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Making sex, moving difference

An ethnography of sexuality and diversity in Dutch schools

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The pupils of the second grade take a seat at the bench that stretches along the side of the Physical Exercise hall. The teacher of this class in a secondary school in the Netherlands starts by mentioning the change of the locker rooms: as this group consists mainly of girls, the girls will be assigned to the larger locker room from now on. 'Yes!' shouts one girl, 'Then we get the mirror!' The teacher then proposes a game of chase, dividing the group into two teams, one with yellow and one with red tags. Rick, assigned to the red team, shouts: 'Ugh, gross, I have the menstruation color!' In the classroom next-door, in the 'care and welfare track', six girls are practicing some skills for a test next week. During a short break, they group together around one table. Linda takes a bottle of nail polish out of her bag and starts applying it to the nails of the girl next to her. Meanwhile, she talks about her boyfriend, who is away on holiday and whom she misses. Linda's friend Mireille advises: 'You can make a cast of his dick, so you can make a dildo out of it'. She continues to ask the others at the table: 'Do you know Serena? She did that with a dolphin, you know, one of those statues, with a fin?' Faces of disgust and laughter result. 'Yuck!' In yet another classroom, one of the pupils goes up to talk to her class teacher about a prior incident. 'They called me a slut but I am not a slut at all, teacher, I am not going out with many boys. They are sluts themselves!' She starts to cry, and says, 'If they call my mum a slut one more time I will slap them!' The teacher tries to calm her by saying that he will make sure to talk to those who insulted her. He finishes by saying, 'Now, dry your tears and go for a break, I want to go for a coffee myself too before the next class starts'.

How can we make sense of such seemingly fleeting jokes, fights and stories? This dissertation explores how sexuality comes to matter in mundane practices of relating in school. In broad strokes, the moments described, which occurred on my very first day of fieldwork in a secondary school in the Netherlands, make clear what is at stake in this study on youth and sexuality. I begin this dissertation with these stories not because they are exceptional, but because they were so common, as I would learn later. Like on this first day in school, references to and invocations of gender differences and sexuality were often made.

The argument made throughout the following chapters is that sexuality is not locked into the bodies of pupils, dormant until puberty, a challenging awakening that needs to be negotiated in schools, but, rather, that it is enacted in mundane practices: these practices bring sexuality into being. These practices draw in scientific and popular knowledge, images and discourses. As the fragment above indicates, this process can include images like that of the slut, objects such as red tags and dolphin statues, and spatial and temporal structures such as locker rooms and timetables. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in four secondary schools in the Netherlands, I show that categorization is part of these practices, leading to, for example, an *us* that is fond of using mirrors, a *them* that masturbates, or an *other* whose mother is a slut.

Each of the five papers that make up this dissertation has an introduction that pertains to the issue addressed in the chapter. This chapter offers more general introductions: to the literatures this dissertation builds on and is in dialogue with, to the debates it intervenes in, to the approach taken to the study of youth and sexuality, and to the papers that comprise this dissertation.

Knowing adolescence and sexual development

Through studies on youth and sex, sexuality has emerged as a topic that is addressed by focusing on health and healthy sexual development, with the adolescent as the main target of investigation. Survey research into the health

of the Dutch population, and that of youth in particular, has documented a wide range of issues, such as the frequency of sexual behavior, the age of sexual debut, satisfaction with sexual acts and the use of contraceptives (Bakker et al., 2009; De Graaf, Meijer, Poelman, & Vanwesenbeeck, 2005; De Graaf, Kruijjer, van Acker, & Meijer, 2012; Mouthaan & Vlugt, 2012; RutgersWPF, 2012). These studies catalogue, chart, and compare sexual development. For example, the meticulous documenting of the age at which youth first have certain sexual experiences made it possible to construct an average sexual trajectory ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse (De Graaf, Vanwesenbeeck, Meijer, Woertman, & Meeus, 2009). The most recent survey into youth and sexuality, *Sex under the age of 25* (De Graaf et al., 2012), showed relatively good contraceptive behavior and low rates of STDs and unwanted pregnancies.¹ Such outcomes, which have been relatively stable over time, have made the Netherlands famous for its sexually healthy youth – the country is often ascribed a guiding role in these issues (Harbers, 2006). The causes of these favorable sexual health outcomes are sought in the overall societal acceptance of youth sexuality (Schalet, 2011) or sex positive culture (Jackson & Scott, 2004), sex education (Lewis & Knijn, 2002) and pragmatic policies (Alford & Hauser, 2011).²

