

The Illusion of Sexual Liberation– Heterosexual Homosexuality:  
(Re)production of Homonormativity within the Lived Experiences of  
LGBTQ+-identifying Individuals in the Netherlands

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**Abstract**

Considered a forerunner in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other sexual identities (LGBTQ+) advocacy, the Netherlands prides itself as a country where LGBTQ+ are accepted and protected. However, the dissonance between LGBTQ+ persons' reality and LGBTQ+ portrayed by the Dutch government, illustrates homonormativity as an extension of heteronormativity rather than genuine acceptance. Homonormativity entails the privileging of heteronormative constructs and ideals within the LGBTQ+ identity and community. It asserts the belief that values and norms associated with heterosexuality should be emulated by homosexual people. Therefore, the research question of this study is: *How is homonormativity (re)produced within the lived experiences of LGBTQ+-identifying individuals in the Netherlands?*

To understand and examine the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ persons, 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with varying genders and sexualities were conducted. These interviews resulted in four themes: Institutions and Corporations, Dutch environments, LGBTQ+ environments and Journey of the Self.

The findings implied that the prerequisite for the (re)production of homonormativity lies in Dutch institutions and corporations– laws, constitutions and Pride, and the Dutch environment– language and sayings. The (re)production of homonormativity for some individuals manifests due to the need of being socially viable, and for others, how their self-expression is perceived. Homonormativity is (re)produced to also mitigate experiences of harassment, discrimination and micro-aggression. With the impacts it has on LGBTQ+ persons in their development of identity, studying homonormativity helps to dismantle heteronormativity, necessary for genuine acceptance.

**Keywords:** Heteronormativity, Homonormativity, LGBTQ+ persons

## 1. Introduction

The Netherlands has emerged as a leading advocate of erotic freedoms and sexual liberties since the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s. The transformation that the Netherlands underwent was significant, transforming from a society governed by Christian political parties and conservative (Hekman and Duyvendak, 2011) values to a country where both locals and foreigners can embrace and indulge in sexual freedom. As a result of the sexual revolution, the Dutch society experienced far-reaching effects. With numerous social changes influenced by organisations such as the NVSH (Dutch Society for Sexual Reform) and the COC (Center for Recreation and Culture— a code name representing the Integration of Homosexuality), the Netherlands in terms of sexual morality, emerged as the most liberal nation in the world (Hekma and Duyvendak, 2011). This narrative of sexual liberation continued with the constitutionalisation of equal rights for LGBTQ+ people in 1993, legal same-sex marriage in 2001, same-sex parenting and adoption, and, discrimination protection (Hekma, 2004). In the eyes of the law, homosexuality and heterosexuality is equal, however, legal equality does not mean social equality. Even though attitudes towards homosexuality in the Dutch population compared to other European population is notably more positive— and with same-sex marriage, the most accepting (Gerhards, 2010; Keuzenkamp, 2011), however, Hekma and Duyvendak (2011) argue otherwise.

Hekma and Duyvendak (2011), state that even though in their acceptance of homosexuality the Netherlands seem exemplary, this acceptance applies more to its laws rather than everyday life. Lisdonk et al. (2017) add on and note that the acceptance of LGBTQ+ in the Netherlands synonymises tolerance instead. The paradoxical nature of tolerance— in which one overcomes dislikes to promote harmony— has caused confinement for the LGBTQ+ community and persons in the Netherlands. The limitations of tolerance become apparent in same-sex expression of public affection as it is met with discomfort and objection in comparison to their hetero counterparts (Lisdonk et al., 2017). 23% of the Dutch population are uncomfortable with two men walking hand in hand in comparison to a man and a woman. Additionally, 32% of the Dutch population perceive two men kissing in public to be offensive (Kuyper, 2016). This tolerance of homosexuality shows that the Dutch population and society still function in heteronormative ways (BeingMe, 2018; Krebbekx, 2018; Lisdonk, Nencel & Keuzenkamp, 2017).

With micro-level aggressions and the ‘tolerance’ of homosexuality, many LGBTQ+ persons are influenced to behave differently— preferring to keep their homosexuality private, and as invisible as possible. Aggarwal (2010) notes that there is social pressure for LGBTQ+-identifying individuals to perform as ‘normally’ as possible to mitigate the experiences of discrimination. Robinson (2012), in his research, studies how the assimilation of homosexuality in a heteronormative society and institution marginalises the Dutch LGBTQ+ community. He argues that the broader narrative of (homo)sexuality in the Netherlands, is strongly interrelated to the traditional gender and sexuality norms creating a category of accepted homosexuality. In this way, homosexuality reinforces and sustains the hetero-norms instead of challenging them, disallowing the creation of a space for the variance of LGBTQ+ identities. This is what Duggan (2003) defines as homonormativity. Moreover, Robinson (2012) notes that assimilation comes into play, in which LGBTQ+ individuals in the dominant Dutch society conform to what the broader heteronormative institutions and society deem as acceptable— as a form of self regulation and repressiveness due to their environment.

The Dutch’s nature of heteronormativity persists along with homosexuality in the form of homonormativity. Even though in the eyes of the law, LGBTQ+ persons have been granted equal rights, the social acceptance of LGBTQ+ in the Netherlands is a facade for tolerance (Hekma and Duyvendak, 2011). LGBTQ+ persons may (re)produce homonormativity to mitigate experiences of discrimination, and their counterparts, those who do not perform, their deviance is considered non-conformity. (Re)production of homonormativity in this context manifests itself in different ways; such as changing their mannerisms (Lisdonk et al., 2017), or assimilating oneself into the standards of the greater heterosexual Dutch population (Robinson, 2012). This research seeks a deeper understanding of how homonormativity is (re)produced and serves as a gateway to challenge heteronormativity and its extension- homonormativity. Moreover, this research seeks to empower LGBTQ+ persons, to understand the standards and expectations placed on them just because of a label, and to overcome them. Currently, the literature on homonormativity usually resides in homonationalism, in which narratives of progressiveness are used at the expense of religion and countries that are not as progressive, as means of xenophobia and racism (El-Tayeb, 2012). Additionally, the different manifestations of homonormativity— self-expression, associations, etc. and its consequences, constitute a knowledge gap.

This research will therefore look at different manifestations of homonormativity. More specifically, this research will investigate the different ways in which homonormativity is (re)produced, and this will be explored through the lived experiences of LGBTQ+-identifying persons. This gives insights into what homonormativity is influenced by and how it leads to different manifestations of homonormativity. Thus, this research will answer the following research question:

***How is homonormativity (re)produced within the lived experiences of LGBTQ+-identifying individuals in the Netherlands?***

This research provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between heteronormativity and homonormativity, their underlying relationship and causes— how heteronormativity manifests itself in homonormativity, and how homonormativity manifests itself in LGBTQ+ individuals' daily lives. With that understanding, it helps foster genuine inclusivity and acceptance within and outside the LGBTQ+ community— to dismantle the threshold of acceptable homosexuality and to challenge homonormativity.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This research uses queer theory as the theoretical framework in which it dismantles and challenges the traditional assumptions of sexuality, especially concerning the dynamics between heteronormativity and homonormativity. Therefore, the following chapter reviews the relevant theories and concepts; heteronormativity, homonormativity, and lastly, implications of homonormativity— recognition and (self) regulation.

