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Our Boys: Deconstructing Homonationalism and identifying (New) Discourse on Masculinities Through Queer Representation in Dutch Media

By
Tim Suijderhoud

Submitted to
Central European University Department of Gender Studies

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Critical Gender
Studies*

Supervisor: Eszter Timar
Second Reader: Kath Bassett

Vienna, Austria: June 3rd, 2022



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Abstract

The last ten years have seen a radical change in the way we understand, perform, and represent identity in the context of the Netherlands. A country with a progressive reputation regarding LGBTQ+ emancipation is found lagging behind neighbouring countries uncovering persistent gendered issues and xenophobia reflective of homonationalist politics. Now, a sudden increase in diverse media representation suggests the emergence of a new discourse on queer identification, challenging traditional nationalist ideals. In this research I aim to identify the trajectory of Dutch discourse on masculinity in particular by examining performances of gender, sexuality, and nationalism as intersecting signs of identity. Moreover, I propose the significance of new masculine discourse to the deconstruction of homonormativity and homonationalist politics in my analysis of Dutch film, television, and theatre. What do these staged performances tell us about changing practices of identification and the changing national masculine ideal? The focus lies on the production of gay/queer masculinities, as I imagine their performativity to be situated within the nexus of subjectification and transformation of discourse. I find that, although they are up for discussion, traditional, nationalist notions of manhood perpetually play an important role in the lives and identifications of male identifying queer bodies. However, new, intersectional negotiations of gender and sexuality represented in mainstream media indicate a rapid generational shift. I argue that in the last 5 to 10 years, straight acting, masculine anxiety, brotherhood, fluidity, and vulnerability, are implicitly and explicitly discussed in various, films, series, documentaries, and theatre productions, pointing towards the emergence of new masculinities and a subversion of homonormativity and traditional, national ideals. Contrastingly, gay male identifying bodies continuously show signs that reproduce national homonormative ideals to which entertainment's de-politicisation of queer issues and practices of gaystreaming contribute.

Keywords: Performativity, representation, masculinities, homonormativity, homonationalism

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Lastly, I want to thank my friend Rikkert van Huisstede for inspiring me to participate in the revolution of vulnerability.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

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Signature: Tim Suijderhoud

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1. Introduction

When I was just a closeted teenager, I sensed that most aspects of my sexual identity were not normative in and around the institution of high school, I became frightened of standing out for the wrong reasons. I decided to mimic the behaviour of boys (in particular, boys that were established straight) to blend into the crowd. I became quite proficient at this practice and found out, interestingly, that to shield my (alleged otherwise obvious) sexual differences from exposure, I had to repetitively prove my masculinity. I had to establish my masculine gender to manifest my heterosexuality. I performed straight, by performing male. Then, upon coming out that masculinity that had established itself within my body started to feel uncomfortable. I found out quite quickly that what I felt was the by-product of a false promise that what follows the heteronormatively constructed process of coming out is freedom of identification. A lingering feeling of the presence of uncomfortable and uneasy masculinity made me slowly understand that into my processes of homosexual identification the heterosexual masculinity that I had internalised persisted.

It is important to consider the gender of sexuality when formulating contextual understandings of homosexuality. Cheri Jo Pascoe captures the experience that I, and many with me, had in high school in her book “Dude, you’re a fag” (2011) when she exposes the discursive strategies of the word “fag” that are integral to the experience of young manhood. Many men becoming men develop masculine constructions of self that reflect homophobia through “fag” discourse: an abjection of homosexuality as inherent to the production of heterosexuality. Considering Judith Butler’s performativity as constructive of identity (Butler, 1993a), masculinity therefore cannot ever be untangled from performances of sexuality. This thesis further explores these performative contingencies of gender and sexuality. On the level of the individual, we internalise whatever we identify as acceptable which many scholars argue to be construct of “straight acting” practices (Eguchi, 2009; Sánchez & Vilain, 2012) and, in trying to perform our queer identity as activist politics, we are subject to normative constructions of queer identity (Duggan, 2002; Ng, 2013). We become consumers of queer tv that de-politicises our position (Jr, 2018) and we desire bodies that perform gender in a way that makes us melancholic to what we are afraid to lose (Butler, 1993b). Pascoe’s fag discourse is transferrable into queer spaces through constructions of homosexuality informed by hegemonic heterosexual masculinity.

These performative constructions of self then become enveloped in larger scale neoliberal politics of identity that operate within systems of xenophobia, classism, and whiteness. Foucauldian webs of power persist into our identifications and these power relations are inherently gendered, as the masculine oppressor historically dominates the feminine oppressed (Foucault, 1990). The masculine nation as oppressor informs our internalised normativity, as, in spite of diverse queer pervasion, masculine discourse and representations reflect national ideals of queer identity and politics of homonationalism. The Netherlands has a vast neoliberal political modern history, and, despite its reputation as a tolerant free country (Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011; Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007), statistical and qualitative information suggest persisting gender issues, racism, and homophobia (Gaykrant, 2021). Processes of de-pillarisation meant a focus on freedom as most important liberal political discourse, in which freedom of speech and an equal position of all to express their identity became Dutch national values. (Van Dam, 2015). Then, upon a generational shift of Dutch demographics between the 1960s and the 1980s, the influx of Muslim people into the Netherlands was increasingly politically framed as a threat to that national freedom (Spierings, 2021). Accepting homosexuality within national politics reflected Anti-Islam attitudes appropriated by right-wing political Parties like the PVV, the self-proclaimed Party for Freedom. Freedom here is nationalist and racially informed, into which queer politics have been adopted to propose the narrative of the necessary protection of “our boys” against the evil that is Muslim immigrants and others with a Moroccan or Turkish background.

The research presented in this thesis aims to deconstruct homonationalist ideals that persist in heterosexual as well as homosexual spaces that produce the image of “our boys” and the discourse that the freedom the Dutch people enjoy is threatened by terrorist notion of whatever is outside of our national, masculine, heterosexual, white borders. The real threat, namely, comes from within Dutch politics and performances of identity. Firstly, Dutch Christian values coincide with anti-LGBTQ attitudes which is underscored by the recent publication of a Dutch copy of the Nashville statement. Secondly, queer bashing and discrimination persists as more and more cases of violence are registered every year (College Voor de Rechten van de Mens, 2021), in which the case of Frederique, who became victim of abuse in July 2021 in Amsterdam (Dorlo, 2021), is particularly exemplary of Dutch national ideals of identity. She could not be read as boy or girl, gay or straight, exemplifying how having this identity that is not specifically solidified and culturally legible remains dangerous and an incentive to violence. Lastly,

masculinity and its intersections with nationality and whiteness as perpetually constructive of national discourse is repeatedly established to which Joris Luyendijk and the publication of his book “De Zeven Vinkjes” (2022) is highly exemplary. This book presents an understanding of Luyendijk’s privileged position as a possessor of seven intersectional checkmarks that reflect aspects of identity. He discusses his positionality in Dutch society as a white, autochthonous, heterosexual, wealthy, and highly educated man. In essence this book provides a reflexive and in depth understanding of the workings of intersectionality and privilege for which he received national acclaim. The overwhelming view on his writing still is: “Look, this man is doing his part in understanding interactional identities and structural oppression”. He quickly became the new face of Dutch emancipation. Backlash followed though, and my thoughts on his book are indebted to comments made by Sylvana Simons, leader of Dutch political party Bij1, concerned with issues of diversity, on the political talk-show “Buitenhof” (2022). She argues that the issues Luyendijk wrote about are published years ago by black feminist authors in books such as Gloria Wekker’s “Witte Onschuld (White Innocence)” (2017). These publications did not receive that much acclaim, and Simons states that this very fact exposes lingering effect of the exact issues that Luyendijk claims to identify. Moreover, Luyendijk had barely given credit to the original thinkers in the field of intersectionality. Ironically, after the episode of Buitenhof aired, Luyendijk felt betrayed by the network (VPRO) which uncovers precisely the fragile white masculinity that constitutes his privilege and the production of Dutch hegemonic discourse.

To deconstruct hegemonic (homo)national ideals of identity, I am interested in popular cultural tendencies and mainstream representation as constructive of performative practices. This research therefore focusses on Dutch mainstream media in the form of film, series, documentaries, and theatre productions. I understand the differentiating lines between performances on and off stage as blurry in which I adopt a Butlerian framework in which performances of gender like drag expose quotidian performances of gender (Butler, 1993b). It makes sense then to approach these large-scale national politics through mainstream media and representation of identity as a performative discursive practice. Theory on masculinity provides an analytic tool throughout the research. After situating the research within wider scholarly debate, in the chapter 4 I will elaborate on Pascoe’s notion of the conflation of gender and sexuality in discursive constructions of identity and queer expressions of self. The documentary *Acting Straight* (Dibi& Timmers, 2019) teaches us more about masculine practices and

internalised homophobia. This is further exemplified in reality TV like *Prince Charming* (RTL, 2021a, 2021b) and the web series *Hehobros* (Van Rees & Van Wijngaarden, 2017b, 2017c, 2017a) presenting discursive brotherhoods of man and nationalist ideals. Chapter 5 then explores expressions of self and discursive constructions of queer narratives. Through looking at films such as *Jongens* (Kamp, 2014) and *Gewoon Vrienden* (Van de Mond, 2018) we deconstruct homonormativity and the de-politicisation of queer. Finally, in chapter 6, I present an assessment of new masculinities as constitutive of expressions of self that potentially inform a new Dutch discursive trajectory. In this, I propose revolution of vulnerability as inspired by Rikkert van Huisstede and his theatre production *BOYS WON'T BE BOYS* (2020).

2. Theoretical and Contextual Framework

The theoretical framework that I present here is meant to situate my thesis within a wider field of study on gender performativity, homonormativity and homonationalism. As I discuss fundamental theory upon which my research builds and review literature that structurally informed my argument, I aim to map established scholarly discourse and its strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, I address the context of the Netherlands as a “formally equal hetero-culture” and its relevance to research on homonormativity and homonationalism as well as the relevance of this research to its context. Securely situated, with the research presented in this thesis, I aim to illuminate what has been overlooked and bridge theoretical gaps.

2.1. Performativity and representation

Representations of gender and sexual identification and their productive potential become enveloped in the tradition of performativity as they provide blueprints for the discursive materialisation of subjects and the production of national discourse. Simultaneously, the space of representation challenges normative performances of gender and sexuality intersecting with national ideals of whiteness and class through the subversive potential of queer performativity.

Materialist feminist scholarship is concerned with opposing essentialist notions of identity, to which it is suggested that gender is “performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (Butler, 1999 p. 33) and therefore, norms of gendered identity are imposed upon subjects and (re)productively performed by the same subjects towards institutionalisation. To understand the importance of analysing changing patterns of performances and discursive representations it is vital to presume that the material world is constructed by these performances. With a focus on how this plays out in constructions of gender, as Judith Butler assesses how materialisation is a performative practice, that entails both the reiteration and reflection of gendered practices (Butler, 1993a), performativity thus entails the “doing” of gender (Butler, 1993a, 1993b, 1997, 1999) and proposes the -to feminist scholars- widely accepted principle that gender is socially and culturally constructed as opposed to biologically determined. Moreover, materialisation of subjects is the consequence of linguistic discursive practices which involve citational strategies (Butler, 1993b) as non-deliberate acts yet the performative referencing of institutional laws of identity through (quotidian) use of language. Then, representation becomes a site of reproducing or subverting

normative ideals and laws of identity. Deconstructing the political position of women, Butler introduces the paradox of performances of gender:

(...) representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. (Butler, 1999 p. 3-4)

Butler's theory suggests that subjects, individuals, form the centre of a circular construction of their identity. This model cannot exist without constant reiteration, which uncovers the instability of normativity. We are subject to citation as well as agents of citation, and political representations of identity simultaneously reflect and produce normative ideals. This agency then accounts for the potential reform of the laws of identity (Butler, 1993b). Following these arguments, I stress the importance of the question of subversion, and the potential of performances of identity as agents of subversion through representation. The question is whether we as subjects are stuck in the circular model of construction, or whether there is potential for disruption. An important mechanism, is the process of reproduction/citation, ironically reflecting "natural" processes (of reproduction), as never the exact replica of the reproduced/cited. This mechanism is represented by ever changing normativity, the "mainstream" of societies, which implies subversive potential and is important in understanding renegotiations of masculinity as constitutive of national ideals of homosexuality.

To emphasise the inevitable manifestation of performative practice rather than gender as choice, *Critically Queer* (Butler, 1993b) presents drag as an example of performativity. In this assessment drag as a stabiliser of binary configurations of gender and sexuality is theoretically examined. Using Freudian theory on melancholia, Butler explores drag as performances of ungrieved loss of the unloved masculine/feminine, exposing the binary premises of melancholia. Here, the melancholic homosexual drag queen grieves the loss of love of the feminine through theatrical identifications of the feminine. This somewhat dated interpretation of drag denies the artistic political potential of drag as expression of self, however, melancholia as theoretically constitutive of theatrical drag exposes heterosexual performances of quotidian drag, performances of the daily.

The straight man becomes (mimes, cites, appropriates, assumes the status of) the man he "never" loved and "never" grieved; the straight woman becomes the woman she "never" loved and "never" grieved. It

is in this sense, then, that what is most apparently performed as gender is the sign and symptom of a pervasive disavowal. (Butler, 1993b)

Drag should now be understood in its mainstream context, in which political implications of drag performativity have undergone a generational transformation. What remains however is its contested subversive potential of gender binaries, as commodified contemporary drag reflects hegemonic capitalist notions of gender productivity. Butler's theorisation of theatrical drag holds up however as a constant reflection of quotidian "drag", looking at celebrity drag queens and their appropriation of femininity in a neoliberal age (Edgar, 2011; O'Connell, 2020; Schewe, 2009).

As "queer time perhaps emerges most spectacularly at the end of the twentieth century" (Halberstam, 2005 p. 4) in the context of the US AIDS epidemic, it is here that representation of homosexuality as constructive of performative sexuality becomes part of modern understandings of queer politics. Leo Bersani's essay "Is the rectum a grave?" (1987) identifies the political productive potential of television in constructions homosexual identity as congruent with the AIDS epidemic. Following Butlerian theory on citational constructions of identity, within the context of queer performativity, representation thus plays an equally significant role as discursive force. The question of the political position of queer identity then becomes important in scholarship. Queer as interpellation of shameful identity is arguably reversed precisely through reclaiming its meaning and transforming its discursive politics, uncovering that therein lies the subversive potential of reiteration (Butler, 1993b). For Michel Foucault, queer political potential is found in a "way of life" in which manifestations of queer friendships rather than sexual acts cut through normative social fabric. For him, way of life opposes homogenous homosexual practices of identification as reproductive, through the establishment of intense relationships and love (Foucault, 1997). Bersani (1987) understands heterosexual identification as solely the expression of preference, whereas gayness adopts a politically subversive position. Adaptations of this theory on political homosexual positionality are reflected in the work of David Halperin (Halperin, 1995) as he distinguishes gay from queer:

By "gay", I am referring to identities and actions that exist outside the centre of heteronormativity, but do not disrupt it. I use "queer" or "queerness" when referring to a performance of sexuality and identity that acts in opposition and resistive to a social norm (Halperin, 1995 p. 66)

Here, Halperin refers to queer performativity as subversive and gay identifications as reproductive of heteronormative. I wonder if these boundaries are drawn too thick, and whether this thinking that contrasts Butler's understanding of (gender) performativity as "reiterations [that] are never simply replicas of the same. And the "act" by which a name authorizes or de-authorizes a set of social or sexual relations is, of necessity, a repetition." (Butler, 1993b), might contribute to the exact reproduction of norms that Halperin criticises. Illustratively, as his later work denies the political potential of "queer" (Halperin, 2009) and focusses on bisexuality as constitutive of new queer theory, through language and its political potential we can understand contemporary discourse yet fail to identify structural consistency. Therefore, gay identity as unpolitical cannot be temporally stable, nor are they solid, as gay, like queer, became unpolitical over time. What I am interested in, building on linguistic specificities, is exactly the representation of quotidian practices that make gay and queer essentially unstable. The tension between political queer ideals historically and de-politicised gay identifications remains discursively challenging. In the following section I will elaborate upon this by introducing masculinity as constitutive of gay/queer performativity.

2.2. Gay Masculinities

Butlerian performances of gender shape and construct gender itself as they reflect and reproduce structures of power. Historically, we have seen the proliferation of masculine domination that persists into a contemporary western "formally equal patriarchy" (Jónasdóttir, 1988), a legally equal society within which nuanced inequalities persist discursively and in form of representations as discussed in prior sections. In an understanding of dominant structures as manifestations of power and discourse, Michel Foucault states that discourse of what goes and what is forbidden through strategies of "a multiplicity of discursive elements" (Foucault, 1990) constitutes a power that is instable, as its hold on its silenced subjects is slippery:

Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions, but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance ((Foucault, 1990)

An interaction between gender and heterosexuality becomes important as the politics of masculinity are shaped under the conditions of heterosexual powerful discourse. With regard to the institution of heterosexuality, Michael Warner argues that unlike cultural identity with

regards to race, queer culture is not rooted in family and tradition and queer does not have an agenda of reproduction. Building on that, he states that “het culture” thinks of itself as inherently formative of society. Heterosexuality is the basis of any kind of societal structure and the heterosexual couple is the principle for social union (Warner, 1993). An interaction between gender and heterosexuality becomes important as the politics of gender are shaped under the conditions of heterosexual powerful discourse.

“If we are to seriously engage with the central tenets of queer theory, then it behooves us to ask to what extent concepts such as “masculinity,” “man,” and “male sex” are reliant on the institution of heterosexuality for their coherence.” (Garlick, 2003)

Steve Garlick points here, to the role of masculinity in queer theory, culture and the lives of queer folks reflects dominating, silencing potential of heterosexual discursive strategies. In an attempt to examine queer masculinity, it is therefore essential to consider the institution of heterosexuality in its Foucauldian discursive understanding. R. W. Connell produced a significant body of work on the concept of masculinity. Rethinking traditional discourse on masculinity as singular, Connell (1992, 2000, 2005) speaks of a range of masculinities that dominate and shape gender dynamics between men and women and among men. Thereto, it is argued that “The possibilities of historical change in a gender order are reflected- in divisions among men as well as in the practices of women” (Connell, 1992). It is suggested that alongside changing gender dynamics through feminist theory and practice, masculinities disperse and represent new constitutions of masculinity in relation to new femininity and other masculinities. Peter Nardi (Nardi, 2000) emulates her findings and assesses the appropriation and (re)production of heterosexual masculinities within the homosexual experience. Gay performances of masculinities become multidimensional and it is through masculinities as constitutive of homosexuality that we can read changing societal patterns of gendered relations.

