its alternative sexual ideology, but rather to its successful efforts to distribute contraceptives and pragmatic information. During the 1960s, there was a marked division of interest between an inspired avant-garde which favored radical sexual liberation and a more conservative following which primarily valued practical information about sexuality. Once contraceptives became widely available, the NVSH saw its membership quickly decline again.

Although legislation and the actual application of moral laws lagged behind social developments, in 1970 the government demonstrated that it recognized the need for sexual reform. After legal impediments against the distribution of contraceptives had gone, in 1971, divorce was made simpler and easier. In the same year, article 248bis, which discriminated against homosexuals, was dropped. In legal and ethical debates, recourse to 'public decency' as the basic norm was no longer taken for granted; instead, new criteria prevailed, involving basic individual rights, the harmfulness of certain forms of sexuality, and the unequal power relations in sexual bonds. Thus, in 1981, rape in marriage became a crime.

In many ways, the sexual revolution in the Netherlands was spectacular and had a lasting impact, partly because it was enacted and discussed publicly thanks to the presence and attention of the modern media. Possibly, the openness and heatedness of the debates were a response to the more restrictive climate of the preceding period. During the 1960s, sex became visible and debatable, and particularly in Amsterdam the sexual revolution was characterized by radical experimentation. Yet has all this also substantially altered the sexual conduct and views of the average Dutch person?

Opinion polls conducted in the 1960s and 1970s clearly indicated the dissolution of the traditional, strongly Christian repressive morality which only permitted marital sex aimed at procreation, except among small minorities of orthodox Calvinists or Catholics. The decade between 1965 and 1975 marked a turn in the norms on sexuality, marriage and family within the church, politics, health care,

social care as well as in public opinion. A 'sexual enthusiasm', the idea that sexual liberation was essential to the individual's well-being, could be felt everywhere. Sexuality became associated less with shame and aversion; opinion polls taken between 1965 and 1981 indicated an increasingly liberal attitude, in particular with respect to contraceptives, masturbation, premarital sex, and cohabitation. With respect to homosexuality, abortion, and prostitution, the Netherlands, alongside Denmark, was the most tolerant European country in those years. Clearly, the clock could no longer be set back with regard to countless issues, for instance, the disconnection of reproduction and sexuality, and the emancipation of young people, women, and outsiders like homosexuals - groups which perhaps have benefitted most from the permissive society.

However, it remains to be seen whether the results of opinion polls on sexuality correspond well with the sexual revolution viewed as a liberation of desire. The ongoing liberalization, notably regarding premarital sex and contraception, has not caused the Dutch to submit *en bloc* to a hedonistic, consumer-like attitude toward sex. Although some people have engaged in experiments with partner-swapping or group sex, tolerance for extramarital or promiscuous sex seems to have grown only slightly. Increasingly, in fact, such 'aberrations' of the sexual revolution have been met with skepticism and rejection. For most Dutch in all age groups, mere physical attraction alone is not, unlike a tight affective bond, adequate justification for sexual contact. For the majority of the Dutch population, sex remains more or less exclusively tied to a monogamous love bond, whether sealed by marriage or not. The tolerance for premarital sex, for instance, is dependent on the presence of a love bond or marriage perspective.

It seems, then, that the sexual revolution has not seriously affected the close tie between sexuality and the exclusionary romantic love ideal. The distrustful and restrained attitude toward sexuality was replaced by a positive evaluation of sexuality with affective bonds. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Netherlands predominantly became a couple-oriented society: people primarily found meaning in family life and in relationships. Yet the ways in which marriage and partnerships were actually enacted did change significantly. Compared to the decades preceding the 1950s, there is more equality between partners, there is more space for negotiation and personal growth, stereotypical gender roles are broken down, and mutual demands of sexual partners tend to be higher. But with the strong emotional and erotic nature of modern (marital) relationships, the potential for all sorts of psychological tensions that make them more fragile and less durable has increased, as is indicated by the growth of the number of divorces. The more or less self-evident, enduring marital engagement is replaced by a pattern of 'serial monogamy'; most Dutch remain quite monogamous, in their premarital sexual engagements as well.