### ***2.1 Heteronormativity***

Jagose (1996) and Sullivan (2003), argue that sexuality is a result of power, in which heterosexuality is produced within the institutions in place, as the truth. Heteronormativity derived from the theoretical tradition of heterosexuality is defined in many ways. In Marchia and Sommer's (2019) research paper, they attempted to (re)define what heteronormativity is and posit that heteronormativity has four different prefixes corresponding to each theoretical trend; heterosexist-, gendered-, hegemonic- and cisnormative-heteronormativity.

Heterosexist-heteronormativity refers to how non-heterosexuality is seen as deviant, undesirable or unnatural, in which prejudice against non-heterosexuality exists. Gendered-heteronormativity, also known as patriarchal gendered norms, is defined as the heterosexuality privilege as a consequence of the socialisation between men and women, in which these genders have expected roles. Hegemonic-heteronormativity is also understood as hegemonic masculinity or idealised femininity. In this definition of heteronormativity, the persistence of heterosexual sexuality is related to the constructions of desire. In this way, heterosexuality relates to the presumptive gendered and sexual idealisation of femininity or masculinity. Lastly, cisnormative-heteronormativity refers to the relationship between cisgendered and heterosexual privilege originating from patriarchal foundations. In comparison to heterosexist-heteronormativity, this definition includes gender deviance (Marchia & Sommer, 2019).

There are many contesting views on how heteronormativity should be analysed– if gender and sexuality together or separately should constitute what heteronormativity is (Butler, 2011; Foucault, 1990; Warner, 1993). An overarching concept between all definitions is power (Marchia & Sommer, 2019). Therefore, this paper uses an intersectional perspective (power) in analysing heteronormativity. In defining heteronormativity, power is used to describe systematic oppression such as sexuality, race, gender or class (Marchia & Sommer, 2019). This paper, therefore, defines heteronormativity as “the set of norms that makes heterosexuality seem natural or right and that organise homosexuality as its binary opposite” (Valocchi, 2005, p.756), in which the organisation of homosexuality proliferates axes of oppression.

In the context of the Netherlands, the institutions on which they are founded are heteronormative (BeingMe, 2018; Krebbekx, 2018; Lisdonk et al., 2017). Even though the Netherlands is considered a forerunner for the liberation of the LGBTQ+ communities, its foundation lies in traditional gender and sexuality norms (Buijs et al., 2011). Among others, Krebbekx’s (2018) study on heteronormativity in education notes that some teachers enact masculinity to cross generational boundaries with their male students and to build rapport. By asking students about their relationships with their girlfriends and noting that they are players, teachers proliferate hegemonic heteronormativity that unites boys against their female counterparts (Krebbekx, 2018). Moreover, Krebbekx (2018), noted that some teachers would

confine students to their gender exemplified by phrases such as, “she invests more time in her appearance than in her work”.

BeingMe’s (2018) country report on the Dutch care sector discusses how heteronormativity in the Dutch care sector causes homonormativity to be manifested. It was found that the care sector is built on strong heteronormative standards, in that older LGBTQ+ people who need care are invisible. It was noted that among managers of care centres, many of them indicated that no older LGBTQ+ persons were present in their centres. The lack of discussion about LGBTQ+ in the care sector comes with the primary idea that these populations ‘do not exist’ (Leyerzapf et al., 2017). Additionally, within the care sector, sexual diversity is not a priority as other issues– monetary, staff and time– are more important. As sexual diversity is usually not taken into consideration, heteronormative standards and language are usually used, exemplified with standard forms and tick boxes<sup>1</sup> (BeingMe, 2018). With the lack of sexual diversity in standard procedures and the lack of visibility by the Dutch care sector, older LGBTQ+ members in society are not able to express their identities and feelings. The result of this is a smaller social network and experiences of bullying, discrimination and violence (BeingMe, 2018). As the systems in power are not challenging their own heteronormativity, and indirectly oppressing those who identify as LGBTQ+, it proliferates the change of behaviour of some homosexuals to hetero-gender and -sexuality norms (BeingMe, 2018). Robinson (2012) describes this change of homo-gender and -sexuality norms to hetero as assimilation. Homonormativity can be manifested through this way of sustained heterosexuality.

## *2.2 Homonormativity*

Homonormativity, an extension of heteronormativity, is defined by Duggan (2003) who coined the term as, “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of the demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 179). In this way, a mainstream gay discourse is established and instead of dismantling heteronormativity, homonormativity seeks to expand the discourse by conforming to the heteronormative narrative for a person of LGBTQ+ that has legitimacy and rights– only along the lines established by heteronormativity– such as monogamy, gender, marriage,

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<sup>1</sup> Standard forms and tick boxes do not include different genders. Only binary options of gender are present.

procreation and economic development (El-Tayeb, 2012; Gerhard, 2010; Robinson, 2012). Homonormativity does not challenge the exclusion of those who will not and cannot conform to the rules established by heteronormative institutions. Moreover, homonormativity can be produced through internalised heteronormativity by LGBTQ+ persons. More than that, homonormativity can also be seen as an imposed heteronormative way of life by heteronormative environments on non-hetero persons. In the case of the Netherlands, the Dutch phrase, *Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg*– ‘act normal, as that is crazy enough’, summarises the proliferation of homonormativity by Dutch society (Robinson, 2012).

Moreover, the Dutch government concerning the broader political landscape uses their society’s facade of acceptance (in reality as a result of homonormativity) as a form of sexual exceptionalism (Gerhards, 2010). This ‘(social) acceptance’ of homosexuality describes the progressiveness of the Netherlands as a mark of embracing modernity. Despite the social acceptance and status of progressiveness the Netherlands have for LGBTQ+ rights, it is the white middle-class, males or those considered ‘good’ gays that constitute the parameters of homonormativity. Consequently, this acceptance has been framed discursively at the expense of other religions and groups of people– especially Muslims and Arabs– deeming them as backward and traditional (Buijs, Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011; Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011; Robinson, 2012). This highlights how Dutch society does not challenge the heteronormative narrative or rectify the underlying causes of homonormativity; but instead marginalises people based on their traits– race, ethnicity, self-expression, mannerisms, etc.

With this marginalisation, many LGBTQ+ persons prefer to keep their expression of (homo)sexuality private, to be invisible, in order to better integrate into the heteronormative society. Halperin (2012), writes that gay politics has moved from the resistance of heterosexual oppression towards assimilation in which social acceptance and integration are the driving factors. This assimilation gives protection to homonormative LGBTQ+ members. However, this assimilation needs to be within the aforementioned parameters. Robinson (2012) noted that the feeling of fear and shame is prevalent in the experiences of LGBTQ+ persons in the Netherlands, and exists in forms of self-expression. Homonormative discourses show that it was bad to be standing out in comparison to fellow LGBTQ+ persons (Robinson, 2012). Therefore, many LGBTQ+ persons would dress as ‘normally’ as possible and prefer not to outwardly support the expression of fellow LGBTQ+ persons. One of his interviewees stated that discrimination is



persistent against masculine lesbians; many feminine lesbians and heterosexual counterparts degrade these masculine lesbians with terms such as “butch *manwijf* (man-bitch)” (Robinson, 2012), questioning why they have to dress like a man. Clothing as a medium of self-expression is met with fear and therefore influences some LGBTQ+ persons to *doe maar gewoon*, and assimilate into homonormativity.