In the introduction of his book *Gay Masculinities* (Nardi, 2000) Nardi assesses a changing relationship between gay male identifying bodies and masculinity. Before the 1970’s, gay representation largely produced feminine characteristics. After the events of the Stonewall riots, a visible change occurred, in which more masculine tropes were appropriated and discursively adopted. He cites Laud Humphreys in stating that these new masculinities are different from older parodies of heterosexual masculinity (6). I take this empirical assessment as an indicator that masculinities, similar to (or encompassing [or at least inseparable from]) gender and

sexuality are unstable. Paradoxically, gay masculinities still reflect and reproduce heterosexually gendered masculinities as exemplified by binary modern representations of femme and masc. Following Nardi and Connell I understand masculinities as unstable parts of the gay lived experience as well as fundamental aspects of an analytical tool to understand hegemonic heteronormativity as part of performativity reflected within the gay experience. Moreover, the temporal aspect of masculinities is discussed. The lack of research in this field that situates contemporary notions of masculinities within the forementioned scholarship grounds the importance of an analysis of new masculinities. With regards to the research presented in this thesis, it is important to situate gay masculinities in their appropriate context, considering the Western centric analysis that has been (and will be) presented. I would like to consider what Anna Jónasdóttir describes as the “formally equal patriarchy” (Jónasdóttir, 1988) as the context for analysis. She coined this term pointing towards societies that are formally equal when it comes to gender. The focus here is on the patriarchy and its implications for men and women. Gendered inequalities and dominant masculinity are said to be less visible but still prevalent in more obscure patterns. I argue that, in “formally equal het-cultures”, hegemonic homosexual masculinity manifests itself in similarly obscure, nuanced, yet persisting manners.

Contemporary research on masculinity and the homosexual experience points at the following: Heteronormative masculinities are challenged through gay performances and adaptations of masculinity. Parallely, that subversion is contested through gay performances of masculinity that reflect and reproduce hegemonic heterosexuality. This reproduction is often captured within practices of “straight acting” (Clarkson, 2005; Eguchi, 2009; Sánchez & Vilain, 2012) sexual imitation strategies that entail the adaptation of hegemonic masculinity through the abjection of femininity. Performances of homosexuality present meaningful practices that challenge and subvert normative structures, much like and in close relationship with gender performativity, yet informed by heterosexual dominance. Straight acting practices subsequently reflect subordination to dominant heterosexual structures as well as the reiteration, reinterpretation, and possible subversion of these norms.

Findings presented in research on masculine self-perceptions of gay men in the United States conducted by Sanchez and Vilain in 2012 underscore the manifestation of straight acting. Many gay men indicated that normative masculinity in looks and demeanour constructed their desire and sexual behaviour and became important to their presentations of the self. Parallely, feminine bodies and behaviour were rejected and sexually discriminated. Then, anxiety to be

caught presenting stereotypical perceptions of gay men as effeminate informs a culture of masculine presentations. Shinsuke Eguchi (2009) presents an interesting reflection on this phenomenon when he states that “masculine performing gay men may also participate in producing and reproducing the power structure of hegemonic masculinity that eradicates women and subordinates gay men and men of color” (p. 197). Thus, strategies of homophobia make up an important part of heterosexual masculine politics. (Eguchi, 2009, 2011; Ocampo, 2012; Sánchez & Vilain, 2012; L. Segal, 2006; Stein, 2005). To further illustrate, Cheri Jo Pascoe (2011) reformulates the framework in which masculinity and sexuality operate, by exposing “fag” discourse beyond the scope of abject sexuality into understandings of fag as a tool to assert masculinity. Firstly, the conflation of gender and sexuality and the role of masculinity in constructing sexual identity is uncovered here. Secondly, the discursive potential of language that abjects homosexuality is introduced. Considering Pascoe’s fag discourse, homophobia is manifested within the heterosexual as well as the masculine agenda -they are inevitably interwoven- first and foremost as a rejection of the unmasculine. Building on these understandings of gendered sexuality, Arlene Stein that feminine abjection is a manifestation of masculine anxiety and homophobia (Stein, 2005) and a constitutional force behind the construction of gender performativity.

Lastly, straight acting reflects upon interaction with community peers. Sánchez and Vilain found that their participants placed importance on the masculinity of their partners in addition to themselves (2012). Gay men’s reactions to gender atypical bodies also supports the argument that straight acting, as well as other forms of hegemonic masculinity operate on the level of the collective. The community reflects on the individual; therefore, the collective must be policed. This forementioned is supported by theory on femmephobia, when Sánchez and Vilain state: “gay men’s “femiphobia” was partly rooted in a desire to avoid being stereotyped and to distance themselves from the reality that they used to be feminine boys.” (p. 112) The heterosexual gaze on gay men as effeminate types has been internalised and has manifested itself as self-hatred and internalised homophobia as well as femmephobia when it comes to the identity of others within the community. The relationship between the homosexual experience and gender performativity is clear, as we see how perceptions of the self and others are informed in communication with heterosexual masculine norms.

Referring to formerly discussed scholarly history on the political implications of queer identification, I contest solid definitions of gay/queer and I examine straight acting practices as

gay identifications along the notion of “men who have sex with men” following Butler’s understanding of performativity as necessary yet indeliberate and Nardi’s understanding of this position as paradoxical and situated, like most performances, in between reproduction and transformation of norms. Moreover, I read performances of homosexuality through a Butlerian linguistic lens, Foucault’s interpretation of way of life and Halperin’s critical reading of sexual politics of identification. Most exemplary of my understanding of the trajectory of queer theory is building on Sánchez and Vilain’s notion of internalised homophobia as productive of modern gay performances, to which I add the manifestation of an internal conflict between understanding gendered issues and appropriation of heterosexual norms that make up contemporary gay identifying communities, situating new masculinities into the context of new adaptations of political homosexuality. This is not to say that, in my understanding of queer, diverse representations of a-normative identifications intersecting gender, sexuality, race, and class do not challenge binary and normative thinking most radically, which is considered throughout this research, and will be theoretically and contextually framed in section 2.4. It is however, to be considerate of the epistemological potential of homosexual representations in their sublime state.

2.3. Homonormativity and homonationalism

On the scale of the subjective individual, we found that hegemonic discursive power structures might inform internalisation of heterosexual normativity in performances of homosexuality. To explore this phenomenon at the level of politics on a larger scale we can turn to Lisa Duggan (2002) and her assessment of normative homosexuality within neoliberally organised (western) societies. First, she exposes neoliberal politics as justified non-politics, a commercially driven propagation of individual freedom of choice by the grace of equal opportunities (starting point) in the form of privatisation (Duggan, 2002). Then situating queer identification within neoliberal politics, she coins the term homonormativity. Homonormativity is understood as the de-politicisation of queer and the normalisation of homosexuals as consumer subjects, formally integrated within mainstream productive society. Queer identity becomes “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2002 p. 179). Thus, as a normalised ideal of queer is politically constructed, queer identity is adopted into a system that is persistently sexist, racist and homophobic and classist (Duggan, 2002)

Homonormativity theory is frequently used as lens through which mainstream entertainment can be critically examined. Adoption of normative queer identities as representations in romantic comedies and cinematic coming-of-age narratives have been objects of scholarly debate and criticism. In the context of the US, films as “Love Simon” (Francis, 2021) expose homonormative representations of gay, the interpellation of queer viewers as consumers rather than producers of queer, and the limited homosexual accessibility of the ‘good life’ (Francis, 2021). Eve Ng’s (2013) assessment of reality TV such as *Queer Eye* and *Ru Paul’s Drag Race* uncovers processes of gaystreaming as the appropriation of specific normative gay narratives into mainstream entertainment. Through de-politicisation of queer and uniform representations of accepted homosexuality these cases are suggested to be fuel for homonormativity. The homonormative subject promotes whiteness, nationalism, and wealth to which I propose the addition of a gendered aspect: traditional heterosexual signs of masculinity as constitutive aspect of represented homosexual performances to offset feminine notions of homosexuality. I argue that the production of homonormativity, lastly, contrasts notions of fluidity, understood by Erin Calhoun Davis (2009) as undefinable expression of identity that challenges binaries. Fluidity theory provides a lens through which we can understand subversive identity whilst considering the constraints of normative social life.

Further exploring normative constructions of identity as part of national politics in the context of the US’s war on terrorism, Jasbir Puar (2005) identifies nationalist adaptations of queer identity into a system that propagates of xenophobic, mostly anti-Islam discourse. Drag proves yet another political discursive practice exposing such nationalist ideals, as Puar is indebted to Muñoz’s assessment of “terrorist drag” in formulating her findings. In *The White to be Angry* (Muñoz, 1997), José Esteban Muñoz uncovers tensions between terrorism and drag in the context of US nationalism, as he discusses the work of drag performer and activist Vaginal Crème Davis. Different from commercial drag, Davis’s work cuts across nationally discursive systems that constrain the social body through what Muñoz terms disidentification. This makes Davis’s drag terrorist as their sexual, gendered, and racial (dis)identificatory practices are exactly those that reflect the nations internal terror (Muñoz, 1997). For Puar, this queer expression becomes exactly associated with Muslim terrorism that is the antagonist in national wars. By constructing a notion of exceptional nationalist US ideals of inclusion and tolerance, what is accepted into society becomes confined and normative, constitutive of homonormative identity configurations and exclusionary of terrorist queer expression.

That is, queerness is proffered as a sexually exceptional form of American national sexuality through a rhetoric of sexual modernization that is simultaneously able to castigate the other as homophobic and perverse and construct the imperialist center as "tolerant" but sexually, racially, and gendered normal. (Puar, 2005, p. 122)

Muslim terrorism represents the embodiment of homophobia and should be read through a framework of “queer assemblages” as coined by Puar (2005), exposing the collusion of intersectional politics and the state apparatus that wants to control formulations of identity and visibility. Queer assemblages take into account (Puar, 2005) nationalism as discursive regiment and understands identification as messy and temporally unstructured. Through this framework we can identify what is known as homonationalism, national politics of homonormativity into systems of racism, sexism and homophobia that expose state-controlled censorship, visibility, and rigid discourse on identity. As discussed, solidifications of rigid identity in this framework oppose representations of fluidity (Davis, 2009).

Building on theory of homonationalism this research provides a gendered lens, as I try to identify masculinity as constructive of national ideals of sexuality that co-construct homonationalist politics. Furthermore, in the next section, I will present a discussion of homosexuality and homonationalist politics in the context of the Netherlands.

2.4. Dutch national politics and homosexuality

After the second world war, Dutch society found itself organised through lingering processes of pillarisation¹. The properties of pillars as constructive of political society have been up for debate in Dutch scholarship, but many agree that four pillars formed the foundations of the Dutch ideological framework: socialist, Protestant, Catholic and early liberalist (Steininger, 1977). Along these pillars, social and political life was organised and within these ideological groupings, the relationship between political decision-making and the public was closely knit. Peter van Dam (2015) assesses the gradual abolishment of the pillars of Dutch society in decades after the 1950s known as de-pillarisation and discusses how interaction between different socio-political groupings became increasingly important. Moreover, rapid secularisation meant the ties between traditional Dutch Christianity and politics loosened and

¹ In Dutch: “Verzuiling”

social-political formations along Catholicism and Protestantism decreased in their political power (De Koster et al., 2010). Rigid confinements of political orientation that were established within the pillarised Dutch society were further scrutinised after the early 1970s in which the rise of environmental and social political organisations was visible. In reaction to breaking out of confined pillarised community formations the 1970s saw a political emphasis on liberalism and freedom of speech. Liberal political parties such as the VVD² and the D66³ acquired reasonable following further establishing what was arguably the start of the domination of liberal politics in the Netherlands (Voerman, 1995).

Parallel to the rise of liberal politics, Dutch gay and lesbian rights movements that originated in the early 20th century accumulated political foothold. Most notably, the space that the COC, to date the largest organisation the is involved with LGBTQ rights, was able to claim in political spheres, reflects the manifestation of secularisation and liberalisation as effects of anti-pillar public attitudes. Tolerance became an important progressive political agenda and as a consequence of COC's endeavours, although faced with scrutiny from many separatist LGBTQ organisations for its early connections with oppressive systems like mainstream media and the church, homosexuality was accepted as a form of identification and homosexuals increasingly included into mainstream political society. Moreover, in contrast to its impact in the context of the US as formerly discussed, the arrival of the AIDS epidemic in the late 1980s did not lead to increased stigmatisation of homosexuality (Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007).

The fear of the stigmatisation of homosexuals was so deep-rooted that initially the only information campaigns held were aimed at *all* citizens, regardless of their sexual proclivity. Also striking was the fact that, unlike in other countries, homosexuals were not encouraged to use a condom during anal intercourse but were instead advised to refrain from the practice altogether. This policy did not arouse resistance, however – probably because gay organisations had been closely involved in its development and promotion: (...) (Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007 p. 25)

If anything, the AIDS crisis resulted in homosexuality's increased visibility, as insurance companies advertised on television, homosexuality became a topic of conversation in talk shows, and more and more public figures came out as gay (Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007). Framed

² The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy

³ The (Liberal) Democrats 66

within the liberal political agenda however, LGBTQ tolerance is argued to have mostly manifested on surface level, as developments of gay and lesbian rights in the period between 1980 and 1993 staggered due to persistent Catholic and Protestant political configurations (Van de Meerendonk & Scheepers, 2004). Moreover, although the first same-sex marriage ceremonies were performed in Amsterdam 30th of March in 2001, the rise of “purple⁴” coalitions of parties in the Dutch political scene of the late 1990s and early 2000s enveloped LGBTQ emancipation into liberal nationalist political agendas (Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007).

At the peak of de-pillarisation in the Netherlands, around the end of the 1960s a high demand for labour informed an government influx of Turkish and Moroccan guest worker migrants (Spiecker & Steutel, 2001). Although it was expected that these migrants returned to their country of origin within a few years, they often came with their families and formed ties with Dutch country and culture arguably supported through the introduction of the “tweesporenbeleid”⁵ that encouraged integration into Dutch society while allowing for retainment of ethnic-cultural identity (Brons, 2021). This resulted in an unforeseen rapid diversification of Dutch demographics and the manifestation of a new ethnic minority group around the late 1990s. Most notably, this new group brought Muslim religion and practice into the Netherlands in a time in which left-wing political parties were highly involved with lesbian and gay emancipation. Anti-Islam attitudes in Dutch politics began to find political ground and these circumstances informed a persistent political shift and the adoption of LGBTQ rights into extreme right-wing politics around the turn of the millennium and well into the 2000s and 2010s.

Where in the 1970s and 80s gay emancipation was often regarded as a left-wing political theme, today (non-religious) right-wing parties are the most vociferous advocates. And where homosexuality was in the past seen as a threat to society, acceptance of gays and lesbians is today seen as a measure of good citizenship (Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007 p. 27)

The rise of Dutch liberalism, gay and lesbian emancipation and Anti-Islam politics reached (one of) its climax when Pim Fortuyn acquired political acclaim with his ideas (van der Veer, 2006).

⁴ “purple” refers to the first non-leftist non-religious but centre liberal coalitions of parties in the Netherlands (Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007)

⁵ Two track policy

Pim Fortuyn was an openly gay politician that highly valued feminism and sexual freedom. He strongly contested Dutch integration politics and pushed forward the Anti-Islam narrative of the threat of Moroccan and Turkish immigrants (Fortuyn, 1997). His discursive potential became even more dangerous upon the New York terrorist attacks on September 11th and the public disavowal of homosexuality by Imam Khalil El Mounni in May 2001 in Rotterdam (Hekma, 2002). His party, the LPF,⁶ acquired an overwhelming number of followers and voters in the 2002 elections, short after which he was killed by an environmental leftist (Brons, 2021). Dutch politics saw Geert Wilders and the PVV⁷ as his ideological successor, who similarly adopts LGBTQ rights into his Anti-Islam politics and who is in the Dutch parliament still today, further establishing persisting Dutch homonationalism. All the while, anti LGBTQ campaigns persist in Christian communities as in 2019 a signed copy of the Nashville statement was published mirroring US anti-LGBTQ views and disavowal of queer identity (Van Oenen, 2019). Moreover, an increasing number of cases of violence against LGBTQ folks is registered every year (College Voor de Rechten van de Mens, 2021; Gaykrant, 2021).

Geographic location is an important factor now in political orientation as Randstad areas are inhabited by moderately leftist voters and other provinces see more right-wing supporters. In larger cities like Amsterdam however, we can identify a vast body of support for newest neoliberal, masculine hegemonic politics in supporting Forum voor Democratie⁸, a sexist, racist, homophobic populist party. In these political democratic collectives, the idea of brotherhood of men becomes interesting as the persistence of fraternal masculinities. Within these fraternities, white, heterosexuality is the absolute norm, with a slight change in fraternities' demographic in very recent years. Thus, I argue that in homonational political configurations, what is often left out of the equation is the constitutive factor that is masculinity. Moreover, as I discuss throughout this research, Dutch masculinities constitute political attitudes towards and within queer communities. In the context of contemporary Dutch politics, I identify an upcoming shift, visible in the late 2010s and early 2020s. Academic assessment of Dutch politics often fails to recognise persistent left-wing green politics and the rise of parties

⁶ List Pim Fortuyn (right-wing)

⁷ Party For Freedom (right-wing)

⁸ Forum for Democracy (right-wing)

focussing on diversity and equity in Dutch parliament such as Groen links⁹ and Bij1¹⁰. Lastly, green, diverse upcoming political views are reflected in diversified popular cultural representations of identity through which we can read intersections of gender (masculinity), race and class.