Support for the findings of opinion polls can be found in demographic data which show that the popularity of marriage reached a high at the end of the 1960s. During the 1950s and 1960s, more and more people married at a younger age, and the percentage of unmarried individuals declined. Between 1950 and 1975, the average age of men and women at marriage decreased. Until the 1970s the percentage of those who were married among people in their twenties and thirties went up. Only after 1971, as alternative forms of living gained popularity, did

marriage frequency start to decrease, while the drop in the average age at marriage began to slow down. The change in ways of living together during the 1970s manifested itself particularly in the growing number of unmarried couples sharing a household, (younger) singles, and one-parent families, rather than a growth in communes and communal living experiments.

What was seen as either a shocking moral decline or a hopeful breaking of taboos in the 1960s may be considered, in hindsight, as no more than an acceleration in a long-term development of changing sexual attitudes and behavior. The change in mentality since the 1960s was preceded by a gradual, long-term behavioral evolution. Over the course of the twentieth century, a decreasing number of young people has postponed sex until after marriage, while the age of first sexual contact has gradually declined. During the 1950s, sexual conduct already failed to be in line with official morality, even though it was not publicly legitimized. The sexual revolution can be seen as a catching up of public morality with actual behavior. Moreover, what is at issue, it seems, is not so much a sudden and radical liberation of repressed sexuality as a shift in emphasis concerning the meaning and evaluation of sexuality.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s in the Netherlands was characterized by two changes: first, sexuality became visible and debatable, it could be openly discussed, and, secondly, there was a turn in the signification and evaluation of sexuality: whereas before the emphasis was on sexuality as an amoral drive which threatened culture at large, from the 1960s onward, the positive influence of gratifying sexual relationships on health and well-being was stressed. The sexual conduct of individuals used to be determined by social status, hierarchy, social responsibility, economic interests, and fixed gender roles, but in modern Western society personal emotion and desire have gained primacy in sexual matters. The historical roots of the sexual revolution can be found in the link of sexuality and the romantic love ideal as it was conceptualized around 1800 and became part of social reality during the nineteenth century. In the long run, this connection undermined the traditionally restrictive pattern of sexuality based on social and familial demands and economic interests. Particularly in (marital) relationships based on freedom and mutual attraction and affection, it became possible to attach a positive and autonomous meaning to sexuality. The emancipation of sexuality did not so much result in a liberation of sexual desire as in a different way of containing of such desire. While the traditional repressive morality needed few yet strict and unambiguous prohibitions, based as it was on force and control imposed from outside (which of course could not guarantee the prevention of forbidden sexual practices), the new, more flexible ethics was geared toward individual growth and demanded more subtle rules of engagement that depended on people's talent for negotiation and empathy. Changed social circumstances have been tied to new modes of social interaction that require a great degree of flexibility, self-awareness, individual responsibility, and self-control.

The sexual revolution was in many ways an ambiguous revolution. Instead of liberation, it created a host of new problems, on a personal as well as on a political and social level. Once sexuality had turned into an ordinary subject of public debate, all its troubles and difficulties could also come out into the open. The shift from the

traditional do's and don'ts to a more individualized psychological frame of reference did not necessarily mean that sexuality was experienced more freely at the personal level. Now that sexual expression was left to individual choice and responsibility and there was room for personal growth and emancipation, many people did not know what to do with the increased liberties; they had doubts and felt insecure and confused. New norms concerning erotic attractiveness and sexual achievement could make individuals feel as unfree and unhappy as under the old taboos. The new view of sexuality may have caused fewer feelings of guilt, yet they were replaced by other emotional problems: fear of not living up to the new norms, fear of feeling inadequate or being not attractive enough, fear of being abnormal, fear of losing one's partner and of failing to achieve a satisfactory balance between unimpeded sexual fantasies and the limitations of everyday life. Sexual liberation not only invoked new sexual norms about optimal sexual functioning, but as sexuality grew more important for personal identity and the continuity of relationships, problems in these areas also gained prominence and were more intensely experienced at the individual level. Counseling on sexual issues boomed right after the onset of the alleged sexual revolution - this is one of its paradoxes. As a source of personal and relational growth, sexuality remained a sensitive issue. And, obviously, 'good' sex was not just there, but needed practice and experience.