### 2.3 Recognition and (Self) Regulation

In her texts, Butler (2004) argues that recognition is a requisite for one to be socially viable. Within this process of subject formation, societal norms decide whose lives are deemed ‘livable’ or ‘unlivable’. Butler (2004) writes, “The norms govern intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and actions to become recognisable, as such imposing a grid of eligibility on the social and defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social” (p. 42). With the norms dictating the livability of these subjects, acts of recognition will be continuously produced. People in the LGBTQ+ community internalise the hetero norm and formulate their subject in accordance, becoming self-regulating subjects (Robinson, 2012; Valocchi, 2005). What defines a ‘human’ in their society is the norms within that society, and with that, it also decides what practices and experiences are recognised and what practices are regulated (Butler, 2004; McQueen, 2014; Robinson, 2012). In the Netherlands, this comes in the forms of repressing self-expression; in mediums of clothing, and in public displays of affection (Robinson, 2012).

Regulation influenced by the need to be recognised shapes and produces the subject, however, also produces subjects outside of the norm (Butler, 2004). Butler (2004), emphasises that only through the existing norms in society, can individuals know the self– as a gender and sexual being (Butler, 2004). Those seeking to change their ‘self’, specifically, the norms that make them unlivable– allow for their political demands to be recognised (Butler, 2004). In the context of the Dutch LGBTQ+ community, individuals only become recognised if they assimilate in homonormative ways into heteronormative institutions (Robinson, 2012), evident especially in the older LGBTQ+ population in the Dutch care sector (BeingMe, 2018). Even though norms are essential in living (Butler, 2004), they must be transformed since it comes with subjects being subjugated as unlivable. On the macrolevel, recognition comes with power,

defining who is recognised and what is (self) regulated, which in turn calls for the transformation of repressive norms.

### **3. Methodology**

The research question of this study is: *How is homonormativity (re)produced within the lived experiences of LGBTQ+-identifying individuals in the Netherlands?* The goal of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the homonormativity phenomenon and how it is (re)produced. A qualitative method approach to data collection and analysis has been chosen to answer this research question. This research uses semi-structured in-depth interviews since it allows for the exploration of the multiple realities and lived experiences of homonormativity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following subsections provide an elaboration on this strategy and the methods used in this study. The following subsections of C3 discuss the overall strategy, operationalisation, data collection, reliability and validity of the strategy chosen, data analysis and finally the privacy and ethical considerations of this research.

#### **3.1 Overall Strategy**

This research uses only qualitative methods in the collection and analysis of data. The qualitative data were obtained from 10 semi-structured, in-depth interviews that were recorded, conducted either online or in person. Some of the interview questions are taken from existing research to first understand homonormativity and heteronormativity in the case of LGBTQ-identifying individuals in the Netherlands (Robinson, 2012). Additionally, the rest of the interview questions focused on how homonormativity is (re)produced in these individuals, through the inquiry of their daily lives, and within that their experiences of homosexuality and the broader environment that they are in. Some interviewees gave their opinions and perceptions on the issue of heteronormativity and its extension, homonormativity. It is imperative to note that these opinions and perceptions are formed through their lived experiences and are also of saliency to the research.

#### **3.2 Operationalisation**

The qualitative approach through semi-structured in-depth interviews was chosen to get a deeper understanding of how homonormativity is (re)produced. As this research on homonormativity

focuses on the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ persons, interviews were chosen to get a more specific and intimate setting in which interviewees can express in-depth their experiences– which constitutes also their perceptions and opinions. For that reason, 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted, each of them ranging from 45 minutes to an hour, inspired by Robinson's (2012) topic list, in his research on the dynamics between assimilation and homonormativity. Additionally, questions regarding the individual's lived experiences were also added (see topic list). Semi-structured interviews allow for open-ended questions and answers, along with being able to probe further into a topic of interest or when something is unclear (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews not only allowed interviewees to elaborate on their experiences, but also the understanding of the underlying dynamics between heteronormativity and homonormativity, and the impacts it had on the interviewees.

### *3.3 Qualitative Sampling*

The sampling used in this research was based on referral sampling, more specifically using the snowball sampling method, in which the first few interviewees were chosen through my network and contacts. As the interviewees were selected through my direct network, it was likely that certain biases were present, which endangers the reliability of this research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To counteract that, I acknowledge the biases of my interviewees and also stayed impartial to the connection I have with the interviewees throughout the interview. Additionally, all interviewees were told about the criteria of this research. When passing the message, respondents were told that only those who identify as LGBTQ+ and live in the Netherlands could participate. In that, participants were not selected based on their gender, race or nationality, etc. but chosen solely based on their identification as LGBTQ+ and their place of residence (the Netherlands).

### *3.4 Qualitative Reliability and Validity*

As this research is explorative, it seeks to provide rich information on homonormativity. Moreover, it seeks to also provide the context in which homonormativity is studied, the Netherlands– its population, culture and infrastructures. To ensure the reliability of the data, intercoder reliability stands to be an important factor. Intercoder reliability refers to an agreement between different researchers concerning the codes and content used, along with the guidelines that are followed when performing the analysis and coding of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

However, as this research was done alone, the lack of unity for this study causes an issue in the reliability of data. To overcome this reliability issue, documentation of all the specific steps taken in this research was noted.

Another reliability issue that arises is the replicability of this research. As this research focuses on individual lived experiences, the results of different individuals will not give the same result as this study. Though the replicability of the results is not easily feasible, this exploratory research helps provide more information about homonormativity, rather than explain this phenomenon.

External validity poses an issue in this research as the generalisability of this research is limited. This is due to the personal lived experiences of LGBTQ+-identifying individuals. Every individual may experience something different; individuals may also interpret and express their experiences differently. Hence, a bigger sample size could help in the generalisability of the result.

### *3.5 Qualitative Analysis*

The interviews were conducted both in person and online via Google Meets. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. With the transcripts, the interviews were analysed and coded using Atlas.ti. Inductive coding was used during the coding process– taking note of all relevant and new information that was said during the interview. Firstly, line-by-line coding was used to code all sentences. Secondly, these codes were grouped into different categories. Thirdly, these categories and the codes that did not fit into any category were put into different themes and sub-themes. Inductive coding allows for the presentation of new and relevant ideas from the interviewees. Finally, a codebook and a codetree will be created. The codebook serves as a way to communicate research data, my interpretations and coding decisions.