Across communities, identificatory interpretations of gender and sexuality are renegotiated through interaction with changing cultural discourse. The more widespread idea of ranges and spectra of masculinity/femininity and queer sexuality inform a renegotiation of masculinity/femininity in which it is rooted differently (Segal, 2000). Both straight and gay men find themselves subject to contemporary feminist ideas of gender and sexuality, through which they are forced/inclined to renegotiate the meaning of their masculinity (importantly, apart from international differences in exposure/engagement to/with changing discourse, differences in class and race are of great significance here). These negotiations of identity (Ting-Toomey, 2005) and how they are represented in media form epistemological sites for understanding the trajectory of Dutch normative identity and the role of gender within the construction of national ideals. Moreover, queer, diversified performativity and representations potentially transform traditional homonormativity and inform a deconstruction of homonationalism. In the Netherlands, a formally equal het-culture (Jónasdóttir, 1988), we find nuanced, intersectional complexities in which these normative or new performances are captured. I have discussed how discourse on diverse sexuality and equality has been a prominent yet contested national political of discussion. I argue that issues with regard to gender, or the intersection of gender in contemporary problematic social configurations has been underrepresented in Dutch politics and popular cultural representations of identity.

⁹ The Green left-wing party

¹⁰ Left-wing party with focus on issues revolving around diverse identities

3. Methodology

This research presents a contemporary reformulation of discourse on masculinities in gay/queer spaces. The focus lies on new masculinities and how they are manifested in the lives of gay male identifying bodies and represented in mainstream media. Moreover, I formulate an understanding of popular cultural representations of masculine nationalist homonormativity as well as new gender discourse as deconstructive of homonationalist ideals. Thereto, I will be concerned with the following three research questions: How can we understand Dutch gay identification through masculinity as constitutive of homonormative ideals? How can contemporary masculine performances be understood in a changing context of gay men's constructions of self? and what does that tell us about the trajectory of discourse on queer sexuality? How do new configurations of queer identity represent the trajectory of gender discourse and a deconstruction Dutch homonationalism?

A vast body of research on whiteness and anti-Islam propaganda as part of homonationalist politics can be identified in Dutch scholarship, however, not much has been written with a focus on gender constructing homonormativity as constitutive of the homonationalist agenda's. I aim to fill this research gap and investigate the role of masculinity in Dutch production of homonormativity as well as the effect of new masculinities on subversion of Dutch homonormativity and deconstruction of homonationalism. Importantly, masculinity cannot be discursively separated from other aspects of identity and I will consider Kimberly Crenshaw's (1990, 2018) theory on intersectionality, implying co-constitutive relationships between different aspects of identity and layers of oppression. For example, masculinity and whiteness always necessarily co-construct the political position of many of the subjective representations I study. Moreover, in an application of Puar's queer assemblages (2005) and an important addition to Crenshaw's intersectionality, intersectional identity is read through the lens of national ideals, in which homonormative adoptions of queer become national politics of homophobia, xenophobia and Anti-Islam propaganda.

3.1. Analytical framework

I have chosen to do a content analysis of representations of (new) (gay) masculinities in LGBTQI+ Dutch television and theatre in the past ten years. The idea is that national-cultural discourse on queer masculinities is reflected as well as constructed by popular culture, and thus

visible through TV-series and theatre performances. I am including fictional material in the form of film and series as well as reality representations and theatre performances of gay/queer identity. I then situate this assessment of (gay/queer) masculinities within the context of the Netherlands and its homonationalism.

Because of my focus on contemporary popular cultural representations, I have selected my material along the lines of online presence of the relevant films, series, documentaries, and theatre productions. Google search pop-ups, blogposts and Instagram sources have been consulted in my selection of Dutch LGBTQ visual material produced in the last 10 years (2011-2021). In my analysis of linguistics, an outlier has been included in the form of “Gordon en Joling over de Vloer” (De Mol, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). This is justified through its cultural significance and by means of sketching the content’s traditional discursive potential. Moreover, as the scope of LGBTQ film and series produced in the Netherlands is fairly limited, much of the material found is subsequently analysed. More obscure films like *Feast* (Leyendekker, 2021) and *Turn it Around* (Bourgonje, 2017) that screened shortly in small theatres and film festivals and have no accessibility online could not be selected although they have discursive value.

The research uses a visual content and discourse analysis, in which methodological strategies of qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and critical discourse analysis are used (Sriwimon & Zilli, 2017). Much of the analysis focusses on linguistic properties by looking closely at fictional dialogue, reality TV’s confessionals and documented interviews, but rather than using solely summative methods, I identify changing patterns of quotidian and comedic usage of words. I closely engage with the material and refer to theory presented in my theoretical framework to formulate an understanding of the visual content situated within scholarly debate. Moreover, I identify signs within behavioural patterns as visible in the selected material through which I read the role of masculinity within gay/queer identifications. In formulating my political discourse analysis, I consider Frederic Jameson’s suggestion of reading content through a dialectic lens in which both the origins of material and its produced ideology within its cultural framework and the consumptive reception of material that reflects consumers utopian desire (Jameson, 1981). The latter represents both the idea of target audience as well as a socio-political positioning of the material. Practically, therefore, I will draw from my visual material and situate linguistic and behavioural signs within a broader popular cultural context and a scholarly theoretical framework.

3.2. Introduction of material

As I use material at times fleetingly in my analysis, sometimes minor instances within films and series reflect a concept I am discussing, I will present a short introduction of the selected visual material. Not only should this provide for the reader a reference point throughout, hopefully it will give the material livelihood and colour as I deem it important for this research to provide a discursive platform rather than an objectifying approach.

ANNE+ is a fictional Dutch television series that premiered in September 2018. It revolves around a lesbian girl navigating her twenties in the context of Amsterdam. The series seems to have intended to contribute to a discourse of normalisation of queer female leads, as the first season does not seem to hyper focus on issues regarding sexuality. Later, in the film adaptation of ANNE+ (Bisscheroux, 2021) perhaps because of the beckoning opportunity that comes with a growing platform, the focus increasingly lies on discussing queer issues explicitly. Masculinities as they emerge in the life and experiences of a female identifying gay body in Amsterdam are important to consider and what draws my attention is the series featuring people expressing self in a variety of ways. Jongens (Boys) (Kamp, 2014) and Gewoon Vrienden (Just Friends) (Van de Mond, 2018) are examples of classic coming of age romantic comedies featuring a white, masculine, gay protagonist. Both films take place in the Dutch landscape, focusing on presenting gayness as situated within national images and landscapes. Moreover, through these films we can read reproductions and criticism on Dutch homonationalism and xenophobia and the constitutive force of white masculinities in these politics.

Hehobros (Van Rees & Van Wijngaarden, 2017b, 2017c, 2017a) is an online series that consists of 3-minute comedy-oriented videos in which a straight and a gay male character meet up and talk to each other about themes such as sexual activity, relationships and body issues. How is masculinity discussed as inherently different across sexualities? What can we tell from the way the series strategically present masculinities to disseminate “funny”? When does masculinity in the (fictional) lives of these men start to become uncomfortable or threatened?

Queer Amsterdam (Peters, 2017), produced by arguably the most radically progressive Dutch network, aims to deconstruct boxes that confine identificatory boxes. The series revolves around trans man Sam and his brother Bram, who navigate their lives and expressions of self in the context of the queer scene in Amsterdam. Subversive drag, polysexual relationships and bisexuality are explored here. The series summary, translated from Dutch reads: “Everything is

becoming encased in boxes. This seems organised but misrepresents identities. The LGBTQI+ community is much more multifaceted than that. The series *Queer Amsterdam* brings that to light.” (npo3, consulted 2022).

Three cases of reality TV are selected in this research. First, I am looking at *Drag Race Holland* (“Snatch Game,” 2020), a televised contest between drag queens that originates in the US. The contestant queens are faced with challenges in which they have to create an outfit within a limited amount of time or perform as actors or in lip-syncs. Each season, one queen is crowned “next drag superstar”. As discussed, drag is a useful tool to expose performances of gender. In this particular case, *Drag Race Holland* represents Dutch national gendered ideals and notions of homonormativity. Second is *Prince Charming* (RTL, 2021a, 2021b), a Dutch gay version of a dating show. Twelve contestants are hosted in a villa and have to impress the bachelor prince charming. By process of elimination, as the desirable prince goes on dates with the contestants, he ends up with one. His true love. This show is most interesting because of performances of masculinity and straight acting, but there are also signs of vulnerability and new discourse on masculine homosexuality to be found. Lastly, I look at *Gordon en Joling over de Vloer* (De Mol, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c) to uncover more traditional representations of homosexuality. Here we find constructions of the “valse nicht” and understandings of effeminacy, stereotypes like the “gay best friend” and the “shopping queen”.

The documentary *Acting Straight* (2019) created by and featuring Tofik Dibi and Willem Timmers addresses straight acting practices as they are manifest in their homosexual experience, as well as the homosexual experience of others. This documentary uncovers many nuanced performances of masculinities as they are established in Amsterdam gay culture. *Pisnicht the Movie* (Verheul, 2019) addresses similar issues but focusses mostly on quotidian and comedic use of anti-homosexual language like “nicht” and “homo” in the context of the Netherlands. Victimhood and vulnerability are important theme’s here as Dutch national ideals of identity are exposed.

Renowned Dutch documentary maker Sunny Bergman produced *Man Made* (2019) to explore the role of men in feminist political endeavours and the construction of gender discourse. National ideals of manhood are accurately presented here, and masculinity as confined space of repressed emotions in which men have to negotiate identity is introduced.

The currently running theatre production BOYS WON'T BE BOYS (2020), creatively produced by Rikkert van Huisstede, discusses varieties of masculinities on stage. Each of the performers in the cast have their own space to perform and creatively discuss their relationship with masculinity. The description on the BOYS WON'T BE BOYS website goes as follows (translated from Dutch):

BOYS WON'T BE BOYS is a dazzling collage of people who sing, dance, perform poetry, do stand up, make music en tell stories about their personal lives. In their stories they leave themselves vulnerable in discussing the topic of masculinity. Everyone deals on a daily basis with expectations regarding the box that you have been put into. Therefore, it is remarkable that thinking about gender is perceived as reserved for marginalised groups. Wouldn't it be nice for everyone to live without stereotypes? "We should be proud to be open, kind or flamboyant", says initiator Rikkert van Huisstede. (Boys Won't Be Boys, 2020)

It feels highly relevant to include these on-stage performances of masculinity in my analysis in order to identify (new) discourse on masculinities. Moreover, the creative process of making theatre involves a high level of engagement with the topic at hand. I am interested in the effect of engagement with (new) discourse on masculinities on presentations of masculinity and expressions of self.

4. Straight Acting Gays

I am interested in the social phenomenon straight acting as it uncovers exactly the nexus between gender and sexuality that make masculinities essentially unstable. We cannot understand strategies of straight acting without considering its relationship with hegemonic masculinity: the indefinite contingency of heterosexuality and masculinity. A straight act is as much a masculine act as it is a heterosexual act. The strategy takes the form of “men who have sex with men” and makes appearances on dating apps, where we can find the phrase: “no fats, no femmes, no Asians”. The intersectionality of the concept is apparent here. Acting straight is acting masculine, white, and lean.

Gay men’s subversive potential and political position is contested historically, often reflective of Halperin’s understanding of gay versus queer (1995) and Bersani’s critique and distinction between homosexuality as a sexual preference and gayness as a political positionality (1987). Contrastingly, Connell argues that gay potential reproductions of gender normativity simply by having sex with other men is likely situated within the context of the contradictory position of “a very straight man”. This complexity is captured well in the following quote by Peter Nardi (2000) in which he refers to R W Connell (1992):¹¹

Connell (1992) says that gay men often seek other men that embody masculinity: “gay men are not free to invent new objects of desire any more than heterosexual men are – their choice of object is structured by the existing gender order.” (p. 747). In fact, Connell interprets his gay subjects’ eroticism of stereotypically masculine men, their masculine personal style, their emphasis on privatized personal relationships, and their lack of engagement with feminism as indicators of a perpetuation of the gender order. For him a very straight gay is a contradictory position in the gender order, but it is here that the complexities of masculinity can effect social change in that gendered social system. (p. 6/7)

Straight acting becomes a site of contingent heterosexuality and masculinity as well as a potentially transformative theoretical framework in masculinity discourse. The latter, because it remains somewhat uncontested that straight acting gays perform heterosexuality, rather than a version of masculinity that is nothing but gay (without overlooking its incremental misogyny, although that is not solely a straight man’s practice). To consider any performance of

¹¹ R W Connell’s formerly known pronouns are used in this excerpt

masculinity a heterosexual one is to disregard the gay potentiality of defying the gender binary and understanding performativity as staged beyond the spectrum of masc vs femme and gay vs straight. In this rhetoric, to assume a masculine gay man is acting straight is similar to calling out a feminine straight man for acting gay. Furthermore, historical understandings of gay as essentially unpolitical disregard complexities of contemporary internal conflicts between understanding new gender discourse and the productive power of gendered performative desire to be.

In this chapter I study multimedia material to deconstruct signs of masculinities and to identify masculine discourse as it is represented in films, documentaries and series produced in the last 10 years. Moreover, the research aims to investigate the tension between Butlerian performative subversion and reproduction (1993a). Therefore, to unpack the phenomenon, I examine how we talk about, depict, and perform strategies of straight acting, implicitly and explicitly and I present a deconstruction of straight acting and its situatedness in the (re)presentations and (re)productions of homosexual masculinity building on findings presented by Sánchez and Vilain (2012).

4.1. Men who have sex with men

At the start of the short documentary-film *Acting Straight*, both directors Tofik Dibi and Willem Timmers are seated next to one another on the couch. The interview is conducted by Sunny Bergman, a renowned Dutch documentary maker concerned with societal issues mainly focusing on gender and sexuality.¹² She asks them both what type of people they have been inclined to have sexual interactions with.

When I look at all my boyfriends, exes, and my current boyfriend, I always go for masculine type of men. I am not going to lie about that. When I notice a feminine trait of someone, that for me is a turn off. I have to be honest about that. I just don't find that attractive. (Willem Timmers, *Acting Straight*)

¹² She created some fantastic work. Provided the availability of subtitles, I recommend “*Acting Straight*”, “*Sletvrees* (“*Slutphobia*”)”, “*Man Made*” and “*Sunny side of Sex*”.

If I'm honest, I have to say, it is not that I do not accept any feminine trait, because look at me. But I do tend to go for masculine guys. In some way I know that it is unfair, but that is what my gut tells me.
(Tofik Dibi, Acting Straight)

The way both hold themselves; their posture, the pauses in-between question and answer, them looking away from the camera as well as their words: it reads apologetic. Phrases as “I am not going to lie about that.” and “(...) it is unfair, but that is what my gut tells me.” communicate a state of conflict that feels queer: we are not allowed to be this way. There is an established understanding that the feeling of being attracted to masculine men is frowned upon but shared by many within the community. By whom are they judged in this scenario? It seems unlikely that, in contrast to being queer, this shame is imposed upon them by institutionalised heterosexual homophobia. At first, one would think that the heterosexual world does not tolerate any homosexual behaviour, here, any man sleeping with any other man. However, the idea is that real men who have sex with real men are passable, reflecting the performative establishment of masculinity by the abjection of femininity both in the self and in the other. Therefore, these are not gay men by definition; all they do is sleep with other men. The information that drives these performances is stored in the gut, as uttered by Tofik, as the pressure to adhere to the ideal of man is internalised. What complicates this thinking, however, is the nuance between desire to be and desire to have. Tofik accepts -rather than embraces- certain feminine traits in himself, but that does not translate into his desire when it comes to sexual partners. It seems to point to something I will elaborate upon further on; an incremental tension between sisterhoods and brotherhoods of man and their reflection of national ideals: the discourse of masculinity and its positive relationship with desirability versus the transformation of the gendered self, as we “hey sis” our friends yet “yes daddy” our lovers. Straight acting performances are problematised through negotiations of the gendered self, which arguably contest the notion of rigid abjection of femininity within them.

The ideal of men who have sex with men or “masc 4 masc” is further illustrated through the case of the Dutch, gay version of the Bachelor: Prince Charming (RTL, 2021a). The first series of the dating show features 12 contestants, 10 of which white, and most of them muscular masculine presenting bodies. Throughout the contest, the prince (a white muscular man) dates the participants and chooses a winner, his true love, by process of elimination. Interesting about this show are two confounding narratives. One is the idea of true love, and the prince's search for the man of his dreams, and the other is the production, in which it is aimed to formulate a

representation of gay life. Arguably, modalities of gay ways of life and the representation of real love as actualised aspect of homosexuality support what Foucault perceived as way of life as potentially subversive (Foucault, 1997). However, situating this narrative in contemporary homosexual discourse, mirroring Willem and Tofik's conversation, the contestants share their attraction to masculine men. The production pushes an image of gay sexuality that is masculine, white and lean. This representation is not only harmful because it falsely depicts real life gay experiences, but also the only version of gay life that television represents, as it is generally accepted in the context of a heterosexual Dutch nation.

As mentioned, in Willem and Tofik's responses they imply a consensus that masculine men are more sexually attractive than feminine men. This stereotype is confirmed throughout most of the course of the reality show *Prince Charming*. However, the directors of *Straight Acting* communicate a collective sense of shame as they disclaim their statements by saying "I am not going to lie about that". These feelings are shared by others featured in the film, as the conversation shifts towards them and their thoughts on masculinity within the queer community. Modalities of sexual discrimination are quite strikingly addressed by a man whose name is not featured in the film.¹³ In an interview with Tofik and Willem he says:

Why I am often embarrassed by the gay scene is because we can bring each other down. We can make each other feel like shit. Because you are black, or Asian or too feminine. Usually these things are said jokingly, but it is not really funny actually. It really sucks, it is not ok, and I am embarrassed. We should be better as human beings. We should know better, for many of us come from an environment that is not safe for us and then we go looking for an environment that is safe. We should be accepting within this environment to each other and look out for each other. (Rapper, *Acting Straight*)

The disappointment at the culture to have failed to create a safe and egalitarian environment is apparent and moving. The unsafety with regards to expression of identity is produced by the inclination of gay culture to categorise amongst themselves. Straight acting practices of white masculine gay men seem to produce these categorisations parallel to the rejection of certain identity types such as effeminate, Asian, or black men. The contestants of *Prince Charming* seem to reproduce these categorisations, by showing signs of abjection of subdominant identity types. Moreover, the show's typecasting, as mentioned, accounts for a false notion of

¹³ Because of his fabulous musical skills, I have named him *Rapper*.

inclusivity, where contestants of colour are used to fit certain personae for the purpose of production and storytelling. More than confirming what I have discussed in sections above on shame and oppression imposed by a masculine, heteronormative world by saying that “many of us come from an environment that is not safe (...)”, Rapper is very much aware that the oppression continues within a supposed safe community. He sketches the outlines of a queer desire of freedom, reflecting national notions of freedom, that falls apart into false promises; an epistemology of the closet that refers to Sedgwick’s assessment (1990), in which coming out does not result in freedom of sex and gender but in which the closet becomes an incremental aspect of queer identifications.