Through the administration of individual surveys, studies like *Sex under the age of 25* locate sexuality within the individual, to be captured through individual scores on behavior, attitude and knowledge. Compiling (sub) population averages and distributions afterwards, in turn, makes it possible to speak of the sexual trajectory of adolescents, transforming adolescents into a group with shared attributes and developments. Large surveys of human sexuality are not new, and became popular in the period after World

¹ The most recent available statistics show that in the Netherlands in 2015, 3.2 per 1000 girls gave birth before they reached the age of 20 (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2016), which makes the percentage of teenage pregnancies among the lowest in the world. With regard to contraceptive use: 65% of 15-year-old girls, and 78% of 15-year-old boys reported using a condom during last intercourse; use of the contraceptive pill was 66% for girls and 60% for boys during last intercourse (Inchley et al., 2016). In the ranking of European countries that the WHO compiles based on these statistics, the Netherlands ranks 11th in terms of condom use, 3rd with regard to the pill (Inchley et al., 2016).

² This image extends to sexuality more general: it is strengthened by the country being the first to legalize prostitution (in 2000), and to achieve marriage equality (in 2001) – though one should not mistake legal equality for social equality (Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011).

War II when Kinsey published the results of his studies (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhardt, 1953). Interviewing hundreds of people about their sexual practices and attitudes, these thorough studies showed sexual behavior to be more diverse than assumed at the time. Around this period the method of population survey became popular, and sexual behavior became recorded in official scientific databases.³ Instead of individual cases, which formed the basis of earlier studies into sexuality, researchers now established population and subpopulation averages and distributions, creating knowledge about the sexual behaviors and attitudes of ‘the human male’ or ‘the human female’ in different countries, enabling country comparisons and rankings.

The first behavioral survey into sexuality in the Netherlands was ordered by women’s magazine *Margriet* in 1968, and aimed to map ‘actual and desired behaviors on the terrain of sexual relations’ (Noordhoff, 1969, p. 11).⁴ Participants were mostly asked about issues such as masturbation, pre-marital sex, sex drive, contraception, abortion, extramarital sex and homosexuality. The study indicated that the idea that sex belongs in a lifelong monogamous, heterosexual marriage was widely shared (Noordhoff, 1969) – although the number of people who had sex before marriage was already increasing since the 1940’s (Kooy, 1976). During the 1970s, the social legitimization of sexual activity (marriage, or intention to marry) was being replaced by an individual one: being in love or ‘strong feelings towards each other’ became a more common legitimization (Ketting, 1990, p. 73). In the following decades, surveys were repeated. Increasingly, attention was paid to the development of attitudes and practices of sexual permissiveness among youth (Bolt, 1989) in response to societal concerns about (youth) sexuality.

3 The survey method replaced earlier studies on sexuality that were based on individual case studies or theoretical treatises. For a history of sexology see Hekma (1985) and Van Ussel (1968).

4 A study into attitudes on sexuality – such as the coupling of sex and marriage – was carried out among youth at the end of the 1940s, in response to Kinsey’s study. As opposed to Kinsey’s approach, though, the study did not survey behavior, and showed that in general, at least ideologically, sex was firmly placed within marriage (Saal, 1950). In 1963, the Dutch Society for Sexual Reform (NVSH) commissioned a study into parental sex education. The study showed that girls received more information about sexuality than boys, and that this information mainly was related to first menstruation. The study was also interested in differences between social groups, along the lines of the pillars (catholic, protestant, social-democratic, liberal) that organized social life at the time (Van der Veen, 1963). See also Ravesloot (1997).