### *3.6 Positionality & Research Ethics*

As a researcher that identifies as gay/queer and constitutes some parts of the LGBTQ+ community, this research may pose issues of biases. Interviewees will be those that identify as LGBTQ+, however, with this there is a certain unspoken connection between the interviewees and I, being part of the same community. Additionally, confirmation bias that comes from my personal lived experiences may influence the coding decision and what I deem important or less

important. With the lack of intercoder reliability, it is imperative that the research be read through by the interviewees, and a codebook is available for others to see my coding decision. Moreover, to overcome confirmation bias, this research tries to separate observations and interpretations.

As the topic of research considers sexuality, gender and the lived experiences of individuals, ethical considerations are highly taken note of. Firstly, all respondents are above the age of 18, and to ensure informed consent, a consent form had to be signed by all participants (see consent form). All participants were also informed that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed. Additionally, all participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any time, as they wished, and not answer any question as they saw fit. This is to ensure that no lines were crossed as the research deals with sensitive experiences and personal subjects. Moreover, when transcribing and using quotations, pseudonyms were used instead of their real names, to ensure privacy. Furthermore, the information was protected on a password-protected file on OneDrive, while following the GDPR regulations throughout the whole process. Lastly, the transcripts and research paper were shared with the interviewees before publishing, so that any further inquiries and privacy concerns could be dealt with.

## **4. Findings**

### *4.1 Reflection on the research process*

Before discussing the findings, I will reflect on the research process, specifically the gathering of data and the interviews. Ten participants were interviewed, five cis male, two non-binary individuals and three cis female, moreover, three identified as bi/pansexual, three bisexual, one pansexual, one gay, and two queer. It is important to note the participants come from various backgrounds, five of which are Dutch and five of which are international— living in the Netherlands from 1 to 6 years. The cultural upbringing of participants, especially those who were international will affect their lived experiences and perception on the issue of homonormativity due to their multicultural environment and experiences. This research focused on the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ identifying individuals, and the interviews created space for the interviewees to share personal and lived experiences that were extremely meaningful and pertinent to the issues of reproducing homonormativity.

## 4.2 Institutions and Corporations

Homonormativity coined by Duggan (2003) can be understood as the expansion of heteronormative gay discourse. The gay discourse in this sense is no longer within the LGBTQ+ persons but established by those outside of the LGBTQ+, and since it is established by those outside the LGBTQ+, this discourse does not challenge heteronormativity but instead sustains it. One way in which this happens is through institutions, including those that are assumed to cater towards the LGBTQ+ community– such as the COC. Though the COC is an organisation that focuses its advocacy and work on the promotion of homosexual interests– decriminalisation of gender identity and sexual orientation for social acceptance, equal rights and emancipation– in reality, its advocacy is not holistic. Keith points this out by saying: “COC organises their events [and] they're obviously focused on gay men, basically, in their lobby as well. And much less, for example, focused on trans people.” When asked about their affiliation with institutions, all interviewees– varying in sexual identities– deem them as impersonal, with little to no affiliation. Most participants indicated that they had no connection to the institutions in place for LGBTQ+ in the Netherlands as the work they do for them does not do more than constitutionally protect LGBTQ+ persons, similar to Hekma and Duyvendak's (2011) finding. Additionally, even though there are laws put in place to protect LGBTQ+, interviewees have experienced how these laws can be worked around.

*“Institutions, of course, have rules that you shouldn't bully someone or you're not allowed to say, ‘Oh, you can't have a job here because you're gay’, But I feel like that's bureaucracy, and bureaucracy always comes down to the person that's hiring higher up, [they] get to say what they want, and they can obfuscate it for the rest of this system for a different reason. And so you basically don't get hired because you're queer. But they say, ‘Yeah, you just didn't [get] it.’” [Ben]*

Homonormativity in Dutch institutions is the expansion of the mainstream gay discourse built upon the heteronormative Dutch narrative (Gerhard, 2010; Robinson, 2012). The Dutch institution reproduces homonormativity by setting parameters taken from heteronormative ideals in which an LGBTQ+ individual can exist. The interviewees through their experience of the organisation of homosexuality describe the parameters as ‘normal gay white men’. Some

interviewees explain through the lens of power, similar to Marchia and Sommer's (2019) paper, that power in heteronormative society lies in white straight men, and for homonormativity, the power is instead given to white gay men. Daniel exemplifies this by saying: "At my school a lot of students have been complaining that teachers that are getting fired, for example, are more of the diversity hires." Explained by some interviewees that heteronormativity influences homonormativity and is manifested in how power lies with white gay men as the only difference between their hetero counterparts and them is their sexuality. In comparison to those who are intersectionality at a disadvantage even in the heteronormative society, explained also by El-Tayeb's (2012) paper on queer Muslims and Robinson's (2012) finding on trans individuals' double sense of marginalisation. Sam summarises this by saying:

*"About intersectionality, a lot of these white gay men, they're able to use this as a wildcard because the only thing that is different from the traits of a white straight man is that they're gay. For people of colour who are gay, they have two different things that they have to deal with, race and sexuality and gender."* [Sam]

Similarly to Butler's (2004) idea of social viability, some interviewees feel that in this context they have to suppress their self-expression to be as similar to their hetero counterparts to be safe and socially viable. One of the interviewees mentioned that the way Dutch institutions and corporations advocate for LGBTQ+ influences the mindset of what is deemed accepted homosexuality. This will seep into the mindset of Dutch society on what homosexuality should be. As aforementioned, the acceptable gays should be those that are 'normal' and similar to straight white men, similar to Robinson's (2012) finding that it was bad to stand out of these parameters. Some interviewees also mentioned that the way institutions facilitate subjects pertinent to LGBTQ+ affects the way the Dutch general population thinks and the experiences they have from dialogues with Dutch people. Sam summarised this by saying:

*"We're seen as low, attention seeking and whiny because we have it so well here. Why should we complain? We were the first country to legalise marriage, what else is there we can do, we're protected by the law."*

*“I also feel like those companies and what they do for straight people, it shows what queers think. They don't get the narrative.” [Sam]*

Most interviewees agreed that the institutions in place, do facilitate more acceptance and freedom for LGBTQ+ individuals, such as being the first country to legalise gay marriage or fair hiring practices. However, in reality, the constitution does not facilitate the protection of the daily microaggressions and discrimination that the interviewees face as it is used as sexual exceptionalism. Similar to Hekma and Duyvendak's (2011) finding that acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands applies to laws rather than real life, all interviewees still experience microaggression and prevarication of these laws frequently, which questions the extent to which these laws work. Alex summarised this idea by saying that:

*“Laws are just one way in which the state can make me, can support me, but it's not all the ways. I would argue not even necessarily the most important one per se because how many times do I actually have contact with the law? Like if someone hatecrimes me on the street I'm not going to take the time to to call up the law. The Netherlands also has a way of portraying itself as a very progressive country and not really being (...) if I ask some of my queer friends here how they feel about being queer, the answer is not this is an oasis or this is a paradise the answer is often 'it's fucked' and it's really difficult there.” [Alex]*