Straight acting then becomes more than a sexual strategy but an internalisation of anxiety informed by failed heterosexual masculinity. I get the sense that this is the main aim of the documentary, to show how these queer people are aware and ashamed of straight acting practices, but also to elicit a conversation about the source of straight acting beyond the scope of sexuality: the idea that gay masculinity is unstable and frail, and that men who have sex with men perform their toxic masculinity, their discriminatory practices, as the result of an unresolved relationship with their sexuality. This idea is reflective of an internal conflict between reflexive understanding of masculine practices in conversation with growing visibility of the issue and persistent desires to be accepted though homonormative discursive constructions of identity. I argue that Rapper knows exactly what he is talking about:

(It makes me think of people who are bullied and then start bullying others). Yes, definitely. It is about projecting trauma onto someone else. That is very unhealthy. It is not supposed to be like that. (Rapper, Acting Straight)

A consensus of desirability of masculine men exists in parallel with different modalities of discrimination and various expressions of shame. Multiple gay masculinities in the lives of men who have sex with men and straight actors are informed by masculine pressure and anxiety. The conflation of gender and sexuality becomes yet more evident: desire here is not a sexually informed phenomenon alone, it is informed by negotiations of gender in the context of passing and failing. Moreover, what is represented as gay performances are versions of straight masculinity, whereas I argue that this version of masculinity cannot be understood without the context of gayness made apparent by this internal conflict between what is felt, what is known and what is produces in terms of behaviour and performances. Gay masculinity cannot be

straight masculinity as it is informed by feelings of anxiety, induced by heterosexual abjection of femininity and knowledge and reflexivity with regard to behaviour, different from heterosexual masculine performances. This position then, following arguments made by Connell, is exactly where we find potential for transformation of norms. For now, in performances of gay, straight acting men, men who have sex with men, I argue that the last ten years have seen a shift in reflexive expression of identity in which firstly, identification becomes a paradox between desire to have and desire to be, and secondly, an internal conflict between discursive knowledge and subjectivity: reflexive potential versus sense of powerlessness. In chapters following, I will elaborate upon how this potential is growing in recent years.

4.2. Body imagery

Appearance is a substantial concern in the lives of many of the gay men interviewed in the documentary *Acting Straight* reflecting an important aspect of the internal conflict between discourse, understanding performative behaviour and desire, the yearning towards adhering and normativity. Imaginary bodily standards are informed by traditionally represented masculine imagery, shaping normative, cross cultural perceptions of men's bodies (Sánchez & Vilain, 2012). Homonormatively, a muscular body hosts the symbol for sexual attraction and shapes exclusionary practices within gay men's culture.

I used to think: “exercising, training, hurting my body? That can’t be healthy?!”. But now I am addicted to it. I go to the gym about 5 to 6 days a week. And if I don’t go, I look in the mirror and think: “you are ugly.”. I am trying to let that go, but it is difficult. I notice how it affects my view of others. If someone does not gain muscle mass and I do, I look at that person differently. That says a lot about perception and what being muscular means. It is really reflective of and based on body images and ideals created by poster boys. (Unknown, *Acting Straight*)

The construction of the “good body” that this interviewee is referring to does not solely have a place in performances of straight acting, as muscular presentation of self reflects desire of the masculine as well. This is illustrated very accurately yet implicitly in the web series *Hehobros* (Van Rees & Van Wijngaarden, 2017b). Kevin utters that it is easier for Pepijn to not really be bothered about weight because he is in a relationship with a girl and they have completely different bodies. Men who are in relationships with men always have to mirror their bodies to what is in front of them. Firstly, this discussion reflects implicit discourse on the imagery of a

good body: a body that is muscular and lean. Secondly, as Kevin further discusses how he is into men with good bodies which justifies his need to have (be) a good body as well. He expects his partners to have (be) good bodies, so he feels the need, feeding into masculine expectations, acts, and desires, to present muscular in return:

Kevin: that's how gays work.

Pepijn: so, you are attracted to yourself?

Kevin: yes, actually I am

Pepijn: that's gross

Kevin: a woman's body is gross (Van Rees & Van Wijngaarden, 2017b)

The body serves another normative tool in the construction of the white masculine homonormative ideal reflecting theory on homonationalism in the work of Puar (2005) in the context of the Netherlands (Spierings, 2021). In both *Jongens* and *Gewoon vrienden* explicit cinematographic moments can be identified in which lies heavily on the white masculine body. Firstly, in *Gewoon vrienden* (Van de Mond, 2018) Joris takes off his shirt frequently and at particular scenic moments that represent masculine emotion, in the form of working out, and more interestingly as an expression of anger. The latter seems to represent nakedness as a natural, primal expression of aggression and masculine emotion. Moreover, Yad's interactions with shirtless Joris reflect desire of the muscular body as well as the appropriation of this body type as Yad's physique is equally masculine. However, pointing towards the propagation of the desirability of whiteness, Yad is not seen shirtless in the film.

Secondly, in *Jongens* (Kamp, 2014) the frequent featuring of Sieger and Mark's white, lean and muscular bodies seems to represent straight masculinity in an effort to balance out the femininity that is associated with young gayness and to retain the idea that these boys are "our boys" which promotes an understanding of young homosexuality as normative in a framework of hegemonic masculine, heteronormative, homonationalist ideals. Further illustrative of this is the conceptualisation of physicality between young gay men in the form of "stoeien"¹⁴ that creates a viable, acceptable space for intimacy between boys. I argue that stoeien represents a very important and persistent performative act, as it becomes an important site for hegemonic

¹⁴ The Dutch word "stoeien" translates to the English playfighting, but only makes sense in a masculine context. Women do not "stoeien"

masculinity by means of de-sexualising and de-romanticising physical touch. The romantic, sexual potential of Sieger and Mark's interactions is framed within this performance of stoicism in order to position them within nationalist ideals of young manhood, perpetuating pathways of young manhood as masculine and straight.

The documentary *Man Made* (Bergman, 2019) features an experiment done with different stereotypes of (at times) male presenting bodies in which their testosterone is measured. Included in this experiment are policemen, rugby players, queer artists, lawyers, ballet dancers, and nurses. Jamil, one of the lawyers states he hopes he has more testosterone than average, because otherwise he is scared about something being wrong with his masculinity. Another lawyer states that he doesn't have to be on top of the "apenrots (monkey rock)" but that he does not want to be among the lowest. One of the nurses says: "I am hetero so I think my testosterone will be higher." Brian, another nurse says: "I am very kind and sensitive, so I don't think I have a lot of testosterone". Finally, Jefta, one of the ballet dancers states: "My ego says, I hope it's not a bad (low) result.". Attitudes towards the masculine function of the body in this experiment shows an essentialist connection between testosterone and gendered identity. Discursively, masculinity is stored somewhere, perhaps like Tofik Dibi said, in the gut. The ideal of man then becomes someone with a lot of testosterone. When a scientist (woman) comes in to talk about testosterone's correlations with sex-drive, competitive nature, and aggression, the results show a reversed stereotype. The conclusion amongst these men is that they feel brainwashed by society and that testosterone and traditional notions of masculinity do not correlate. They say that certain jobs, identity types are deemed more gay or feminine, and they are surprised that those jobs score higher testosterone wise. One of the rugby players starts cheering, because he thinks that he has the highest level of testosterone. When he is shown how to correctly read the scores, upon finding out that he has the lowest level of testosterone, he says: "oh.... Strange", and requests anonymity in the documentary.

These notions are linked implicitly to gendered occupation and thus capitalism, production, and nationalism: A nurse and ballet dancer are deemed more feminine, whereas a rugby player or lawyer are perceived more masculine. The intersection that presents itself here between gender, sexuality and occupation is interestingly addressed by one of the Queer artists, Leendert, who says that he is average when it comes to testosterone. He then states: "what does this mean? Does it make me more man, or more human?" (Bergman, 2019). The notion of the body as storage unit of masculinity exposes expressions of self through the body as a form of normative

masculinity in line with findings presented by Sánchez and Vilain (Sánchez & Vilain, 2012) and my argument that straight acting practices, although reproductive of homonormativity, represent masculine anxiety and internalisation of heterosexual abjection of femininity.

4.3. “Why am I a nicht and why are you a homo?”

[TW: Dutch slurs]

The difference between “nicht” and “homo” in the Dutch language is telling of the embeddedness of hegemonic masculine discourse in and across communities demarcated by sexuality. Moreover, the English word “gay” becomes increasingly important. Sociolinguist Alison Edwards’ (2016) assessment of English within the Dutch language makes sense of a vast history of Dutch adoption of English words. She states that the globalised position of the Netherlands explains this phenomenon as English is used for touristic and economic purposes. More importantly, however, is the creative usage of English as an identificatory practice. There is a vast difference between Dutch cultures and subcultures and the frequency with which English words are used. English provides many niche and marginal subcultures with tools used to not necessarily function within a globalised mainstream capitalist society, but to construct distinct identity (Edwards, 2016).

A nicht refers to a man who is feminine, loud, extra, and mean. The word shares its meaning with “female cousin” and “niece” which indicates the Dutch tendency to generalise homosexuality, as well as anything out of the het-cultured masculine norm, and femininity. Etymologically, nicht is said to derive from the changing positionality of a child that is found to be different than other children in the family but retains their mothers love (Hekma, 2007). In pop culture and mainstream media, nicht, or “valse nicht” is used interchangeably with (vals) “kreng” and (valse) “heks” in the context of gay male television figures. The word vals translates to nasty or foul and shares its meaning with phony and “out of tune”. Moreover, kreng and heks mean “shrew” and “witch” respectively. The nominal value of these terms is transferred precisely onto gay public figures whose identity becomes this mean, witchy symbol for feminine homosexuality.

An obvious representative example of this portrait is painted by the producers of *Gordon en Joling over de vloer* (De Mol, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). This reality show features two quite well-known gay, rich, white men (Gordon Heuckeroth and Gerard Joling), as they are scheduled to

partake in “actual work” (day care, cruise ships, trash service). Interestingly, they both share the narrative of coming out during their music careers, after which their public roles shifted drastically from being serious musicians to figures of “nichterigheid”.¹⁵ Throughout the series, as they work at common folk’s jobs they are portrayed as mean (valse), spoiled, bratty figures that serve a comedic purpose: to laugh at, to laugh with and to be shocked by. In their assessment of gay representation in Dutch gay television, Hielke Vriesendorp and Gijsbert Rutten (2017) support this argument by stating that other versions of the same stereotype play marginal roles in Dutch television and film can be found looking at characters played by Mari van der Ven, Maik de Boer, Albert Verlinde and Alex Klaassen (Vriesendorp & Rutten, 2017). They represent the “gay best friend” or the “shopping queen” as they deliver judgemental comedic one-liners and show no character development. Furthermore, the lines between their roles and their public persona seem blurry. Through the process of typecasting, they become stereotypes off stage as well as on stage.

It is evident that this type is not produced nor received as real, human, or subversive, as they represent the perpetuation of a stereotype that reproduces the abjection of gay femininity and the proliferation of heteronormative masculine performances. Furthermore, as this stereotypical mould shapes one of few opportunities for mainstream representation, an escape into this type occurs by the grace of “I matter”: The ever-present yearning for acceptance, relevance, and inclusion into mainstream society. Simultaneously, the opposite happens in the lives of many young gay men, who do not wish to be associated with this stereotype (Vriesendorp & Rutten, 2017). A binary then of mainstream representation of identification is visible: The young ideal of the forementioned masculine Prince Charming versus the feminised traditional representation of the valse nicht into which Gordon and Gerard Joling have been framed. They represent opposite sides of a spectrum that is being shaped by societal, cultural, and generational changes informed by the young homosexual anxiety to be associated with nichterigheid that represents femininity, falseness, and marginality.

The word “homo” is commonly used by masculine, heterosexual figures to call out gay (feminine) behaviour in suspect peers. This is clearly presented in the documentary *Pisnicht* the

¹⁵ Adjective (noun) of “nicht”

movie¹⁶ (Verheul, 2019) when Nicolaas Verheul, a Dutch, white, openly gay television figure and director, approaches people on the street with the question: “Are you homo?”. This question uncovers multiple purposes of the word through which a disconnect between the word and its direct link with homosexuality becomes legible. Here, homo points to inadequate behaviour, a failure of some sorts, or unmasculine behaviour, the two of which conflate.

Man working at a farmers’ market: So, I think, if you can’t do something, or like, if you are weak or something, in those kinds of situation you would use it. You associate a homo with that.

Nicolaas: So not a real man?

Man working at a farmers’ market: Yes, haha, I think so, I am sorry. But that is not what I mean by it, that is just what I say. (Verheul, 2019)

When in traffic something happens, I say: “dirty homo”. I don’t really know where that comes from. It just kind of became normal. Just a little Dutch word. (Man outside of supermarket, *Pisnacht the Movie*)

Coach: (to a locker room full of male football players) When do we say homo?

Nicolaas: Yes, that is the question. En what does it say? It could be a joke, or it could mean nothing, but that is the conversation I would like to have with you.

Football player 1: It does not have any meaning. It is similar to when I say “shit” or “kut”¹⁷. I do not mean a pile of shit or a pussy, so to speak.

Coach: When players are not alert, or they are not playing 100 percent, then you could say you are playing like a bunch of homos.

Football player 2: It became synonymous to “weak”, so I am not saying you are homo’s, I am just saying that you are a bunch of weak guys, so it has another meaning now, in our vocabulary. I think in the vocabulary of the Netherlands in general though. (Verheul, 2019)

Underscoring Pascoe’s assessment of the fag discourse (2011), in these interactions it is evident that the word homo does not necessarily point to homosexuality anymore. This is where gender and sexuality evidently conflate, as the word for homosexual is appropriated and used to call out feminine behaviour in heterosexual peers. Moreover, these interviewees argue that they do not consider homo a slur, as it became part of the quotidian and does not represent homosexuality. Thus, it is overlooked by many, which is what this documentary accurately

¹⁶ Direct translation: “Pissfag the Movie”

¹⁷ Slur: Vagina

addresses, that the quotidian use of the word homo reproduces normative discourse on the parallels of gender and sexuality: femininity, inadequacy, and homosexuality.

In Jongens (2014), Sieger's brother, a character representing traditional teenage heterosexual masculinity as he rides motorbikes, picks up girls and neglects his family, uses the word homo a couple of times. It seems here he communicates subtle disavowal of feminine behaviour in the form of masculine peer pressure. Gender and sexuality conflate here, as Sieger is interpreted homosexual upon not coming along for a joyride in a stolen car. Not adhering to masculine norms then becomes a homosexual trope. Arguably, gay male communities use the word in similar ways, reflecting hegemonic heterosexual masculinity as they keep each other, and their reputation in check. Showing how this rhetoric is appropriated within gay communities and in interaction between constructions of sexualities, Gewoon Vrienden (Van de Mond, 2018) presents an interesting scene in which Joris responds to being called out for being a homo while on a date in a restaurant with his love interest Yad.

People in Diner (two guys, two girls): Those are flikkers (fags) right? Yes, look at them, haha. Flikkertje, flikkertje, flikkertje! Yes, those are dirty, dirty kankerhomo's¹⁸. They don't like pussy or do they.

(Man in Diner who calls them out is wearing a shirt with the words "le coq", Joris walks up to him)

Joris: That thing on your shirt, what does it say? That says "coq". Do you know what that means, girls, "cock"? Cock means "lul" (dick), ladies, you are wrong here! He just needs a cock inside him!

(Starts fighting them and wins)

Joris: (sings) He needs a cock inside; he needs a cock inside. (Van de Mond, 2018)

After this scene Yad storms off telling Joris that his response to his accusers is stupid. It is not further addressed why he thinks it is stupid, but the viewer gets the sense that Yad does not approve of Joris's aggression and word choice. I will elaborate on how these words and the role they play in interactions between and within communities contribute to (changing) representations and cultural constructions of gay men in following chapters, but it is clear that they have been involved in structuring potential straight acting practices. To this purpose, the scene presented above in Gewoon Vrienden addresses how gay men call out other men, queer or straight on their masculinity.

¹⁸ Direct translation: Cancerhomos

Following Sanchez and Vilain's (2012) perspective on femmephobia, Michiel addresses how usage of different words to address peers is dependent on levels of perceived masculinity, as he expresses his disgust upon being called a *nicht*.

Yes, many other gays have told me, you are a *nicht*. You are not a *homo*, you are a *nicht*. First of all, I think: "that's such a gross word!". Second, why am I a *nicht* and why are you a *homo*. Are you only truly a *homo* if you are still masculine? (Michiel, *Acting Straight*)

The clear defiance upon association with *nichterigheid* is indicative of anxiety of being perceived feminine and to lose masculine credibility. It is vital for Michiel as it is for many other gay men of his generation to reclaim a masculine status after coming out. His utterance however read contradictory and underscore a paradox I have discussed before. Michiel sees and frowns upon the idea that one is only truly a *homo* when perceived masculine, while simultaneously expressing his desire to be a *homo* and to be perceived masculine. The internal conflict between discourse and desire supports the argument that internalised femmephobia and masculine anxiety inform the reproduction of a system in which the "gross" reputation of the *nicht* opposes the dominant position of the *homo* and in which heterosexual masculinity is hegemonic.

Because of this generally negative representation of *nichten* in mainstream Dutch media, Vriesendorp and Rutten (2017) argue that gay men are influenced by role models in other, anglophone countries, seeing linguistic as well as cultural connections to these countries are often closely tied. Moreover, they state that entertainment in the USA in particular represents a more positive gay narrative compared to Dutch media. Therefore, as they "(...)account for these codeswitches as an identity practice through which members make use of the positive connotations of English and its connection to positive gay role models." (p. 48), the word "gay" is strongly embedded within the Dutch language. I argue however, that the word's positive connection to role models is unstable and that the push factors that drive its usage as an alternative to *nicht* and *homo*, as they represent varying but persistent negative stereotypes, is most explanatory of the adoption of "gay". Notably, the word is used within and outside of the gay male community, but different from *homo* and *nicht*, the term *gay* is most often used to

identify oneself and as part of processes of coming out.¹⁹ Gay then seems to cross boundaries between social groupings while it creates a space for open discussion on sexuality. Nevertheless, the word is appropriated into relatively young heterosexual masculine lexicon, where it is used as an adjective for things that are “not cool”. Although gay is not a direct reference to homosexuality here, again, a term used throughout identificatory practices of gay communities becomes appropriated into exertions of heteronormative masculinity.