The feminist argument that sexuality is far from innocent because it can be used for manipulative and egotistical purposes indicated that many sexual reformers had miscalculated the complex and ambivalent nature of sexual desire and the large differences in male and female sexual experience. Therefore, the ongoing reform of moral legislation was a controversial point in the 1980s. Proposals to change legislation concerning pornography, sexual violence, and the age of consent for sexual activity gave rise to heated debates and were met by resistance from both Christian and feminist circles. The women's movement considered rape, sexual child abuse, prostitution, and incest as evidence of the fact that liberated sexuality is often male, aggressive, and violent; as such, it poses a threat to women and children. As a consequence of the heightened awareness of the dangerous sides of liberated sexuality, a large part of the Dutch population turned back to somewhat more conservative attitudes.

The emergence of AIDS in the 1980s also cast a chill over the sexual revolution. In the early 1980s, the hedonistic gay subculture - quite possibly the only place where the fundamental principles of the sexual revolution were consistently practiced - was first struck by the epidemic, after, in fact, the number of infections involving venereal diseases had already risen drastically in the 1970s. It should be pointed out, though, that in the Netherlands, in contrast to England and the United States, the new disease did not unleash a moral backlash against the accomplishments of the sexual revolution. Obviously, the time of carefree promiscuity - if ever it existed - is over; the epidemic has led to more caution and a revalorization of committed relationships, but as yet there is no sign in the Netherlands of a return to a repressive sexual morality, except for pedophilia. It can be argued that AIDS has in fact contributed to even more openness about sexuality in general and about homosexuality in particular, both in terms of its pleasures and its pains.

In the Netherlands, even more than in other Western countries, sexuality has become visible and discussable since the 1960s. There are many ways in which consumer culture tries to appeal to sexual desire. We are constantly exposed to ideals and information about our sexual functioning. Advertising, fashion, lifestyle magazines, pop music, movies, and the entertainment business stimulate our sexual emotions and represent erotic attraction as a significant determinant of happiness. Therapeutic discourse treats us as sexual beings, and the media suggest to us that optimal sexual functioning is an imperative for personal growth. The educational system, social services, and governmental information teaches us what responsible and healthy sexuality entails. The media devote much attention to all kinds of sexual variation, from homosexuality to sado-masochism, and from fetishism to exhibitionism. In Amsterdam in particular there is a wide choice available for satisfying all sorts of sexual needs, and 'kinky parties' are well-attended. Both in government and among the general public a tolerant attitude prevails. It remains to be seen, however, whether modern society can truly provide its members with the means for forming and satisfying the sexual needs which it constantly invokes and incites. At times it seems as if sexual liberties are propagated rather than practiced. Where formerly morality lagged behind actual behavior, now it appears that liberal views do not lead to a rich or versatile sexual life. For the majority of the populace, sexual practice is limited to steady partners and sexual activity shows little variation. In that respect the Dutch are hardly very different from other Western nations.

An array of culturally determined assumptions still prevent a varied, multifaceted sexual culture from developing, not only in the Netherlands but in the entire Western world. First, the difference between the ways in which men and women experience sexuality presents an obstacle to sexual equality; at present it overfreights heterosexual relationships with discussions about liberties and sexual violence. Secondly, the debate on sexuality is marked by a polarization between 'good' sex, conducive of individual freedom and personal growth, and 'bad' sex, characterized by inequality and force. Next, the connection of sexuality and love prevents individuals from seeking sexual experimentation outside their relationship. At the same time, sexuality is perhaps overestimated in relationships, and this burdens love relationships with changeable and unpredictable sexual desires. Fourth, the idea that sex properly belongs to the invisible private sphere discourages the formation of a public sexuality. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the formation of a new sexual culture is prevented by the deeply rooted assumption that sex is 'natural' and that therefore it cannot be learned or cultivated.

The drive-model is central to both traditional Christian-bourgeois morality and various liberalization ideologies of the sexual revolution. This means that sexuality is considered a part of human nature that has an autonomous existence regardless of society. Before the 1960s, it was the dominant idea that sexual urges posed a continuous threat to the moral order because of their explosive and barely controllable nature; therefore, they had to be strictly repressed by outside regulation and control. Since then, the emphasis has shifted toward a positive evaluation of sexual desire as the heart of the self. Yet the social-critical elements of the sexual revolution have been hastily overlooked. Since the 1970s, the common

understanding of sexual liberation has stressed personal awareness and individual growth within the existing social order. Because every individual harbors sexual desire, according to the new morality, he or she has the right to sexual gratification, as long as certain rules are met. Although sexuality has unmistakably entered the public arena since the 1960s, it has concurrently - and paradoxically - become a more personal, private, and psychological affair. The ever more negative responses to the expression of various sexualities in public, that can be witnessed today in the Netherlands, are an indication of how difficult it is to break these ingrained patterns and views.