All interviews also agreed that LGBTQ+ is being commodified by some institutions and corporations. Similarly to Duggan's (2003) definition of homonormativity, the advocacy by institutions does not challenge their own heteronormative norms but focuses on how to fit LGBTQ+ into the heteronormative narrative. This in turn propagates homonormativity as LGBTQ+ is seen as an extension of heteronormativity. This homonormativity manifests as the privatisation and promotion of gay culture through mainstream consumption such as Pride month. It gives the LGBTQ+ individuals this illusion that they are integrated and accepted by the Dutch population and institutions, and therefore should not complain and challenge the institutions as they are seen as equals. However, in reality, it confines the LGBTQ+ to the parameters set by the institutions in which they are allowed to exist, exemplified by some



interviewees' experiences of Pride month, the month in which LGBTQ+ are allowed to exist in all shapes and forms. Max summarises this idea by saying:

*“Their whole marketing is based almost off like the Pride Month, and they all seem to have to be willing to help out this community. But then when pride month is over, you never see anything else, or like you never see it again. So it just feels like they're trying to make money off this pride month and off the fact that people are struggling a lot with this whole subject.”* [Max]

Apart from this month, the deviance from the parameters should be invisible– not to stand out or be weird, but to be normal. Many interviewees felt that the institutions and especially the corporations that exist in the Netherlands are performative and show false alliances.

*“Oh, we really support the gay community and stuff. And it's like, they're the same, that energy is not shown throughout the year. And then there will be like how Erasmus has this zebra path or the university that I go to they have like a rainbow flag (...) but there's still a lot of discrimination.”* [Dani]

#### *4.3 Dutch environments*

Influenced by Dutch institutions and corporations, homonormativity is embedded in people within the Dutch environment and manifests itself as tolerance and language. The saying, *“Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg”* (be normal as that is already crazy enough), was brought up several times by Dutch interviewees and with participants that were not fluent in Dutch, nine of the interviewees encountered this saying one way or another. This saying conveys the mindset of people within the Dutch environment, and the interviewees have encountered this saying regarding their self-expression. Homonormativity and its parameters are reinforced by this saying, where the interviewees are taught to conform to the parameters of what homosexuality can and should be. As experienced by the interviewees, any person who wants to be socially viable or avoid discrimination has to blend in with the concurrent heteronormative

Dutch narrative. This implicitly exhibits the behaviour of tolerance instead of acceptance as they are allowed to be LGBTQ+ however, they have to fit into the parameters for LGBTQ+.

*“I think there are a lot of ways in which it is not as progressive as people will think. And (...) one of the main differences or things I felt was that people tend to tolerate LGBTQ people in their surroundings, but they still don't see it as something normal.”*

*“This idea of tolerance, that tolerance is so widespread and combination of that with but as long as they don't act up as long as they are doing it at home. Basically, I think that's the dominant narrative.” [Keith]*

As Halperin (2012) writes, the gay constituency has moved from resisting heterosexual oppression to assimilation, and how assimilation should happen according to the interviewees is to be normal. This proliferates homonormativity as challenging heteronorms are impeded, while the expansion of heteronormative gay discourse proliferates. To be normal is to sustain the heteronorms and to reproduce homonormativity. Through the interview, it was found that alterations of the participants usually lie only in their self-expression, as it is what this self-expression is associated with that matters. All participants mentioned the ingrained normality of traditional heteronorms impeding their self-expression, either in behaviour, mannerisms or both. Elise experiences this herself, saying: “Sometimes I feel like I maybe have to hide a little bit, my sexuality and act in a way that is conforming to cultural and societal norms. If I'm walking around Rotterdam, I'll think about [my sexuality and mannerisms] more.” Moreover, all participants agreed that the Dutch saying, “*Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je als gek genoeg*”, was pertinent to the alterations of self-expression.

*“I think, to be more accepted, or to feel less of a target of discrimination, I feel like there's a lot of pressure (...) to just kind of look like a regular person, I think those are the conditions to be accepted and to be treated like a person, like a regular person. And I think as soon as people start, more conservative people start seeing that you look different, or that you act differently, you already automatically get treated differently.”*

[Dani]

In this way, LGBTQ+ identities have to be muddled down if not they would be called out. This is also evident in the use of “homo” as a profanity in the Dutch language towards anyone who acts outside of the hetero norm. All Dutch participants have experienced the use of queer or homo (gay) as an insult in the Dutch language. Dani experiences this a lot: “I’ve encountered a lot, especially straight Dutch men who use homophobic slurs on the regular, saying, ‘Oh, that’s homo’. But they’re like, ‘It’s fine. The gays can do whatever they want.’” Well, you’re still using it in your language.” Even though it is mentioned by a few interviewees that they know the use of homo by their straight friends is not meant as derogatory, this word is ingrained in the way Dutch people speak. Interviewees mentioned that their straight friends do not think much about how using homo is derogatory and that it is used more as a normalised cursed word that can be used in any situation.

*“Some of my guy friends from high school might still use homo in Dutch as a curse word. And they don’t even mean like, they don’t even mean that they find it a negative thing that you are gay, but they just are so used to being used as a curse word.” [Max]*

Homosexuality has a negative connotation in the Dutch language, and some interviewees suppress their self-expression; as argued by Aggarwal (2010) and Halperin (2012), it makes it harder for them to challenge the hetero norm, and it is better to assimilate to the Dutch mindset rather than fight against it, reproducing homonormativity. Therefore, with this mindset, the Dutch population, based on just its language perpetuates the difficulty in challenging the hetero norm which in turn causes LGBTQ+ to reproduce homonormativity, in which it is safer for them to sustain the hetero norms in the promise of demobilised and depoliticised gay constituencies (Aggarwal, 2010).

#### *4.4 LGBTQ+ environments*

When asked to describe LGBTQ+ environments, most interviewees mentioned that LGBTQ+ environments are safe and accepting; a haven for intrapersonal spaces of sharing. However, within these safe havens, a central finding provided by the interviewees was feeling out of place due to the misunderstanding of gender and sexuality by the LGBTQ+. Though expected by the participants to be a safe haven, these so-called ‘safe havens’ come with unspoken codes of

conduct such as being “too straight”, in which microaggressions and discrimination happen. Both Dani and Ben experience this themselves as bi/pansexual individuals. Dani says: “I think there's also a lot of misgendering even in the queer community and there's (...) And also just not acknowledged, or not thinking that being bisexual is real.” Similarly, Ben experiences this as well: “So it basically becomes the opposite, where they're like, ‘Oh, yeah, but you're too straight.’ Which is extremely odd or hypocritical.”