The film *Jongens* (Kamp, 2014) contains a scene in which another important nuance in Dutch language in the context of homosexuality is featured. When Sieger first kisses Mark, he takes his leave saying “Ik ben geen homo”, which translates to “I am not a gay (homo)”. Linguistically, the inclusion of the article in this phrasing is important because it shows the distinction between a Dutch, heterosexual notion of homosexuality in which the person is interpellated to fully embody their sexuality, and a version of homosexuality in which sexuality is but an identificatory feature of one’s body, leaving space for fully developed identity and lived reality. This structure, for example in “Ben jij een homo? (Are you a gay [homo]?)”, is used frequently in the context of quotidian heteronormative policing of the forementioned suspect homosexual/feminine figure. However, when it comes to self-identificatory practices, in few cases where the word homo is used, the structure is almost without exception: “Ik ben homo (I am gay [homo]).” This phenomenon underscores the Dutch heterosexual tendency to strictly confine gender and sexual binaries, and to police their borders. Whether explicitly or implicitly, Sieger represents a closeted person, presenting an abjection of homosexuality to establish heterosexuality. The value of scripting the word “geen (not a)” instead of “niet (not)” lies in the nuanced representation of Dutch heterosexual masculine anxiety.

Internalised homophobia and femmephobia reflected by this culture of identificatory terminology are made apparent by Michiel, and its effect on self-identification and perception of others within the culture is further addressed in an interview with a gay identifying man whose name is not featured.

(I feel like you often go for masculine men, am I right?) Yes, that might be true... most of the time that is true. But maybe that has something to do with a form of self-aversion? I used to be a real “relnicht”.

¹⁹ “Ik ben gay” (“I am gay”)

My ex-mother-in-law used to call me that: a “relnicht” (direct translation: riot faggot/sissy. A feminine and very “obviously homosexual” man: They might cause a gay riot). (Unknown, Acting Straight)

The disgust at being called a “relnicht” produces a form of self-aversion and an aversion to feminine characteristics of other gay men. The anxiety of being perceived as feminine is projected onto others and reflected in the rejection of the non-masculine and this internalisation of heteronormativity shapes identity negotiations and informs performances reflecting masculine anxiety.

The frequent slurring use of words like homo and nicht are recurring themes in documentaries, films, and series, and represent damaging cultural parallels that are made between sexuality and gender. To be called a homo, however one identifies, is to be deemed inadequate and excluded from masculine spaces. What becomes perpetuated is a conflation of inadequacy in heterosexual spaces and masculine practices, which produces the discourse of feminine homosexuality and induces anxiety in the lives of gay men upon being slurred through this terminology of not performing straight/masculine. Nicolaas Verheul adds to these notions in the film *Pisnicht the Movie* (2019) by stating that words like homo, “pisnicht”²⁰ and “flikker” serve a comedic and ridiculing purpose in entertainment. He finds that many argue that this is nothing to get upset about. Someone who identifies as homosexual is not a victim of the use of these words as they do not idiomatically translate to homosexual anymore. The Dutch adoption of words like nicht and homo into the quotidian produces a perpetuation of a discourse that abjects homosexuality and femininity, whilst justifying usage of the words as no longer directly slurring homosexuality. This potentially explains the adoption of these new idioms into gay spaces, as they are made difficult to resist and further establishes Pascoe’s argument and the discursive force of homosexual slurs in processes of masculine performativity.

4.4. Brotherhoods and sisterhoods of men

Relationships between men are a very present topic of conversation in *Prince Charming*, as production is keen on presenting to the viewers “the normal lives of gay men”. In conversations between the contestants, a quite uniform narrative is produced, in which masculine men are deemed attractive, yet undatable. Moreover, the contestants share that, although many of them

²⁰ Direct translation: Pissfag

have been engaged in short term sexual relationships, the ideal is to find someone that truly loves them and will spend the rest of their lives with them.

In my earlier discussion of abjection of femininity, I have touched upon the idea of sisterhoods and brotherhoods of men. The show *Prince Charming* provides an interesting case to understand nationalist ideals of fraternity as well as production of sisterhoods reflected in the group of contestants' interactions. There seems to be a sharp contrast in identification and self-presentation in the context friendships of men as opposed to sexual/romantic relationships of men. Between contestants, who are not portrayed to pursue any sexual or romantic relationship amongst themselves, bonds of friendship, inclusion and exclusion occur. Although the focus of production on these moments seems to be on taken off shirts as they dive in the swimming pool, or run across a beach, in (seemingly) candid conversations, they read less invested in presentations of traditional masculinity. Thereto, they present sensitive and emotional versions of themselves, through which scarring relationships with other men, coming out stories and identity negotiations are expressed. These sisterly relationships allow for such interactive content, however, once the prince is in their proximity, they put on their office attire and adopt their statuesque chiasitic stance as the potential sexual production that he represents calls for the framework of fraternity, as in this framework, men who have sex with men are nationally accepted.

Thus, In the name of romance and sex, a presentation of heterosexual masculinity seems of importance to the production of the gay narrative. I imagine that the image the production wants to publicly disseminate, is one of productivity and sexuality within the margins of Dutch perpetuated capitalist, heterosexual, and nationalist ideals. Through the inevitable unproduced slippage into candour, however, we acquire more information about how the straight jacket of hegemonic masculine performativity restrains other, ungended adaptations of masculinity. Ones that do not adhere to nationalist masculine ideals but exactly form the nexus between sexuality, gender and nationalism that provide room for subversion. I will discuss further the properties of this nexus in section 3 of chapter 6.

Another manifestation of the production of fraternity as nationalist homonormative ideal can be found looking at the web series *Hehobros* (Van Rees & Van Wijngaarden, 2017b). The premise of this series, in which two white, middle class, cisgender male friends meet up in a café, one straight and one gay, is dependent on the notion of "bros". Linguistics of the word bro

unveil a discourse that is produced through a form of masculine friendship that allows for intimacy, read: the only form of friendship that a straight and a gay man can have, reflective of fraternal relationships that constitute the heterosexual national masculine ideal. Here we find representations of (gay) men that are complicit homonationalism: two white, middle class (bar) good-looking men can be bros as the word bro itself makes this into something explicitly platonic, to compensate for the threat of failed heterosexuality that informs masculine anxiety. The setting however is such that it seems there is no necessary dominance. They want to represent a way of being and a way of going about friendship that promotes the idea that gay and straight are in fact not that different. This perpetuates however and integration of gay into systems of heterosexuality. What is represented here is again a version of gay that fits the Dutch homonationalist agenda. Two notions of nationalism are projected here: the idea that gay and straight can go hand in hand in the form of bros and at the same time the representation and reproduction of a Dutch nationalism that is white, middle class and productive. The constitutive potential of masculinity here becomes evident looking at the word bro and the national inclusion of gay identities into bro(therhood)-organised relationships.

This Chapter has explored the conflation of sexuality and gender within discursive production of identity and performative expressions of self. Straight acting practices reflect the role of masculinity in the construction of sexual identification and quotidian use of homosexual slurs shows a manifestation of homophobia in heterosexual as well as homosexual spaces. Moreover, abjection of femininity in gay expressions of is reflected in represented imagery of the body as lean and muscular. In addition to the latter, the perpetuation of national ideals of homosexuality should be read through a lens of whiteness. In the next chapter I will elaborate on representations of homosexuality and the role of masculinity, whiteness, and homonormative notions of solid identity in the production of homonationalism.

5. Expressions of self and Solidifications of Identity

Expression of self and its relation to theories on performativity is evident: the self becomes materialised in interaction with various social situations throughout which the self is subject and agent of its (re)production. In a process of negotiating identity through reiteration practices, we acknowledge deviations and slight altercations through which we understand subversive potential and a changing discourse on identity (Butler, 1999). I am particularly interested in how young manhood is culturally represented and what societal pressure to adhere to normative structures of self-identification can be identified. I argue that young adaptations of masculinity produce new spaces for negotiations of identity and perceptions of self. I aim to investigate how we can see both factors, homonormativity, and new masculinity, within mainstream media content, and thus how coming of age and coming out narratives are (re)produced. These stories arguably capsule reproductions of homonormativity and hetero-masculinity as well as new ways of being. This should tell us something about the pathways of life that are featured and propagated and how they tie into a homonormative ideal and a Dutch homonationalist agenda. Contrastingly I am interested in deviations of this narrative and how they contribute to new discourse of gender and sexuality, with a focus on masculinity and male homosexuality.

5.1. Young gay manhood

Gay coming of age narratives become increasingly popular in dominant mainstream entertainment. In the context of the US and UK, often producers of dominant culture, it is important to consider practices of “gaystreaming” (Ng, 2013). Upon deconstruction of this phenomenon a distinction between early activist gay representation and subsequent homonormative mainstreaming of gay narratives becomes identifiable. Focus on integration of the gay narrative into mainstream culture through film and series often implies acquiring a position in a capitalist normative market in which marginal identificatory groups are left out (Ng, 2013). In the context of the coming of age narrative, this post-gay agenda then consists of normalising gay love stories as part of mainstream entertainment and with that, the potential production of homonormativity through the propagation of common identities and eradication of “the explosive political potential of queerness” (Francis, 2021). Queerness becomes depoliticised and its intersections with race, class and ability are denied. The production of homonormativity as part of a post-gay approach to film is discussed heavily with regard to the film *Love, Simon* (Berlanti, 2018) (Francis, 2021; Jr, 2018; Rauchberg, 2019) which is

exemplary of a gay coming of age romantic comedy set in the context of a high school. Most criticism focusses on the presentation of gay characters in the film as ‘just like’ any other character (Francis, 2021), for example in its production of a monogamous love story between cisgender, white, high class individuals. Moreover, in the production of normativity regarding happiness, the film does not represent identities that are ‘too queer’ which perpetuates the idea that such ‘good life’ aspirations are solely available to white, cisgender, and monogamous individuals. Intersecting this, I argue that such homonormativity is strengthened as a result of the production of masculine performances featured in films like *Love, Simon*. Adding to the abjection of the ‘too queer’, in appearance, gay characters are often portrayed lean, sporty, and dressed normatively masculine. In behaviour, traditional masculine norms are often implicitly perpetuated through imagery like voice, physical strength, aggression, anger, and constraint. This typing reflects the masculine straight jacket, and these types fall into the category of men who have sex with men discussed in earlier sections of this research and are particularly visible in Dutch mainstream media.

Similarly to *Love, Simon* the Dutch fiction film *Jongens* (Kamp, 2014) characterises two white, young, able bodied boys (Sieger and Mark, both around 15 years old) as protagonists of a gay coming of age love story. Notably, both actors are straight men²¹ which points towards a focus on masculine representations of gay life, as well as the exclusion of the ‘too queer’. Moreover, the fact that both actors are straight is part of post-gay politics, as it sends the message that these characters are just like any other characters and that therefore, it is not necessary to cast queer folks to play these roles. This on-stage performance of two same sex characters kissing on screen, performed by two white, straight men, represents off stage performances of masculinity, whiteness and ability that construct homonormative ideals of self. Moreover, these heterosexual, masculine performances of gayness perpetuate the Dutch idea of happy normalcy, excluding ‘too queer’ folks and queers of colour from the narrative of becoming happy and from the availability of the ‘good life’. To further illustrate, I want to propose the idea that integral to coming of age films portraying the lives of male teenagers is the narrative of becoming a “man”, synonymous to becoming an “adult”. In the film *Jongens*

²¹ This information is gathered through social media research. I am making educated assumptions in this case.

this narrative is produced in a variety of manners. Firstly, the idea of becoming a man is dependent on the successful acquisition of a certain achievement. In this case, the narrative revolves around high school relay racing, in which both Sieger and his love interest Mark are involved. The film's capturing of the characters' gayness within this framework of physical performance uncovers a focus on productivity and ability and the positioning of the character in a capitalist, productive society, de-politicising his queerness. Additionally, how well Sieger performs is dependent on how confident he feels about himself and the level comfort with which he can understand his attraction to his love interest, Mark. Gayness here is directly linked to productive performance, as coming out becomes part of a normative masculine achievement: winning the race. Thus, Sieger's negotiation of sexuality is framed within a narrative of reaching the ultimate goal of becoming a productive, successful man. Secondly, Sieger's manhood is dependent on whether he is able to "get the girl", an aspiration pushed by his friends in Jongens and an imagery that communicates the cultural phenomenon of peer pressure that is important with regard to homonormativity as it reflects the anxiety to fall out of the norm. This storyline is important because it produces the idea that although Sieger is gay, he could still, if he wanted to, get the girl. His masculinity therefore remains intact in spite of his potential gayness. Furthermore, the storyline perpetuates the notion that he is like any other (straight) boy becoming a man and more importantly produces a narrow and near unreal image of passing, as he eases his way through peer pressure to negotiate his sexuality in his own time and space. This sense of ease and 'good living' is perpetuated when Sieger's friends conclusively accept him upon his coming out, which is not explicitly featured, but made apparent through smiles and nods of approval as he rides off into the night on the back of Mark's motorcycle.

Although one of the two main characters, Yad, in the film *Gewoon Vrienden* (Van de Mond, 2018) is from Syrian descent -an important plotline revolves around homonationalist ideals and anti-Islam discrimination, on which I will elaborate in the next chapter- the film represents another white gay narrative, as the focus is mostly on Joris' coming of age. Moreover, Yad's coming of age storyline does not address his Syrian background or his Islamic religion as intersecting his sexuality other than both men's families' apprehension at their relationship which shows equal value of discrimination of white and non-white. Both men are muscular, lean, and masculine presenting and similar to Jongens, their sexuality is barely addressed. Normalisation of the gay narrative, as both are out and accepted by friends and family, is made possible through these masculine, sexually solid bodies.

Both films produce another important construction of gay life, as images of the “broken family” play important roles in the narrative of both *Jongens* and *Gewoon Vrienden*. First, the disruption of the perfect nuclear family as the result of the death of a parent becomes an a-normative contextual framework, in which queerness is equated with these imperfections. Then, implicitly, the idea of the broken household justifies gayness as part of its brokenness, as the gay kid becomes a product of its family. Although it is generally accepted in entertainment production and Dutch urban spaces that it is not a choice, it is important in the Dutch context of film and television that homosexuality is explained. I argue that the broken family is a tool with which homosexuality is made legible and acceptable. Moreover, the loss of a parent and the process of grieving adds to the image of becoming a man. This is particularly visible in the *Gewoon Vrienden* storyline, in which Joris journey towards adulthood is presented as parallel to him processing his father’s death through which the ‘good life’ becomes available to him. The absence of his father here first makes Joris less of a man, for him then to prove his masculinity by becoming a strong adult, overcome his imperfect identity and the brokenness of his family. Gay narratives become less about the politics of queer and more about mending brokenness of family and identity through integration into a proper lifestyle and an accepted course of life.

The narrative of Dutch gayness represented in *Jongens* and *Gewoon Vrienden* is synonymous with whiteness and it is here that we find evidence for the reproduction of homonormativity as the film is a product of homonationalist politics. The idea communicated is that these are “our boys”, and they need to be accepted and protected, however that image as cultural heritage includes white abled bodies exclusively. Furthermore, through a process of gaystreaming, and normalisation of gay coming of age narratives, the films contribute to the paradox that is the inclusion of queer folks as commercial consumers and the general commodification of queer and the simultaneous de-politicisation of queer and exclusion of the ‘too queer’ from access to representation of good life experiences. I argue that this is where masculinity comes in following Clarkson’s argument (2005) that hegemonic masculinity constitutes the commodification of queer. To uphold the nationalist image of “our boys” reflecting hegemonic nationalist, white and masculine ideals, films such as *Jongens* and *Gewoon vrienden* cannot be ‘too queer’. The embodiment of gayness then becomes masculine, muscular, productive, sporty, white, monogamous, and emotionally homogenous, at least in the context of representation of serious and acceptable life courses. I subsequently understand this type, similar to Prince

Charming, as the masculine counterpart of the feminine *nicht* as discussed in earlier chapters. Moreover, I argue that this type has emerged out of aversion to the *nicht* and has informed identity negotiations based on masculine anxiety. These new role models have created a binary with the *nicht* that directly reflects traditional gender binaries of masculine and feminine and reflect masculine dominance. Moreover, the *nicht* is spoiled bratty and clownish, whereas the masculine gay figure is strong, productive, and able to mend the brokenness of his family, synonymous with the image of the “man of the house”.

5.2. Reimagining the closet

To understand gay men’s identity negotiations and how they are represented and productive of Dutch gay culture, I want to propose a reimagination of the closet that considers what I have discussed in Chapter 4 about the role of masculinity within gay men’s performances. The idea of the closet is useful with regard to an investigation of the confinements of identity produced by masculinity within gay men’s lives, deconstructing the traditional narrative of coming out as the exact moment of becoming homosexual and adding a layer of temporality and fluidity. Moreover, I explore Eve Sedgwick’s (1990) idea that heteronormative definitions of homosexuality are captured within constructed narratives of the closet, in which the closet as a discursive unit persists into the homosexual experience.

Acting Straight (Dibi & Timmers, 2019) aims to illuminate the internalisation of heteronormative masculinity and introduces the narrative of the “straight jacket” that represents the closeted properties of gay masculinity. The masculine closet does in fact resemble the heterosexual closet, both of which entail hiding femininity, and the destructive self-image produced by this hiding.