Selected bibliography

- Akkerman, T., Stuurman, S. red. (1985). *De zondige riviera van het katholicisme. Een lokale studie over feminisme en ontzuiling 1950-1975*. Amsterdam: Sua.
- Berkel, D.A.M. van. (1990). *Moederschap tussen zielzorg en psychohygiëne. Katholieke deskundigen over voortplanting en opvoeding 1945-1970*. Assen, Maastricht: Van Gorcum.
- Bolt, A. (1989). Jeugd en seksualiteit in Nederland; een vergelijking tussen enquête-materiaal uit 1968 en 1981. *Tijdschrift voor Seksuologie* 13/4, 266-275.
- Brongersma, E. (1986). *Zedelijkheidswetgeving in Nederland. Handboek Seksuologische Hulpverlening*. Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus.
- Glasbergen, P, Zandanel, R. (1976). *Bevolkingsgroei en welvaartsstaat*. Assen, Amsterdam: Van Gorcum.
- Heeren, H.J. (1985). *Bevolkingsgroei en bevolkingsbeleid in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Kobra.
- Hekma, G. (1987). *Homoseksualiteit, een medische reputatie. De uitdoktering van de homoseksueel in negentiende-eeuws Nederland*. Amsterdam: Sua.
- Hekma, G. (1994). De klemmen van de lust. De ontwikkeling van het plezier sinds de seksuele revolutie. *Etnofoor* 7/2, 5-23.
- Hekma, G. e.a. red. (1990). *Het verlies van de onschuld. Seksualiteit in Nederland*. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff.
- Hofstee, E.W. (1981). *Korte demografische geschiedenis van Nederland van 1800 tot heden*. Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck.
- Ketting, E. (1983). De nieuwe seksuele beheersingsmoraal. *Tijdschrift voor Seksuologie* 3, 93-109.
- Kooy, G.A. (1976). *Jongeren en seksualiteit. Sociologische analyse van een revolutionaire evolutie*. Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus.
- Kooy, G.A. (1975). *Seksualiteit, huwelijk en gezin in Nederland*. Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus.
- Kooy, G.A. e.a. (1983). *Sex in Nederland. Het meest recente onderzoek naar houding en gedrag van de Nederlandse bevolking*. Utrecht, Antwerpen: Het Spectrum.

Mooij, A. (1993). *Geslachtsziekten en besmettingsangst. Een historisch-sociologische studie 1850-1990*. Amsterdam: Boom.

Nabrink, G. (1978). *Seksuele hervorming in Nederland. Achtergronden en geschiedenis van de Nieuw-Malthusiaanse Bond (NMB) en de Nederlandse Vereniging voor Seksuele Hervorming (NVSH), 1881-1971*. Nijmegen: SUN.

Noordhoff, J.D. e.a. (1969). *Sex in Nederland*. Utrecht, Antwerpen: Het Spectrum.

Oosterhuis, H. (1992). *Homoseksualiteit in katholiek Nederland. Een sociale geschiedenis, 1900-1970*. Amsterdam: Sua.

Röling, H.Q. (1987). *'De tragedie van het geslachtsleven'. Johannes Rutgers (1850-1924) en de Nieuw-Malthusiaanse Bond*. Amsterdam: Van Genneep.

Schnabel, P. (1973). Seksualiteit in de welvaartsstaat. *Sociologische Gids* 3, 189-206.

Stuurman, S. (1983). *Verzuiling, kapitalisme en patriërchaat. Aspecten van de ontwikkeling van de moderne staat in Nederland*. Nijmegen: SUN.

Tielman, R. (1982). *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland. Studie van een emancipatiebeweging*. Meppel: Boom.

Top, W. (1988). *Fijn en frisch. Seksuele voorlichting onder Gereformeerden 1900-1965*. Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij.

Warmerdam, H., Koenders P. (1987). *Cultuur en ontspanning. Het COC 1946-1966*. Utrecht: Veen.

Zessen, G. van en T. Sandfort, red. (1991). *Seksualiteit in Nederland. Seksueel gedrag, risico en preventie van Aids*. Amsterdam, Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.