Within LGBTQ+ environments, homonormativity is not always reproduced but is also questioned. Some interviewees, specifically those who identify as bi/pansexuals experience conflicts about their sexuality. There are different categories of homosexuality, those who are part of the accepted homosexuals and those who try to challenge heteronormativity, thereby not sustaining homonormativity. Within the latter group, bi/pansexual individuals mentioned that their self-expression is similar to their hetero counterparts, in that they are straight-passing. Bi/pansexual individuals mentioned that the expectation of bad gays is challenging the hetero norm. Therefore, as these bi/pansexual individuals' self-expression is similar to their hetero counterparts, it associates them with good gays (not by choice). And with that, their self-expression is seen as a sign of reproducing homonormativity instead of fighting against homonormativity. This presents itself in microaggression where their self-expression is judged and questioned due to not being as extreme as those who are part of this group. Homonormativity does not only outcast people to ‘good’ or ‘bad’ gays but creates different perspectives and prejudice about how homosexuality should be. This is exemplified by Elise when asked about bisexuality in LGBTQ+ environments: “I had that a few times [where] people were double checking if I was actually bisexual. [As] I said before, because I'm pretty straight passing. They're like, ‘okay, you just look like a straight woman who wants to be cool.’”

Bi/pansexual individuals also mentioned the pressure to associate themselves with different socially viable groups of people. These groups of people are distinguished as heterosexually socially viable or homosexually socially viable. All bi/pansexual individuals experience dialogues and conversations with people that question their sexuality, in that they have to choose either to be part of the heterosexuals or to be part of the homosexuals. Homonormativity manifests itself here as the expansion of the mainstream gay discourse, in that being bi-pansexual is seen as an in-between and should not exist in affiliation with the heteronormative narrative and the homonormative discourse (Dungan, 2003). Bi/pansexual

interviewees face a constant stereotype by the LGBTQ+ environments that they are unsure of their sexuality, in that they have to choose a gender that they prefer more. Most interviewees feel like they are unable to just be, without the need or pressure to choose a preferred gender.

*“I think a lot of people on both sides of the spectrum, whether they're gay, or and I think this is similar for pansexual people, if whether they're gay or straight, they think we're just confused about which side of the spectrum that we're on, rather than actually just accepting the fact that we don't look at what you got, when you look at your willy or your imagined.” [Angela]*

Contrary to Dutch society, to be socially viable, LGBTQ+ persons are expected to be normal as aforementioned. However, within LGBTQ+ environments experienced by the interviewees, the expectations are the opposite. It is expected by the LGBTQ+ environment to express oneself in a way that challenges the heteronormative way of self-expression. However, for some interviewees, the expectation of challenging heteronormativity through self-expression comes at the cost of confusion about one's individuality. Some interviewees experience this as imposed normality by LGBTQ+ environments to be different even though they are just being themselves, which already is different. Therefore, some interviewees feel out of place, to question one's level of homonormativity, both within Dutch environments and LGBTQ+ environments.

*“ (...) then I go to a queer space. And I'm like, I don't want people to think I'm a straight person infiltrating their queer space and taking away from the safety and not acknowledging the fact that just because I want to dress the way I dress does not mean that I'm not queer.” [Dani]*

*“I feel sometimes that I need to look different or be different, like, do a different sport like the straight people do it. Do sports that gay people do. The LGBTQ plus people wear different clothing. Excellent. Because like, that's how you get accepted by them (...) my feelings sometimes. Do drugs to be part of the LGBTQ community.” [Adam]*

*“I’ve also had experiences where they will question my level of non heteronormativity, because I’m not as extreme. But I mean, I’m still figuring it all out. I’m still trying to find myself, I’m still trying to play with my gender identity.” [Angela]*

With the imposed normality, some participants also mentioned that the microaggression of social viability in the LGBTQ+ contrasts with the social viability in the Dutch environment. In Dutch environments as aforementioned, social viability comes with being straight-passing. On the contrary, being straight-passing is discriminated against in LGBTQ+ environments, leading to barriers of entry, whereby individuals who are straight-passing not by choice but because of personal identity are misconstrued as being homonormative.

*“So for me, I think in my expression, in terms of the way I dress, and stuff like that, I tend to not really look to stand out the most. Because I feel more comfortable in that. And I think this is also like a symptom or a result of those norms. Which I don't necessarily see as a bad thing.” [Keith]*

*“There are requirements that you have to do before you can get into the environment to feel safe (...) the requirements are having to maybe experiment, do a little bit of drugs and go to a different alternative party and things like that. Making art for example, be artsy.” [Adam]*

#### **4.4.1 Power/Organisation of homosexuality**

One major finding indicated by most interviewees was the use of power in the organisation of homosexuality within LGBTQ+ environments. Within the organisation of homosexuality, the binary division of sexuality is apparent, influenced by Dutch environments that homosexuality is gay or straight.

*“Although I will admit that even though it has this perception of being such an open country, that there are still people that just see it as either straight or gay, they don't see all of the stuff that exists within the spectrum.” [Angela]*

Moreover, this binary division of homosexuality gives power to those who are at the top of the gay hierarchy– usually white gay cis gendered men. Likewise to the advocacy by corporations and Dutch institutions, gay white men are put at the top of the hierarchy in their advocacy as with the parameters set.

*“For gay men. I think that's like the leading part of the– not necessarily that they're the backbone– but that's kind of where most of the focus is. Especially from straight people. (...) They are so normalised.”* [Daniel]

Therefore there is a distinction between good gays– normal white gay men– and bad gays– those who do not fit within the parameters. Most interviewees see that in the Dutch environment, white gay men are the leading part of the LGBTQ+ narrative and in that, they gain power through being socially viable in Dutch environments (Butler, 2004). With that, the hierarchy of homosexuality causes what Dani calls rivalry between gays, in that there is animosity between those who fit into the category of good gays and those who do not.

*“I think there's also a lot of tension. I feel like there's almost like a genre of like gay men, not necessarily only white gay men, but gay men who are very flamboyant and extravagant. And it's those people I feel that are kind of policing the community. Even going to bars, when you see men like that, it almost feels like you're at a straight bar. Because it's still dominated by men. And I think they still do feel superiority. And I think with women, especially with trans people, I think there's almost like a hierarchy [where] they're on the lower spectrum, and the gay men are still on the top. There's also a bit of rivalry between gay men and lesbian women. And I think there's almost quite a lot of animosity.”* [Dani]

This animosity feeds into the reproduction of homonormativity; in the eyes of the good gays, all other LGBTQ+ identities are considered too weird and abnormal, and they should work towards being part of the parameters. This hierarchy of gayness (distinguished by the Dutch mindset to be normal and the Dutch institutions' advocacy) perpetuates differences in LGBTQ+

identities and causes an unspoken tension between accepted homosexuals that advocate for assimilation towards accepted homosexuality and those who seek to challenge homonormativity.

*“I think there's like two parallel communities, almost, that one is more conforming to society, and the other one is more rebelling against those norms. And I think that's a perfect display of how society accepts one form of being LGBTQ more than another. Because it's more normal.”*

*“Organisations like the COC (...) are definitely being led by men and [focused] more on (...) Well, the normative queer expressions, just like cis gay men.”*

*“And I think there's some conservative voices within that institutionalised community that are saying, 'Oh, this is about gay people, more than it is about genderqueer people.”*

[Keith]

Butler (2004), mentions that those seeking to dismantle the norms will cause their lives to be deemed unlivable, through the interviews, the power given by Dutch institutions makes it harder for those who want to challenge homonormativity to succeed as LGBTQ+, in reality, is tolerated and not accepted.