(Do people sometimes tell you they did not expect that you were gay?) Yes, they do and at the one hand I tell myself “Good job! Good job hiding that!”. On the other hand, I think “you don’t know anything about people and all their colours.”. Everyone has multiple faces. It is about which one you are showing at that moment. (Snorella, Acting Straight)

(Do you have any traits that you learned to repress?) I think there are a lot. And I think it starts at a young age. By playing with certain toys for example or liking certain colours better than others because other boys like that colour. And you know you are different from the norm, but you learn to repress that feeling. Yes, it is the way you walk the way your voice sounds, the way you pick something up. (Timmers, Acting Straight)

Firstly, the idea of the closet as solid is introduced by Snorella, when he argues that practices of hiding gayness and being proud of succeeding to pass is informed by an abjection of the idea that people have “all their colours” and “multiple faces”. This quote points towards the closet as constructed through focus on identity as solid and a denial of fluidity and queerness. Secondly, as Timmers accurately states, the closet must be understood as temporal materialisation of identity and the institutionalised confinement of identity negotiations that is present throughout life courses. This implies that coming out does not mean the eradication of the closet, as a process of internalisation of norms has been incremental. The closet lives on after the moment of coming out, or the closet remains a factor in the lives of folks who choose not to come out or to strictly identify. The latter’s performative potential to eradicate the closet is underrepresented, as is exemplified by *Gewoon Vrienden* in which the absence of coming out and the immediate acceptance from family and friends is overshadowed by signs of solid masculinity and homonormative ideals.

Pisnicht the Movie presents a perspective on the internal conflict that we have touched upon in Chapter 4, as Nicolaas Verheul converses with his friend Melvin about his homosexuality.

I struggled a lot. I think we still catch ourselves embarrassed about how gay we are. I should speak for myself: When I am with friends, I am more myself, compared to for example on a tram, on which I think, [I should act] a bit straighter, kind of. It is so stupid, and I feel embarrassed because of it, but it happens, still, subconsciously. (Melvin, *Pisnicht the Movie*)

As discussed, the masculine closet produces masculine anxiety, hiding feminine characteristics and behaviour in order to blend into the heterosexual norm. Although it is addressed in multiple documentaries, it is often overlooked how homosexuality is kept hidden by performing masculine or the abjection of femininity, pointing to a blind spot for the conflation of gender and sexuality and gender, masculinity, as constitutive of sexual identity, homosexuality. Melvin however, who touches upon performances of straight acting in the presented quote, addresses the closet in a manner in which the internal conflict between reflexive identification and subjectivity, subconscious behaviour, becomes yet more evident. He goes on to state how his drag persona helped him negotiate his identity and understand the properties of the masculine, heterosexual closet and he touches upon the idea of national ideals of belonging and failure.

We will never belong to the 80% of the world that is deemed “normal”, so we had better deal with it. But, you know, tell that to an eleven-year-old boy. I often have discussions with friends, or I get the question

if I was presented a pill that would make me hetero, would I take it? And the answer, 11 years ago, would be yes, of course. Because how easy would it be to live a hetero life, and to not have to come out of the closet and to just belong and to be able to have kids, why not? But now I think, no, not in a million years! And I think that realisation is the most important and freeing realisation you can have. I could adjust and pretend to be hetero or masculine or as heteronormative as I can, but I'll never be or become that! So why don't I just put on a dress and enjoy life? I think that's better, right? (Melvin, *Pisnicht the Movie*)

I understand the closet as an incremental productive element in gay men's lives, in which hegemonic heterosexual masculinity informs masculine performances, but in which homosexuality provides an often-overlooked context through which these performances can only be understood. Then, the traditional closet of heterosexuality becomes a closet of homonormativity perpetuated through uniform, masculine gay representations and productions that inform young manhood. What becomes evident through the normalisation of gay, for example in *Jongens* and *Gewoon Vrienden*, is that the heterosexual closet is highly visible and even mainstream. The homonormative closet, however, is rarely represented let alone deconstructed in films and series. Documentaries such as *Pisnicht the Movie* and *Acting Straight* hint to the homonormative closet and to the idea of failure to adhere to the national ideal but seem to miss important intersectional information. They debunk the myth of freedom after coming out of the heteronormative closet but remain to understand masculine gay performances as informed by heterosexuality, straightness, overlooking the importance of heterosexual hegemonic masculinity as co-constitutive of homonormative ideals. Moreover, I argue that national ideals of whiteness and masculinity inform this homonormativity that produces the post-closet closet, as we repetitively see in fictional representations of gayness. An important aspect of the homonormative closet, as informed by Dutch nationalist ideals, is the focus on identity as binary and solid, on which I will elaborate in the next section.

5.3. Solidifying gender and politics of sexual identity

[TW: English and Dutch slurs]

Across platforms, documentaries, series, and films, much of what is communicated and expressed seems to point towards practices of reproduction and reiteration of identificatory binaries whose structure is reminiscent of traditional, normative gender and sexual structures. Identity negotiations are informed by an idea of strict confinement of typing through identificatory factors. Therefore, particularly evident in fictional representations, Dutch

television and film tends to produce non-fluid characterisations of a-normative identifications. Regarding sexual identity these solid characters present themselves as either gay or straight, or on a journey from one to the other. Thus, the importance of solidifying and manifesting identity is stressed. In this process of producing defining sexual binaries, I argue that traditional discourse on gender binaries play a constitutional role, which is very clearly pictured in *Pisnicht the Movie* as a straight identifying man talks about what he accepts and does not accept with regards to homosexuality.

I have nothing against it, but they (homos) are not my best friends. Again, everyone their own value, but you are into it, or you are not into it. If I am having food at the mac (McDonalds), on, what is this day called, gay parade, and then people talk effeminate, I cannot deal with that. You are and will always be a man, is what I think, so just act like a man. Look, if you love another man, that is your own business, but just act like a man. Those situations I don't understand with homos. (Locker room man, *Pisnicht the Movie*)

In particular, hegemonic masculine practices, as discussed in documentaries or portrayed in films and series, construct solid representations of gay male identity which produce pathways informing on as well as off stage identity negotiations in communication with and producing culture.

A very pronounced example of manifestation of solid identity through abjection of other identity is found in several episodes of the web series *Hehobros* (2017) in at least three solidifications. Firstly, in the first episode, a space is created between the two cisgender men to talk about the vagina, as Kevin explains Pepijn how he had a dream about having sex with a woman. Despite enjoying the experience in his dream, he refers to the vagina as a “thing” and he makes a blunt gesture with his hands. Not only does he not know what a vagina looks like, a manifestation of ignorance normalised through gay men's disinterest in the non-masculine sex, he justifies the use of a slur²² saying he does not have any affinity with the body part. Upon being asked questions about the vagina, Pepijn starts to feel uncomfortable and reluctant to answer.

Kevin: I have no idea what it looks like! Pep, please, tell me. What does that thing look like?

²² The word “kut”, most similar to the English word “cunt”

Pepijn: First of all, it is not a thing

Kevin: No, but what would you call it, because a penis²³ is an actual thing

Pepijn: But it is not a penis

Kevin: So, what is it then?

Pepijn: Well, I don't know (looks around him and lowers his voice), normal people would call it a vagina

Kevin: ah ok, so in my dream the vagina, or vag, can I say vag?

Pepijn: No.

Kevin: In my dream the vagina is very warm inside, is that true?

Pepijn: Oh god, I am not going to engage in this conversation (brings his face to his hands)

Kevin: Pep, please, I need to know!

Pepijn: Whether it is warm? Eh, yes most of the time, I guess.

Kevin: And wet? Is it wet?

Pepijn: If you do it right

Kevin: If you do what right?

Pepijn: Well... like the whole act

Kevin: When you go in?

Pepijn Yes!

Kevin: With your cock?

Pepijn: With your thing, yes.

Kevin: And it is all about the clitoris, right? The clit. But it is very hard to find right?

Pepijn: (He grimaces) Sometimes...

(...)

Kevin: So, you will have to take your cock and move up and down the clitoris (...) to make someone climax?

Pepijn: No

Kevin: No?

Pepijn: No, a woman does not always climax from penetration.

Kevin: No? So how do they climax?

Pepijn: Well... (rubs the table with his hand)

(...)

Kevin: Ah, fingering!

Pepijn: Yes! For example.

Kevin: Ah, ok so in practice you will have to finger her after you fucked her.

Pepijn: Yes

Kevin: Or cunnilingus!

Pepijn: No, no, you don't do that once you have climaxed.

²³ The Dutch word "pik" translates to penis, but the connotation is more similar to the English "cock"

Kevin: Huh, ok so you will have to go down on her before sex or finger her after sex?

Pepijn: Yes

Kevin: But you are not going to have the desire to do that right?

Pepijn: No, but you do it anyway

Kevin: Why?

Pepijn: Because...

Kevin: Because you are her boyfriend, and you love her. Yes, that is when you do things you don't want to do. Ah, and that is real love!

Pepijn: Yes, I think you are right. (Van Rees & Van Wijngaarden, 2017c)

Not only does this space for discussion about the vagina represent an example of the construction of a common type that represents gay and straight men, as gay men are portrayed similar to straight men in their disgust, ignorance and discomfort upon addressing sexuality of non-masculine bodies, the abjection of feminine sexual pleasure forms this common ground which solidifies the role that masculinity plays in homonormative representations and its role in the adoption of solid, non-fluid masculine homosexuality into politics of identity. The penis, contrastingly, represents a tool for measuring masculinity, which similarly crosses the boundaries of sexual identity. Throughout the series, Kevin mostly discusses penis size and how it affects his confidence. Here lies an interesting nuance, as Kevin's role in this discussion repeatedly is to exert his manhood. His masculinity is more evident than Pepijn's which reverses traditional notions of masculinity as determined by heterosexuality. Arguably, masculinity becomes more important than heterosexuality when establishing dominance, which shows the Dutch tendency to normalise homosexuality in spite of gender. Gendered issues are less visible than issues involving sexuality, which is made apparent through the dialogue above in which the focus lies on penetrative sex as 'actual sex', and thus penetration as a common denominator for consensus on the properties sex between homosexual and heterosexual men. In new public discourse and mainstream media, a culture of dominant masculinity is more present than a culture of dominant heterosexuality, particularly with regard to comedy.

Pepijn: Kev, who exactly is...

Kevin: Top or bottom? Well, usually...

Pepijn: (cuts him off, gesturing that he does not want to hear it) No, no, I mean, who is the female in your relationship?

Kevin: Oh, no...

Pepijn: What?

Kevin: That is such a cliché I am not even going to engage,

Pepijn: Why not?

Kevin: Because this is the question that is always asked homo's

Pepijn: Is that so?

Kevin: I am not going to talk about it... It is so short-sighted, as if with homo's one is always more feminine than the other.

Pepijn: Every relationship has its gender roles

Kevin: Yes, but why do homo's always get the question who is who?

Pepijn: Well because they're both men

(...)

Kevin: I think in heterosexual relationships a lot of the women are the male. And dykes²⁴ are both males.

Pepijn: You just said you didn't believe in this!

Kevin: I hate dykes. (Van Rees & Van Wijngaarden, 2017a)

Secondly, in the conversation about traditional views of female and male gender roles within men's homosexual relationships presented above, Kevin, although he acknowledges that these roles exist within any relationship, addresses that it is offensive that people ask gay men who is who. Through hateful, homophobic, and misogynistic expressions here with regards to comments made about dykes, we can read heterosexual hegemonic masculinity as constitutive of the homosexual agenda. Moreover, I argue that this masculine solidification of identity is very important in construction of Dutch homonormativity as it leaves no wiggle room for temporal fluidity of sexual identity, exemplary of the exclusion of the 'too queer' and of manifestations of masculine anxiety. Pepijn and Kevin touch upon another important issue here, as a clear distinction between the idea of top and bottom and male and female roles is made. Arguably, this points to the idea that homosexual relationships are in fact different than heterosexual relationships, as the division of labour between penetrator and penetratee in homosexual relationships is not directly connected to its heterosexual counterpart. However, what stands out is that Pepijn does not want the conversation to go there, as he is uncomfortable discussing gay sexuality. Instead, he asks Kevin which of them, in terms of quotidian behaviour, could be seen as male and who as female. This does not move beyond a heterosexual understanding of homosexuality, but pushes the narrative even further, past sexuality into the quotidian. I argue that this case exemplifies a Dutch discourse on sexuality, which is overwhelmingly tolerant towards (men's) homosexuality, that incorporates highly traditional

²⁴ The Dutch word "pot" translates to the English word "dyke"

normative views on gender as binary and solidified. This projection of gay masculinity opens the discussion on the purpose of comedy and its role in Dutch manifestations of identity and exclusionary, discriminatory practices. I argue that comedy and the protection of its tradition are typical Dutch nationalist practices. They subsequently tie into homonationalism, as exemplified by the inclusion of the gay type that Kevin represents into this system of oppression through comedy.

In Jongens (Kamp, 2014) something interesting is presented with regards to solidification of sexual identity. Although Sieger's sexuality is partially solidified through its production in a gay coming of age narrative, as a straight passing masculine boy is negotiating his sexuality in interaction with another masculine boy, there is no clear coming out scene in which his sexuality would be established. Arguably, leaving out that cinematic moment has its consequences for the solidification of Sieger's identity, as however he is defined or defines himself sexually is left in the middle. On the one hand, this choice accounts for the instability and temporality of sexuality, as Sieger's sexuality is not explicitly categorised. In theory, the story could be about a straight boy that happens to fall in love with another boy, which queers heterosexuality. On the other hand, I argue that this narrative is complicit with the "men who have sex with men" type, in which masculinity and straight passing play an important role. Then the privilege of not having to define one's sexuality because of the way one is able to blend in or chooses to blend in becomes a considerably large valuable. Again, queer sexuality becomes de-politicised, and queer gender is not even discussed. Furthermore, the choice of leaving out a coming out moment implies a case of gaystreaming, through which gay young identity negotiations are normalised and therefore de-problematized. This can only happen in cases in which the character is homonormatively passing, which stresses the importance of whiteness and masculinity (the not 'too queer') within the production of these narratives and its contribution to homonormative culture and homonationalist ideals.

RuPaul's Drag Race has been studied frequently as a case in which the subversive properties of drag are challenged (Edgar, 2011; Feldman & Hakim, 2020; Hodes & Sandoval, 2018; LeMaster, 2015; Schewe, 2009). Studies often deconstruct and criticise the show's history of reproducing gender binaries, the invisibility of trans identities, its mistreatment of people of colour, and the commodification and de-politicisation of queer. The growing franchise has been influential with regard to the adoption of drag in the mainstream and therefore shows paradoxical notions of drag as subversive as well as reproductive of normative gender binaries.

The Dutch version of RuPaul's Drag Race, *Drag Race Holland* provides a platform for drag queens to showcase their art on this internationally acclaimed stage in the form of a competition to become the "best" Drag Queen. The show presents an interesting case through which queer mainstream discourse on gender as constructive of identity can be identified, as drag is argued to be (counter)productive of homonormativity. I argue that the first season of the show reflects very traditional, solid ideas of gender and its role in drag which perpetuate heteronormative discourse. To illustrate, in the fifth episode ("Snatch Game," 2020) the contestants are asked to present themselves in a split performance, where half of their body is dressed feminine and the other half masculine. The premise of this challenge is very traditionally gendered and reflects solid ideas of gendered performances: Drag is when a man dresses as a woman. Interestingly, two of the contesting queens interpret the challenge differently, through which the subversive potential of drag is visible. They present a non-binary split performance, as Ma 'Ma Queen shows herself and her inner demons and Chelseaboy presented an androgenous approach to both sides of the split. Firstly, Ma 'Ma Queens' non-binary identity was not featured or talked about in the show, which points to the shows' ignorance about the societal position of non-gender specific bodies. Secondly, both queens were put down for not adhering to what the challenge called for, to present a male and female side, and the episode's production clearly features the judges' ignorance on non-binary identity and its rejection. Janey Jacké, Envy Peru and Miss Abby OMG succeed in the eyes of production, and not only do they receive good critiques from the judges, but they are also pushed as front runners of the competition. "Good drag" here becomes a production that reflects hegemonic gender binaries and a reproduction of normative gender ideals.

Performances of drag reflective of quotidian performances of identity are therefore accepted and become more mainstream if they are gender specific. Masculine feminine binaries play an important role, but we cannot overlook whiteness as constitutive of homonormativity here, as the queens featured on the show are apart from a few exceptions white. Solidification of gender as a binary becomes even more evident through the invisibility of trans identities on the first season of the show. I argue the radical altercation that is made with regard to the production of the second season of *Drag Race Holland* that sees a trans woman win the show to be a product of its ties with the US production of RuPaul's *Drag Race* and management of reputation, similar to the sudden visibility of Nikki de Jager in mainstream media. Dutch drag that is represented in mainstream media scratches at the surface of established discourse on solid identity.

However, Drag Race Holland reflects and reproduces gender normativity and the Dutch tendency to de-politicise queerness by adopting it into a system of categorisations. Drag, as has been homosexuality, is increasingly accepted into the mainstream, but is morphed to fit into a system of perpetuated binaries and structural invisibility of a-normative identities and fluidity reflecting Butler's notion of drag exposing paradoxes of gender performativity (Butler, 1993b) and contemporary research on the commodification of queer through popular cultural representations of drag (Edgar, 2011; Hodes & Sandoval, 2018).

In *Queer Amsterdam* (Peters, 2017) we can find representations of diverse queer issues and I will discuss the show more in depth in the chapter to come. What is presented and criticised on the show is the rejection of bisexuality and the solidification of gender and sexuality that occurs throughout queer, particularly gay men's communities (Eguchi, 2009; Garlick, 2003). The aim is to make queer issues legible, and it is done appropriately in an instance in which the protagonist is interpreted and perceived gay and has to come out as sexually non-specific. More on this incredible play on gender and sexuality later on, for now *Queer Amsterdam* informs this chapter's conclusion on representations of white muscular gay men and the perpetuation discriminatory nationalist ideals, although as discussed in chapter 4 informed by anxiety, pressure, and internalisation of heterosexual normativity, when it comes to queer sexualities. In particular with regard to non-specific sexuality this is important. The show touches upon something that is exemplary of a certain rejection through solidification. Sexual specificity then is required to be part of the gay men's community, and I argue that this is a peculiar but important aspect of gay identification and masculine anxiety, as a rejection of fluid sexuality, an obsessive protection of a brotherhood of men, and an abjection of femininity or feminine sexuality within that community. It points to masculine dominance within many queer spaces in which masculine performance as well as desire of the masculine is normative (Sánchez & Vilain, 2012; Stein, 2005).