#### *4.5 Journey of the self*

The theme journey of the self explores how the identities of the interviewees are shaped through their lived experiences. All interviewees went through a transition best understood as ‘self-actualisation’, mentioned by *Angela* with reference to the hierarchy of needs:

*“It just makes you feel kind of connected to other people. And I think that's a big part of being humans. It's what makes us feel alive. In a certain sense. It's part of our hierarchy of needs, thank you psychology. But it is its needs, we need self actualization, we need to feel like we're part of a group”* [Angela]

For all interviewees, homonormativity plays a part in the journey of the self, though in different ways, homonormativity was salient in the forming of the interviewees’ identity. Firstly, homonormativity manifests itself through social viability in self-safety and -protection. Some



interviewees learnt to change their behaviour in different settings. In settings outside of LGBTQ+ environments, these interviewees tweaked their self-expression to be normal, in order to mitigate discrimination and to be socially tolerated by the Dutch environment, and socially represented by Dutch institutions and corporations. In this way, these interviewees reproduce the homonormativity and the idea of what LGBTQ+ individuals should be, established by Dutch institutions and environments. They reproduce homonormativity by masking their identity and changing their self-expression to be closely similar to either what their hetero counterparts are or what is tolerated by their hetero counterparts (Butler, 2004; McQueen, 2014; Robinson, 2012). Therefore, for safety and protection, they do not try to contest the heteronormative assumptions by being normal and privatising their identities, similar to Butler's (2004) text on regulation and recognition. Several interviewees expressed their learning of self-safety and -protection:

*“Conforming to these [norms] is just learnt safeness. In that, it's most safe [in Dutch environments], like experientially. And in LGBTQ [environments] it is more safe emotionally.”* [Adam]

*“I think it's also because I've learned for myself a form of self protection, to act, walk, and look– even the way I pull my face or look out of my eyes– in certain situations in which I don't want to be, I guess clocked as queer.”* [Daniel]

*“And I think that for many people, it's difficult to keep up with this, it's difficult to have the resilience and so at the end there you kind of conform to it you have assimilated towards the norm.”* [Alex]

On the other hand, homonormativity plays a part in the forming of identity through self-security for some interviewees. These interviewees mentioned that before arriving at the point in which they deviate from homonormativity, they reproduced homonormativity in their self-expression. However, for them, it did not feel right to express something that is not who they are. Even though they still see, experience and feel the pressure to change their self-expression in Dutch environments, they have overcome these pressures, in that they have self-security in

self-expression. For them, self-security is needed to challenge homonormativity, to defy the ingrained idea to be normal, even when it comes to discrimination or microaggression:

*“I mean, personally, I don't really give a shit what people think about me. I arrive at the time of my life and then I'm like, whatever.”* [Elise]

*“Question of course is ‘Do you conform, conform to that pressure? Or don't you’. And even if you do or don't I feel like the pressure is always going to be there. And usually I choose not to adhere.”* [Ben]

*“I was always just dressing in very stereotypical clothing for being a male. And at a certain point, I really liked letting loose of this idea that I should dress a certain way. And then I just really found my own style.”* [Max]

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this qualitative study has answered the research question: *How is homonormativity (re)produced within the lived experiences of LGBTQ+-identifying individuals in the Netherlands?* Throughout this research, the dynamics between heteronormativity and homonormativity were studied. The findings presented that LGBTQ+ persons perceive Dutch society as heteronormative, and its institutions and society do not challenge this heteronormativity but instead sustain it through the development of homonormativity. Homonormativity is thus the extension of heteronormativity.

Though the constitutions in place protect LGBTQ+ persons in the Netherlands, the interviews highlighted the ineffectiveness of these laws. Additionally, homonormativity is (re)produced through an established parameter by the Dutch institutions. In the Netherlands, the laws and institutions in place target only a specific group of LGBTQ+ persons, usually those who are cis, white, gay and male (the parameters). These parameters define accepted homosexuality, in that those who are not within the parameters are nudged to confine themselves within these parameters– to be homonormative. This nudge comes both externally (from their environment) and internally (from LGBTQ+ persons themselves). The informants feel disconnected from institutional advocacy, deeming them impersonal since they do not relate to

either the established parameters or agree with them. Within the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ persons, homonormativity influenced by institutions and corporations is manifested as Pride month. The existence of LGBTQ+ spaces and Pride month itself is a show that the LGBTQ+ community is not fully integrated but instead tolerated. It is (re)produced by corporations through false alliances– constraining them to a specific time and place in which they can exist. This means that only during this time and space can they fully be themselves, and express themselves in whatever way they see fit. However, this conversely means that in all other times and spaces, LGBTQ+ persons have to lay low, blend in, and be invisible– sustaining heteronormativity by being homonormative.

What the Dutch government presents to Dutch society shows what the expectations of homosexuality are, and what is acceptable. Evident in the COC’s advocacy, which is usually for Dutch white, gay, cis, and male– the acceptable homosexuality is LGBTQ+ persons with those traits. Those who do not fit into those traits have to change their self-expression to fit the stereotypes of what those acceptable homosexuals do. This is what Dutch society then expects from LGBTQ+ persons. These expectations of homonormativity are embedded within Dutch society and its institution, evident in the Dutch saying, “*Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg*”. Moreover, this embedded homonormativity experienced by the informants is tolerance, not acceptance. LGBTQ+ persons are pressured to analyse their self-expression, to mitigate micro-aggression and/or discrimination, or to be socially viable. Experiences of micro-aggression and discrimination for being different are a sign that homosexuality in all its forms is still not socially genuinely accepted (Hekma and Duyvendak, 2011). The informants do not feel accepted to be themselves, as acceptance is the space to exist no matter the shape nor form; by being nudged to be normal (*doe maar gewoon*), informants feel that the view of Dutch society about LGBTQ+ is in reality tolerance.

Adding onto Robinson’s (2012) research on the assimilative effects of homonormativity, this research’s finding suggests that environments play a role in the phenomenon of homonormativity. Homonormativity in both aspects, sustaining heteronormativity and challenging homonormativity does not just exist but is instead imposed on individuals that exist inside and outside the binary division. Corresponding to Butler’s (2004) theory on social viability, in different environments, different norms dictate the livability of individuals. Due to LGBTQ+ individuals’ identity, they are inherently tied to the norms of homonormativity, in that,

each environment calls for a different way of living. There are many different facets of expectations, dependent on the environment LGBTQ+ individuals are in. As aforementioned, in the Dutch environment, LGBTQ+ persons feel pressured to be normal, to blend in with the ideal homosexual Dutch individual. To blend in, LGBTQ+ persons need to live up to the expectation of what constitutes this ideal. However, it is imperative to know that the expectation to blend in means having self-expression that are homonormative– clothing, mannerisms and speech. On the other hand, in LGBTQ+ environments, there are different expectations for LGBTQ+ persons. Within the LGBTQ+ environment itself, there are also different expectations depending on the LGBTQ+ environment one is in. The finding presented two different groups of LGBTQ+ environment– the ‘accepted gays’ and the ‘unaccepted gays’.