6. New Masculinities and Homodiverse Breakthrough

In chapters prior, I have focussed mainly on Dutch homonormative ideals, the role of masculinity in processes of identification, and the representation of homosexuality reflecting homonationalist politics. In the last ten years, the bulk of what has been represented shows a perpetuation of homonormative nationalist ideals of homosexuality and binary notions of ideal identification on the one hand, yet on the other hand the proposal of new discourse on the role of gender, masculinity in particular, within identificatory practices. Following Butler's theory on identification and citational strategies, I argue that new performances of identity cannot exist without subjectification and thus the reproduction of the normative as integral to its subversion. In the Netherlands, mainstream representation of a-normative identity changes rapidly, as entertainment's last five years in particular reflect incremental queer political potential. Approaches to diverse identity seem to have changed generationally as well as laterally discursively, as across platforms the perpetuation of homonormativity fluctuates. Adhering to homonationalist ideals, the propagation of gayness in the form of "our boys" has been discussed in through cases of *Gewoon Vrienden* and *Jongens*, whereas more recent documentaries such as *Pisnicht the Movie* and *Acting Straight* seem to hint towards the production of new discourse, in which identity, still mostly implicitly however, is de-solidified. Moreover, it is important to stress that subversive potential through representation of queer identity, *Gewoon Vrienden* as well as *Pisnicht the Movie* most likely coexists with reproductions of normativity. In this chapter I deconstruct representations of queer identity further, as I aim to paint a picture of the role of new discourse on gender and new masculinities, building on Connell's theory, in the production of entertainment and the renegotiation of nationalist ideals.

6.1. BOYS WON'T BE BOYS

In a "formally equal patriarchy" (Jónasdóttir, 1988) or what I understand as a "formally equal het-culture" such as the Netherlands, it is important to understand masculinity as it interacts with heterosexuality, for as Steve Garlick (2003) argues, heterosexual institutions are integral to the construction of masculinity. We might not be able to see these practices in a system that is formally, legally equal, which is why these intersections and nuanced manifestations of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability are important. Sunny Berman's recent documentary *Man Made* (Bergman, 2019) aims to map the role of normative masculinity in identificatory practices and behaviour in the lives of Dutch men. In essence, she argues for the deconstruction

of the confinements of the range of emotions that is available to men. This is particularly interesting to understandings of non-straight masculinities because it shows where the straight jacket that I have touched upon before originates in its heterosexual production. She identifies aggression and anger as generally accepted masculine expressions of emotion and argues that these confinements are at the root of gendered issues like masculine pressure, anxiety, and abjection of femininity. Moreover, as she states that she is busy emancipating, she wonders what the role of men is in emancipatory processes. Interestingly, she approaches the topic from a standpoint of formal equality, as she is interested in the emancipation of men leaving gendered interactions out of consideration. Her point of view is that men are as societally restricted as women, which arguably reflects Dutch denial of gender as constitutive of identificatory practices and societal issues. However, this approach creates a space in which unfiltered understandings of how the confinements that traditional masculinity produces construct national ideals of man can be presented. Most present in *Man Made* is the analytical tool that the question of vulnerability provides, which I argue to be an important aspect of the production of new masculine discourse.

The documentary features a focus group meeting that is led by a propagator of “mannenemancipatie” (men’s emancipation). He asks the group of men what they (would) teach their children about manhood. Here, the conflation of heterosexuality and masculinity becomes evident as their answers reflect how traditional feminine characteristics are disavowed. Key phrases that come up in this conversation are tough; do not cry; sacrifice; leadership; and “vrouwenverslinder” (woman devourer). Then, if one does not adhere to these expectations, one is called gay, effeminate or a “mietje”²⁵. One of the members of the focus group explains how his past failure to pass as a man in the context of these characteristics contributed to his present-day masculine emotional range. Similar to the case of the football locker-room as I have discussed in chapter 5, his experience in football culture was the abjection of any type of feminine, inadequate behaviour by the use of slur words that derive from homosexual terminology. Dissimilar to that case, however, this focus group understands these words as constructive of a confined Dutch ideal of men and aims to open up space for unmasculine characteristics and emotions. I argue that the precise intersection of gender and

²⁵ Mietje translates directly to “weakling”, but arguably has the same connotation as the English word pussy.

sexuality here, the use of homosexual slurs to call out unmasculine inadequate behaviour, is hinted at yet still underappreciated.

The focus group further discusses the properties of gendered violence in romantic and sexual relationships. Domestic violence against men and men as perpetrators of domestic violence is equally perceived as the man's responsibility, as both men as perpetrators and victims represent different aspects of failed masculinity. Aggression as an emotion and violence as an expression of aggression justified through societal pressure is problematic, and this is perpetuated in this focus group and not problematised enough in the documentary. However, the invisibility of violence as problematic masculine behaviour and violence against men in general is addressed here as Sunny Bergman states: "we're used to the man as aggressor and violator. But the man is also victim of a system that falls short for them." (2019). Moreover, the discussion on the image of men as victims presented in *Man Made* produces new discourse on masculinity as what is challenged is the idea of control and dominance as aspect of masculine adequacy. Many members of the focus group state the pressure is on them to have control over domestic situations and that being a victim is not part of the image we have of the traditional ideal man. Men who are victims of abuse cannot adhere because they're supposed to be dominant and in control as well as have a woman be dependent on them.

The importance of discourse on men as victims is further stressed through its transferability onto narratives of the homosexual experience. Firstly, invisibility of same sex domestic violence is a persistent issue which transfers into the Dutch context. The layer that most research adds to this is the pressure of being part of a minority group, but I argue that notions of failed masculinity potentially exacerbate same sex violence (Hellemans et al., 2015). This is legible through the discourse presented in *Man Made* as the failure of adhering to the masculine type of *vrouwenverslinder* becomes internalised and produces similar sexually violent language in gay men's communities. It points to a "top" dominance of masculine men that is seen in straight acting practices in which "body count" defines masculinity. Body count here refers to number of sexual partners and is particularly interesting seeing the word shares its meaning with number of people killed. Thus, what is challenged in the documentary is dominance, abjection and violent top behaviour that constitute masculinity across sexuality. Secondly, discourse on men as victims in general uncovers another important masculine ideal that perpetuates homonationalist ideals. In one of the street interviews conducted by Nicolaas Verheul and in some of the visual material presented in *Pisnacht the Movie* (2019) he is confronted with the

view that resisting both usage of slurs like *nicht* and *homo* and usage of homosexual slurs for comedic purposes is a practice of claiming victimhood and therefore a sign of failed masculinity. Both documentaries show examples of this resistance and challenge the heteronationalist notion that microaggressions like slurs or IPV against men are signs of unmasculine weakness. This is revolutionary as the idea of men as victims creates space for vulnerability that moves beyond spectra of gender and sexuality. Moreover, it challenges the homonationalist notion that homosexuality is acceptable as long as it is masculine and as long as it does not claim victimhood by resisting traditionally acceptable use of language and nationalist comedy.

As discussed in chapter 5, Dutch ideals of gender are constructed through solidified views of identity which indicates invisibility and underrepresentation of fluid identity. In this, homosexuality is accepted to the point where it remains solid and gender specific. Additionally, Dutch politics are formally equal and surface level societal gender issues are normalised and made invisible through the widespread, liberal idea that the Dutch nation offers equal opportunities for all -read all natural(ised) Dutch people- and therefore does not often show signs of equity policy. Dutch ideals reflecting equality over equity are hinted at by Bergman when she interviews Margarét Pála Ólafsdóttir (1957), founder of Hjalli-schools in Iceland. These primary schools offer “gender compensation classes”, in which girls play in the woods and learn how to produce and build and boys play with dolls and learn how to care and feel. Ólafsdóttir reflects on constructions of masculinity as she states that “human qualities are for all of us, so boys will be trained in all of these qualities (...) this is important because gender is the most dominant variable in anyone’s life. This variable is boxing them in.” (Bergman, 2019). As they give boys opportunities that they are deprived of by society, much of the criticism the schools face reads along the lines of: “they will become gay” or “they will become girls”, to which Ólafsdóttir responds: “how is masculinity endangered by a bit of nail polish?” (Bergman, 2019).

Ólafsdóttir’s thinking sees some parallels in the Dutch context, as some of her ideas are reflected by activist group and theatre production *BOYS WON’T BE BOYS* (Van Huisstede, 2020). I argue *BOYS WON’T BE BOYS* to be movement that is at the forefront of the production of new masculine discourse that is emerging in the Netherlands over the last 5 years. Moreover, the theatre production deconstructs masculine performativity following Butlerian theory, as it plays with on and off-stage performances of gender and sexuality and blurs the line

between the two. *BOYS WON'T BE BOYS* presents a thorough understanding of gender as performance and hints at the conflation of gender and sexuality similar and inspirational to what I have presented in this research. Rikkert van Huisstede, artistic director and creator of the theatre production deconstructs Dutch traditional discourse on gender and sexuality in his opening act:

I am wearing a dress. I didn't put this on just for today though, I wear a dress quite often. Usually, shorter. The other day I was in the supermarket when someone came up to me and said: "Can I ask you something? Are you a homo or a transgender?". This made me think because I would actually like to know that myself. Does that make a woman in trousers a lesbian? The box, into which men have to fit, is a very small box. (...) And when we cross the boundaries that the box creates for us just a tiny bit (...) "gay", "gay", we are called all sorts of names, especially in high schools. This made me wonder, what should we be able to do as men in order to avoid being called names. How do you become a real man? The following things are important in that regard: You cannot wear colourful clothing, for example. Or when you do, there must be a number on it. For example, 89 is a great number. And when you're at a party, you can never dance. What you do is, you walk to your friends who are probably lined up on the side of the dancefloor. (...) The most important thing, however, is to show interest in women. For example, if you walk down a street and it is becoming kind of dark and you see a woman, you can follow her and make sounds you would make when communicating with a horse. (...) The thing is, I cannot really do all of those things. I always thought that was an issue and I felt lonely when wearing a dress. I wondered what was wrong with me, but I am now figuring out that more and more men want to develop themselves outside of that box. (Rikkert van Huisstede, *BOYS WON'T BE BOYS*)

He proposes a break through confinements of gender that produces new notions of masculinity and cuts across systems of heteronormative hegemony and politics of identity. The movement takes exactly the traditional conflation of gender and sexuality that confines identity and transforms it into a post masculine and post-homosexual discourse: the idea that masculinity does no longer exist when it is confined into an unachievable identity type, as well as a denial of any relevance of sexuality within this discussion. Where the contingency between gender and sexuality produced solid performative (re)production of identity, now the conflation between gender and sexuality becomes the space in which categories of identity cease to exist.

The thinking that Bergman and her documentary *Man Made* introduce into the Dutch context is revolutionary as it debunks liberal notions of equality by stressing the importance of equity through supporting either minority groups or in this particular case, by offering early on compensation as a practice of balancing out inevitable exposure to normativity. Moreover, in

dialogue with *BOYS WON'T BE BOYS*, it uncovers traditional contingencies of gender and sexuality, in which one solidifies the other, and the idea of homosexuality as “fine as long as you keep acting like a man” that is either explicitly stated or implicitly perpetuated in fiction like *Gewoon Vrienden* and that fuels homonormative performative reproduction. Lastly, The documentary *Man Made* in its entirety, as its motives are to identify and deconstruct discourse on masculinity through an illumination of repression of feelings and caging of emotions, finds similarities with *BOYS WON'T BE BOYS* in their claims to what I argue to be a revolution of vulnerability, as Rikkert van Huisstede uncovers the masculine box and the repression of feelings.

6.2. The revolution of vulnerability

(...) Emotions. Never show emotions. That is, aggression is fine, that won't hurt your masculinity, but sadness cannot exist. You have to repress that feeling, so that when people ask you how you are doing, you can say: “z'n gangetje”²⁶ (Rikkert van Huisstede, *BOYS WON'T BE BOYS*)

Upon deconstructing normative masculinity, van Huisstede's most pressing challenges revolve around performances of emotion and the repression of feelings. In line with what is presented in visual material that I have studied throughout this thesis, aggression and anger in his view make up the visible range of emotions that represent acceptable masculinity. To challenge the limits to access to emotions is to subvert the box that confines masculinity. Moreover, with regard to internalisation of heteronormative masculinity in the context of gay men's communities as constitutive of the production of homonormativity, I argue that visibility of vulnerability in representations of gay narratives is vital to the production of new masculinities and the subversion of homonationalist ideals.

In *Pisnacht the Movie* (2019) Nicolaas Verheul addresses quotidian use of homosexual slurs and deconstructs discursive parallels between gender and sexuality and inadequacy and homosexuality. Moreover, he examines the properties of comedy and its appropriation of these slurs. When he expresses his discomfort and hurt upon the quotidian and comedic use of slurs like *pisnacht* and *homo*, he is met with resistance and the idea that he, and many other queers

²⁶ “(Het gaat) Z'n gangetje” translates directly to “its way”, as in, “it is going its way”. The meaning of this phrase is most similar to “same, same”, to indicate that nothing has really changed.

appropriate victimhood as a form of claiming too much space and attention. His vulnerable response to slurs then becomes a threat to masculine claims on comedy through politics of freedom of speech and national heritage and is denied its validity. This masculine, practice reflects homonationalist politics through the normalisation and appropriation of homosexual language and perpetuates the notion of vulnerability as victimhood. It is in Verheul's persistent representation of vulnerability that we find the production of new discourse on comedy and quotidian use of homosexual slurs and thus the deconstruction of normativity and normalisation.

To illustrate, the documentary features the story of Bowi Jong (1999), who is part of the Dutch football community and openly gay. He spoke up against statements made by Johan Derksen (1949) and René van der Gijp (1961), hosts of *Voetbal Inside*, a talk show revolving around football most known for its "voetbalhumor"²⁷ consisting of (within that space accepted and encouraged) racist, sexist, and homophobic remarks. Jong's online campaign against the show and voetbalhumor in general was met with violent expressions of criticism and he was forced to cease his endeavours. This narrative indicates general Dutch perceptions of vulnerability and expression of pain as appropriation of victimhood, the normalisation of gay integration as "it is no longer that hard for homo's to come out. If you are a man, just be who you are!" (Derksen, *Voetbal Inside*), and a Dutch obsession with the protection of comedic freedom and freedom of speech. Verheul refocuses on Jong's story and his narrative of pain in *Pisnacht the Movie* and gives way for the rejection of his expression of hurt as subversive practices.

Coming out narratives and issues around the heterosexual construction of the closet are topics of discussion in *Prince Charming* (RTL, 2021b), and, although they simultaneously reproduce hegemonic notions of the closet, it is here that space for vulnerability is created through which we can identify new representations of gay masculinity. The contestants find themselves in a conversation about their self-perceptions and experiences with coming out after Sezer, who is Muslim, one of two non-white and arguably the most "femme" contestant, encourages the rest of the group to perform a Dua²⁸ with him. This ritual breaks the straight jacket for many of the

²⁷ Voetbalhumor translates to football humour and forms the prototype of Dutch, masculine, nationalist comedy.

²⁸ A Dua is a form of prayer that finds its origin in Islamic traditions

other contestants as they respond to Sezer's prayer followed by his story about self-acceptance and religion with emotional responses and narratives of their own.

(The contestants of Prince Charming sit around a table with their eyes closed, both hands in front of them and their palms facing up. The production shifts from the scene at the dining table to individual confessionals)

Sezer (confessional): I did not expect everyone to be this interested in my Dua. I thought it was super nice that we all put our hands out and performed a Dua.

(...)

Ferdi: So, what do you believe [in]

Sezer: I am Muslim, so I believe in Allah en Islam. But there are some things that I question, especially with regard to being homo. They say, "they are possessed" or "it's a psychological disorder". I used to not accept that I was gay at all. I hated myself. I thought, if I have a one-way ticket to hell, why do I exist. So, I prayed and prayed, but I am and will always be gay. Marnix (confessional): I think it is really heavy to hear that someone really tried everything they could to change

Mitchell (confessional): I think... (starts to cry) Jesus, where does this come from now... I think he tried to get rid of the attraction he felt towards men, and that he eventually found out he can't.

Tommy: I think every one of us has something similar, everyone has their battle, because you feel like you are not normal.

Vince (confessional): I am starting to tear up, because I also experienced all kinds of things and when everyone starts telling their story, some things come back up.

Tommy: I had these obsessive thoughts: "I am not gay, I am not gay, I am not gay". Every time.

(...)

Sezer: how old were you when you came out? How was that for you?

Rick: 23. It was very hard. I was really sad. I didn't want it to be true (...) I was bullied at school. Everyone noticed I was different.

Tim: This is hard. I had a very rough childhood. Really rough.

Ferdi (confessional): On the one hand it is really beautiful that we can share this with each other. On the other hand, it is very sad. You know everyone at that table experienced awful things.

Dignum: Are you ok Ferdi?

(Ferdi breaks into tears, Vince gets up to hug him)

Ferdi (confessional): You can be so stoer²⁹, and you can have such a nice life like I have now. I have all my affairs in order. But looking back at the past like this really hits you hard.

²⁹ The word "Stoer" translates to the English tough, masculine. Its connotation is similar to straight acting, showing no emotions.

Rick: (breaks down in tears): I just think about young boys that are like me and see me and maybe don't feel so alone now. We all have different personalities, and for every character there is many others like that character, and they will see you now and think, nothing is wrong with me.

Dignum: I think we can be proud of that, and of how far we came.

Despite the manifestation of the binary of sisterhoods and brotherhoods of men, as the arrival of the prince makes for a sudden shift in atmosphere through which we can read straight acting practices as constitutive of perpetuated normative gay sexuality, I argue that what is represented here is the subversive potential of vulnerability throughout narratives of journeys of self-acceptance. Vulnerable expressions of self then break through homonormative ideals of homosexuality and the masculine closet as it produces new queer narratives and diverse identification. It becomes evident, in contrast to politics of gaystreaming and fictional normalisation of gay identity, that queer narratives and processes of coming out are nowhere near as integrated into mainstream society. Within the space that is created by Sezer, straight acting practices as part of the production of nationalist brotherhoods of men are interrupted and swiftly make way for ungendered, unnationalistic performances of self. Moreover, the production's exertion of tokenism and commodification of Sezer's femme, non-white character is subverted through his potential as someone who invites vulnerability and a-normative, non-white performances of new masculinity. Strikingly, as the emotions that the contestants show and share here is the product of their introduction to Sezer's Islamic ritual and his vulnerability regarding navigating homosexuality and Islamic religion, what this conversation represents cuts across Dutch homonationalist constructions and Islamophobic politics of identity. The purposeful production of the storyline that Alastair, a white masculine presenting contestant, who was shown making femmephobic remarks at Sezer, excludes himself from this conversation further establishes this trend of breaking through homonormative constructions of queer identity.