Within the ‘accepted gays’ environment, LGBTQ+ persons are expected to (re)produce homonormativity, in that they should act closely to what is expected by the Dutch society– to be normal and blend in. Interestingly, within the ‘unaccepted gay’ environment– created through outcasting subjects who do not assimilate to homonormativity – another cycle of social viability is created. Butler (2004) argues that norms produce subjects that are outside of the norm. Those subjects will then be deemed ‘unlivable’ as they do not follow the social guidelines on what defines a ‘human’. Within the ‘unaccepted gay’ environment, this outcasting occurs in the form of discrimination. Due to this environment’s norm or challenging homonormativity, the subjects who are outcasted are those who are discriminated against for being too homonormative or perceived as homonormative. The findings show that bi/pansexual informants within the ‘unaccepted gay’ environment experience discrimination and micro-aggression as their self-expression is deemed too homonormative– too aligned with the accepted homosexual way of dressing, mannerisms and talking. Therefore, adding to Butler's (2004) theory, the findings suggest that homonormativity within this environment creates another group of ‘unlivable’ subjects, bi/pansexual informants in this case. Homonormativity, therefore, reinforces itself through the established norms in different environments, creating cycles of social viability that do not promote genuine acceptance of all LGBTQ+ identities. Moreover, homonormativity within this environment is not (re)produced but used as a mechanism of outcasting LGBTQ+ individuals that do not challenge homonormativity through their self-expression, even when their self-expression is not influenced by homonormativity.

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## Appendix A: Ethics and Privacy Checklist

### PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: The Illusion of Sexual Liberation– Heterosexual Homosexuality: (Re)production of Homonormativity within the Lived Experiences of LGBTQ+-identifying individuals in the Netherlands

Name, email of student: Alson Lum Yu Jie, 527663yl@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Samira van Bohemen, vanbohemen@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: February 8<sup>th</sup> 2023 - 25 June 2023

Is the research study conducted within DPAS **YES - NO**

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?  
(e.g. internship organization)

### PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. **YES - NO**

*If 'NO': skip to part V.*

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? **YES - NO**

*Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).*

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. **YES - NO**

*If 'YES': skip to part IV.*



3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - NO

*If 'YES': skip to part IV.*

### PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - NO

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - NO

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - NO

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES - NO

*Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).*

5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES - NO

6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES - NO

7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - NO
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - NO
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - NO
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

The research studies the (re)production of homonormativity in the Netherlands. As such the target group focuses on those that identify as LGBTQ, therefore the sexual identities and sexual orientation of the participants are imperative for this study, so as to understand the dynamics between heteronormativity and homonormativity.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

All data will be anonymised—during the transcribing pseudonyms will be used instead of the participants' real name. Moreover, all data will be stored securely in a password-protected file on OneDrive. All recordings of the interviews will also be deleted after the transcribing.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

As this research talks about the lived experience of LGBTQ persons, this topic may be sensitive and personal to some participants. As some topics may be sensitive all participants will have to sign a consent form before doing the interview, and they can stop the interview at any time and they do not have to answer questions they do not want to.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

#### PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

Through my network and the network of those in my network (snowball sampling method).

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

10 to 15 people

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

180,000-300,000

*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

*Continue to part V.*

## Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Data will be stored on a password-protected file on OneDrive. It will be stored right after the recordings have been made till all transcripts have been written.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.*

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I, Alson Lum, will be responsible for it.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Once a month.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. All data that could potentially be linked back to the participants (that are not relevant to the research—e.g. age, ethnicity, name) will not be shared and used.

*Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.*

## PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Alson Lum Yu Jie

Date: 23 March 2023

Name (EUR) supervisor: Dr. Samira van Bohemen

Date: 23-03-2023

*Samira v Bohemen*

## Appendix B: Interviewee list

	Name	Age	Sexuality	Gender
1	Daniel	20	Gay	Cis male
2	Keith	23	Bi/pansexual	Cis male
3	Ben	26	Bi/pansexual	Cis male
4	Angela	23	Bisexual	Cis female
5	Max	20	Pansexual	Cis male
6	Sam	23	Queer	Non-binary
7	Adam	23	Bi/pansexual	Cis male
8	Dani	23	Bisexual	Cis female
9	Elise	23	Bisexual	Cis female
10	Alex	24	Queer	Male/ gender non-conforming

## Appendix C: Interview guide

1. How would you describe your sexual identity? How would you describe your gender identity?
  - a. Could you describe your participation in the LGBTQ community?
  - b. How would you describe your environment?
  - c. Accepting everyone what about the nl
2. How would you describe the LGBTQ community in the Netherlands?
  - a. Could you tell me about your experiences as an LGBTQ individual in the Netherlands?
  - b. Could you tell me about your experiences in the LGBTQ community in the Netherlands?
3. How would you describe the social acceptance of the LGBTQ community in the Netherlands?
  - a. Are there any conditions that are needed for this social acceptance?
  - b. How would you describe the progressiveness of the LGBTQ community in the Netherlands?
  - c. How does social acceptance and progressiveness, positively or negatively influence the LGBTQ community?
  - d. How free do you feel like you can be in the Netherlands as an LGBTQ individual? Why?
4. Much research has studied how the systems in power today were historically built by men for men. How would you describe the institutions in the Netherlands, in regard to LGBTQ?
5. How do you see yourself in the LGBTQ community and in the broader scope of being LGBTQ in Dutch society?
  - a. What expectations are there for LGBTQ in the Netherlands?
    - i. How do these expectations affect you?
      1. Do you repress any actions due to these expectations?
  - b. What norms are present in the LGBTQ community? How do you think these norms come about?
    - i. Gender

- ii. Clothes
  - iii. Music
  - iv. Dating apps
  - v. Performance
6. How do you think people are categorised within the LGBTQ community? Is this influenced by hetero norms ?
    - a. What do you think about the stereotypes for LGBTQ+ persons
    - b. Roles to play
  7. How do you think homosexuality is organised in the Netherlands? And could you describe it?
    - a. Dutch LGBTQ laws
  8. What is the dominant narrative of LGBTQ in the Netherlands? Commodification
    - a. How do you think this dominant narrative plays a part in who you are? The way you act? And your experiences as an LGBTQ?
  9. What are your opinions on the Dutch idiom: “Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg” (“Act normal, as that is crazy enough”) in relation to the LGBTQ community and your personal experience?
  10. Have you ever felt marginalised by the Dutch LGBTQ community?
    - a. If so, how?
    - b. And can you describe specific instances?
    - c. Why do you think you were marginalised by the Dutch LGBTQ community?
      - i. Where do you think this marginalisation comes from?
  11. Do you think the Dutch LGBTQ community is fully liberated and the movement has achieved all of its goals? If not, what goals or ends does the movement still need to fight for?
    - a. Contestation of heteronormative institutions
  12. What personal solutions do you have for solving the problems within the Dutch LGBTQ community? And with the broader Dutch institutions and society?
  13. Have you missed anything, and would like to add?
  14. What did you think about the interview?
  15. Years lived in NL?