6.3. Breaking through national ideals and homonormativity

As discussed, gay representation in *Gewoon Vrienden* simultaneously perpetuates stereotypes en homonormative ideals and produces new narratives of homosexuality and gay issues. The focus lies heavily on the masculine body and the film perpetuates homonormative straight acting practices. However, the film introduces a gay character with a Syrian background,

through which Gewoon Vrienden becomes a site for potential subversion of white nationalist ideals. Most storylines presented show a naturalisation of Yad's character, family situation and life course, but there is a particular instance in which his societal position is portrayed in a manner that suggests a break through nationalist, white, homonormative ideals. As Joris' mother, Simone, and her mother, Ans, sit around the table, they speak about Yad, who not long before became Ans' caretaker.

Simone: Are you now taking refugees in your home?

Ans: Simone, act normal, this is my new Paula (old housekeeper)

Yad: You must be Ans' daughter, I heard a lot about you, I am Yad.

Simone: Yes...

Ans: Yad is a trooper!

Simone: Do you not read the newspapers?

Ans: No, he is not a refugee, he is Jewish!

Simone: That makes me Mongolian?

Yad: Oh, I thought Spanish with your skin being so tan!

(Ans laughs)

Yad: Looks good on you.

Simone: You did put away your valuable items safely, right?

Ans: Give me your key, I need it for him.

Simone: Really?

Ans: Yes.

(...)

Yad: Bye Simone!

Simone: Bye Paula, from verwegistan (faraway land)

(...Scene moves from Ans' house to Simone's house)

Simone: Joris!

Joris: Yes?

Simone: Did you know this? Ans has a new help, a Muslim! You can't do that in times like these. At such an old person's house!

Joris: Maybe he is really nice to grandma.

Simone: Nice my ass, he will steal her whole house in no time. But we won't be able to say anything about it because that would be discrimination. These days everything is discrimination. And in the meantime, they are banking on my tax money.

The irony presented in this dialogue deconstructs Dutch xenophobia in a myriad of (nuanced) manners. Firstly, Ans refers back to Dutch historical ties with its Jewish communities pointing at the nationalist notion that Jewish (gay) men fall under the umbrella of "our boys" protecting

them from the real threat: (Muslim) refugees³⁰. Then, as Yad calls out Simone's skin tone by joking that he thought she was Spanish, he explicitly points at whiteness as an abjection of colour, yet the appropriation of "tan" into Dutch high class beauty ideals. Muslim, Syrian background is explicitly rejected by Simone, as she expresses her prejudice and her xenophobic idea that Yad will steal Ans' valuables. Lastly, Simone alludes to a contemporary threat that inhibits freedom of speech by stating that "these days, everything is discrimination", which reflects Dutch generational, new discursive changes in use of language similar to what I have discussed through Jong's case in *Pisnacht the Movie*.

Some recent productions challenge homonormativity as a product of appropriation of normative masculine performances into queer spaces. A clear example of diverse representations of queer identification and queer issues can be found in the series *Queer Amsterdam* (Peters, 2017). The narrative revolves around the lives of white, Amsterdam based trans man Sam and his brother Bram. Firstly, this series is unique in its trans visibility and its representation of trans issues. When Bram performs at a drag night in a club in Amsterdam, Sam is not allowed in by the security guard as he explains it is men's night. The series brings attention to the idea of gender as community defining, and criticises Amsterdam gay scene's exclusionary practices (Valentine & Skelton, 2003). Ironically, inside, femininity plays a large role in the manifestation of these gay communities, which is portrayed in *Queer Amsterdam* as this men's night consists of drag performances. Thus, in a space in which femininity is openly appropriated, we simultaneously see an exclusion of feminine types and a focus on masculine passing through Sam's narrative. Trans invisibility and persisting trans issues are identified and positioned in between hypermasculinity and femininity, exposing how gender normativity persists as an issue within the queer scene in the Netherlands.

Trans issues throughout the series are interestingly understood in the context of Dutch normative views on gender, as illustrated in conversation between Sam and his roommate, Mira She, a black, lesbian, feminist character that is at that point in the series involved with the "free the nipple" movement, misgenders Sam, and he does not correct her or come out to her. She

³⁰ Contextually important: The film "Gewoon Vrienden" was produced in the midst of the so called "refugee crisis", in which political focus was on the question of accepting particularly Syrian refugees into the Netherlands (and Europe in its entirety).

encourages him to join her club and stresses the importance of woman's protests. Upon this misgendering and hyperfocus on woman's issues as supposed aspect of his life and identity, out of frustration, Sam responds by performing hyper masculine, reflecting heterosexual, anti-feminist views. He tells her that he thinks her views are too activist and that she is "overreacting with this whole movement." (Peters, 2017). Mira leaves, disappointed at Sam, who stays behind with his brother Bram, who says to him: "You're the man!" (Peters, 2017). The series representation of transgender negotiations of identity uncovers Dutch gender normativity and blurs boundaries defined by hegemonic national constructions of gender and sexuality that cease to be of any significance in the lives of these queer people.

To further illustrate, the characterisation of Bram as a white, muscular, lean gay man becomes interesting when we find out he does not adhere to normative constructions of sexuality. His body reads masculine, muscular and white, yet he is dressed more gender queer, as he wears nail polish, eyeshadow, and performs in drag. Most strikingly, the viewer finds out he is sexually active with men and women, interchangeably and polysexually. He is not out at the bar where he works as a bartender nor does he define his sexuality explicitly, but his non-specific sexuality is presented as an issue within his gay identifying environment when his colleague renders a bisexual ex-boyfriend sexually immature and unreliably promiscuous. This scene provides an exceptionally accurate insight into specific homonormative constructions of gay communities in the Netherlands³¹. By challenging these exclusionary, solidified spaces of identification, Queer Amsterdam unhooks gendered performances from their sexuality. The way Bram expresses himself through his drag persona further establishes this notion of fluidity. First, he performs feminine on stage. Then, as he is incrementally involved with negotiating his queer identity more, his performances become more genderqueer. Both his fluid sexuality and his queer drag persona are involved with processes of coming out to a gay men's community, reflecting theoretical reimaginations of the closet as a temporal construct that practically persists throughout gay men's lived experience and uncovering perpetual homonormative performances of gay in gay men's spaces.

³¹ Specifically, Amsterdam

In *ANNE +* (Bisscheroux, 2021), a queer coming of age film about a young writer, Anne, navigating identity, gender and sexuality, her friends, two masculine presenting bodies are staged in a setting where one experiments with drag (presumably for the first time) and there is no discussion or about it. The scene is obviously placed quickly and carelessly to show that this play with gender did not alter anything about desirability (they kiss) or interest between the two (of course, drag and femininity are no synonyms, and more, drag (female impersonation) is often found a masculine dominant space. However, drag remains an important site for challenging gender binaries, and does not reflect the hegemonic heterosexual masculinity that I am assessing here). The choice was made to not spend any time discussing this happening in their relationship, which points to a change in the status quo. The pushed discourse is one of “this is totally normal” instead of one of “this situation in real life is met with dispute, but it shouldn’t, which is why we are starting a conversation on screen. The message to the audience is one of happy normalcy, a queer world, where queer issues become just issues. Arguably, this depiction of queer falls into the category of gaystreaming as I have discussed in chapter 5, as *ANNE+* in fact contributes to the normalisation of queer. However, de-politicisation of queer identity does not occur in this case, as the framework of the series and film as an entire franchise is situated carefully as a queer political narrative. The difference in subversive potential between the film *ANNE+* and films such as *Jongens* and *Gewoon Vrienden* lies in the casting of exclusively queer actors to play queer roles, a creation of a framework in which queer political endeavours operate largely cut across a heteronormative, homonationalist system and the normalisation of representation of queer issues within this system. Paradoxically, *ANNE+* provides a narrative that represents the availability of the ‘good life’ to intersectional queer identifications, throughout which people of colour, gender non-specific identities and trans people are included. Queer narratives are diversified and represented as such, promoting queer Homodiverse discourse. However, these are integrated into normative systems of the ‘good life’ contesting radical political notions that queer identity represents.

To illustrate, I argue that in the second season of *Drag Race Holland* (“Who’s That Queen?,” 2021), the subversive potential of the adoption of a trans contestant and contestants of colour into mainstream spaces of queer expression should be read through the lens of the commodification of queer. In this case, trans bodies and people of colour are deployed as tokens of diversity into systems that perpetuate homonormativity by means of gaystreaming and capitalist endeavours, reflective of identity politics as I have discussed in Chapter 5. However,

Drag Race's platform being incrementally occupied by queer, gender non-specific bodies points to the transformation of traditional notions of drag, reflecting changing popular cultural discourse on gender.

Halperin's distinction between gay and queer (1995) remains relevant here as illustrated through queer Amsterdam, as the representation of trans and sexually non-specific identities produce political queer potential. The revolution of vulnerability will increasingly form a resistance to masculine national protection of comedy and quotidian use of homosexual slurs and anti-Islam politics. The latter is particularly interesting as it seems like representation and visibility of queer identity increasingly overlaps with popular cultural deconstructions of xenophobia. Dutch masculine nationality as well as white nationality then become simultaneously and inseparably subverted. Gender as a concept is most difficult for entertainment to deconstruct. Drag as a play on this is becoming more mainstream but often perpetuates gender binaries rather than subverts them, to which the visibility of trans identities and its representations becomes increasingly important.

7. Conclusion

In a “formally equal het-culture” like the Netherlands, much has been researched regarding sexuality and homonationalism in the form of anti-Islam politics through the adoption of pro-LGBTQ agendas (Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011; Spierings, 2021; Van Lisdonk et al., 2018). However, Dutch nationalist common interest in masculinity and the abjection of femininity across communities points to another aspect of Dutch homonationalism that is not yet covered. This research formulates an understanding of gay masculinities as they are represented in Dutch media. Then, how does this assessment of gay masculine discourse show indication of masculinity as constitutive of Dutch attitudes towards homosexuality and with that, an adoption of discourse on masculinities into homonationalist politics. Moreover, this research tries to deconstruct gay masculinities to find signs of resistance to traditional masculinity and the construction of new masculinities that cut across Dutch systems of homonationalism, homophobia and femmephobia. They seem to adopt discourse on the conflation of sexuality and gender and the importance of men as emotional, sensitive, and flamboyant beings: a resistance to Dutch homonormativity. It is here that, following Butler’s theory of citation and laws of identity (1993b, 1997), performative subversion exists.

Masculinity constituted by straight acting and masculine anxiety in a dialectic forms a foundational aspect of homonormativity (Eguchi, 2009; Sánchez & Vilain, 2012). Reversed, we can understand gay identification through these homonationalist discourses of masculinity. I am finding a lot of representational evidence that white, productive masculinity makes for an identification of homosexual men that is adopted within mainstream Dutch culture reflecting unpolitical configurations of gay identity that Bersani (1987) and Halperin (2009) allude to. A certain type of gay men is featured in fiction such as *Gewoon Vrienden* and are further represented by the contestants of *Prince Charming*. They are allowed to share their story, to which their sexuality is most important. Homosexuality as such thus, is widely accepted, coherent with historical literature on changing Dutch views on sexuality (Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007; Van de Meerendonk & Scheepers, 2004; van der Veer, 2006). However, the Dutch are not interested in its implications for the intersection of gender in constructions of identity. A man is and will always be a man in this case, which is reflected in *Pisnicht the Movie*. Masculinity thus, is an important part of Dutch homonormativity as it is internalised by a certain type of gay men. Straight acting practices and proliferations of masculine anxiety in the lives

of gay men exemplify this internalisation. Within the gay male community, discrimination and femmephobia are very active tropes of social interaction reflected by interviews conducted in the documentary *Acting Straight*. Sexuality is formed by these practices as masculine men are presented as desirable. Body and attire reflect hegemonic heterosexual masculinity adopted into the gay community as well as capitalist notions of productivity. Gay men are presented as “one of us” and valuable to Dutch society. The idea of “our boys” becomes important and is situated in the context of brotherhoods of men. Moreover, acceptance of homosexuality should be considered through a lens of racism and xenophobia. Whiteness is important here, as popular cultural representation of white gay men perpetuates homonationalist, anti-Moroccan/Islam propaganda that we know from Pim Fortuyn’s political endeavours (Brons, 2021; Keuzenkamp & Bos, 2007).

Although these damaging structures are ever-present, by understanding gay acceptance and homonationalism through an assessment of new masculine discourse we can uncover subversive potential of gay men who situate themselves within a homo-hetero space. Yad’s case in *Gewoon Vrienden* contests whiteness as constitutive of homonormativity (Duggan, 2002; Francis, 2021). Moreover, I identified queer movements whose ideas cut across traditional notions of masculinity and with that resist uniform representation of manhood. These movements are very interestingly exemplified by *BOYS WON’T BE BOYS*. Firstly, the conflation of gender and sexuality, and the idea of masculinity across sexualities is clearly understood. Emotional, sensitive masculinity is not claimed as feminine or gay masculinity but claimed as universal characteristics of men. Rikkert van Huistede simplifies the issue when he states that he is a man who feels different than traditional men which implies that the box that men are supposed to fit into is too small. The dangers of this conceptualisation of man are that it does not account for the intersectional nature of gender identity: the boxes created for men to fit into have walls of race and class. Nevertheless, the movement stages an open-minded discourse of masculinity that cuts across sexuality and provides resistance to homonormative representations of masculinity. There is a difference visible between this movement and traditional gay movements as traditional gay movements seem to show signs of perpetuation rather than transformation, similar to Halperin’s dichotomy of queer versus gay (Halperin, 1995). By cutting across lines of sexuality and gender, the *BOYS WON’T BE BOYS* movement accounts for this perpetuation of solidification: masculinity is fluid for straight men as much as it is for gay men. In other words, gay masculinity is not an alternative for

heterosexual masculinity, but heterosexual masculinity cannot exist when we remove the sociocultural straight jacket. Queer and straight masculinities should not and cannot be demarked through differences in sexuality. Solidification is further contested by representations of drag performativity in Queer Amsterdam and in fleeting subversive instances on the show Drag Race Holland as drag incrementally becomes a site for fluid expressions of identity and renegotiations of race, gender, and sexuality. It is not the terrorist drag of Vaginal Crème Davis (Munoz, 1997), but its queering potential is evident.

To understand better the implications and structure of homonationalism in the Netherlands, this research has shown how discourse on masculinities forms one of the constitutive factors regarding queer representation and acceptance. The new masculine discourse in the Netherlands consists of a very binary reproduction of hegemonic heterosexual gender constructions as well as a countermovement focussing on the conflation of gender and sexuality and the revolution of vulnerability. Throughout, the discussion of a-normative gender related issues, as well as post-colonial and post racist issues, remains far more difficult and less visible than conversations about a-normative sexuality. Simultaneously, the agenda is: “we are free here, and Moroccans, Turks and other Muslims are a threat to that freedom” (Brons, 2021; Fortuyn, 1997; Hekma, 2002). It is masculinity that serves as the important analytical tool here: the question is about freedom of manhood through which sexuality could be read and discussed. Dutch politics aim to protect “our (gay) boys” from attacks from religious differences of belief. The real danger however comes from within the Dutch society itself, as I have argued: a much-confined hegemonic heterosexual masculinity that seeps through the boundaries of communities and is internalised and reproduced by its targets’ masculine performances. Straight acting, masculine anxiety and expressions of self show how this masculine pressure is internalised and reproduced. My argument is that movements like BOYS WON’T BE BOYS, by understanding the nexus of sexuality, gender, and race and by explicitly aiming to deconstruct the confinements of masculinity in the form of repressed emotions, provide a common ground on which configurations of self across sexuality, gender, race, and religion can be expressed more freely. It is precisely this understanding of dominant masculine performances that undermine xenophobia, homophobia, femmephobia and racism.

Although the Netherlands enjoy a reputation of seamless integration of queer ways of life into the mainstream, there are a lot of issues with regards to homonormativity and homonationalist

ideals perpetuating traditional patterns. The main problems that I can identify through how homosexuality is represented and the role of masculinity within those representations are:

1. Homosexuality is normalised to a point where its queerness is de-politicised
2. The adoption of homosexuality into nationalist politics perpetuate damaging ideals of whiteness, masculinity, and ability and reflect anti-Islam propaganda
3. In discourse around a-normative sexuality, intersections with gender are often denied, reflecting hegemonic masculine structures within gay communities including straight acting, masculine anxiety, femmephobia and (internalised) homophobia.
4. Identity is viewed and represented as solid, leaving very little room for the ‘too queer’ and the fluid

Newer films and series, mainly ones created after 2018 show a changing view on sexuality and gender and their fluidity. Moreover, people of colour and trans representations of gayness become more visible in popular culture. Queer theatre productions as *BOYS WON'T BE BOYS* and queer television like *Queer Amsterdam* are involved with deconstructing masculinity, which as I argue throughout this research, is one of the main components of Dutch homonormativity and co-constitutive of homonationalism. In this very new deconstruction, vulnerability and gender non-specificity contribute greatly to the construction of new masculinities and the rejection of homonormative nationalist identificatory ideals, while persisting normativity by the integration of queer identification into hegemonic national systems remain threatening.

Representation and performativity are closely related and lines between on stage performances and performances of the quotidian are blurry (Butler, 1993b). However, an analysis of popular cultural visual material on its own cannot carry the weight of the examination of national discourse in its entirety. I have attempted to select content carefully, but I concede that more obscure material potentially exposes nuanced discursive movement and queer practices of self-expression. In contrast to an assessment of mainstream representation as I present in this thesis, underground and small-scale collectives should form an additionally important source for analysis. Moreover, upon my ambition to formulate to an understanding of vast national discourse, I have engaged with a great variety of material which at times limited my analytical potential. Many of the cases studied deserve a bit more love and attention. Lastly, Although the focus here mainly lies on masculinity as homonationalist ideal as well as new masculinities as

spaces for subversion of that ideal, throughout my argumentation I come back to its intersections with race, religion, and gender. It is vital for the production of new discourse on masculinity that the intersectional nature of reflections of homonormativity and homonationalist ideal is understood which deserves much more in dept investigation. What now seems particularly pressing is the perpetual invisibility of trans identities and queer people of colour in Dutch popular culture and mainstream political discourse, to the deconstruction of which potential further research could greatly contribute.

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