The survey method and its population focus remained popular. The response to the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s resulted in an increase in the administration of such surveys, with increasingly sophisticated statistical techniques for analyses. Thematically, there was a shift to sexual health and the detection of risk groups to be used in the development of policies to prevent transmission of the HIV virus. In the Netherlands, an association between AIDS and homosexuality was deemed ‘unjust’ (Tielman & Van Griensven, 1985, p. 421) unfair, but in practice there was an increased risk in groups of homosexual men, so the focus on homosexual men was deemed a pragmatic solution.⁵ Such an emphasis on detecting risk in subpopulations is also evident in *Sex under the age of 25*. Whereas the survey in general is aimed at Dutch youth between 12 and 25, statistical difference tests with regard to gender, age, religion, ethnicity, and educational level were conducted.

Ethnicity has especially received a lot of attention in recent years, as the sexual behaviors and attitudes of ethnic minority youth have increasingly become problematized in the Netherlands. *Sex under the age of 25*, however, showed that when differences were found, they were often very small. Nevertheless, these small differences sparked further research into those considered to be non-Dutch (ZonMW, 2011) to understand and explain the (small) differences found. Such further research into these differences implies that ethnic minority groups represent different cultures that deal with sexuality differently.⁶ This is in line with a public debate on the ‘culturalisation of citizenship’ (Duyvendak, Geschiere, & Tonkens, 2016) that requires migrants to express feelings of belonging and connectedness to their new country. In the Netherlands, sexuality plays a pivotal role in this expression of belonging (Geschiere & Guadeloupe, 2016).

Although the discipline of sexology ‘grew up’ with that of anthropology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Weston, 1993), sexuality

5 In the reaction to HIV an interesting discrepancy appeared as in the west, HIV was connected to specific factions of the population that were seen to be at risk; in Africa the whole population was seen as at risk, thereby contributing to the image of singularity of sexuality in Africa and the African as promiscuous (Adkins, 2001; Epprecht, 2008; Patton, 1990).

6 See chapter two, which details how the need for such a study was established.

was not a defining theme for early anthropology. Sexuality was an area of study that belonged mostly to the sciences.⁷ For anthropologists, it was one of the many things commented upon in ethnographies, described through a ‘flora-and-fauna style of analysis’ (Weston, 2011, p. 18) in which sexuality was regarded as self-evident, not a category of which meanings were shaped by ‘class warfare and colonial struggle, but a force both primal and given’ (Weston, 2011, p. 11). Linked to the idea that controlling (sexual) instincts is at the basis of culture and civilization (Moore, 2004), the extent to which sexuality was tamed was taken as a measure of the extent to which a population was ‘savage’ or ‘civilized’. Thus, sexuality became an important indicator to determine the position of a people on the evolutionary ladder, classifying colonial subjects into distinct kinds (Stoler, 1995).

In 1904, psychologist Stanley Hall published his seminal study on adolescence (Hall, 1904). He chose adolescents as the object of his empirical studies, in line with the Lamarckian idea of evolution through accumulation: his finding of adolescence as an inherent period of storm and stress served as evidence to this thesis of linear progression (Seaton, 2012). In the construction of age-based development stages, Hall linked seemingly neutral stages of development to knowledges ‘produced in colonialist social relations and the social imagery of the great chain of being’ (Lesko, 1996, p. 462). This maintained the analogy that was popular at the time in which youth were seen as primitives, and it constructed ‘adolescents in the same terms that subject peoples were defined: irrational, conforming, lazy, emotional beings who were totally other from Euroamerican adult men’ (Lesko, 1996, p. 462). This colonialist legacy positioned youth as distinct from adults, as lacking reason and in need of civilization.

Challenging the universality of the evolutionary concept of adolescence, anthropologist Margaret Mead asked whether ‘the disturbances which vex our adolescents [are] due to the nature of adolescence itself or to the civilization’ (Mead, 1928, p. 17).⁸ To answer this question, she conducted

7 For a description of the making of sex and the changing understandings of sexuality and sexual difference in the sciences, see Laqueur (1990), also (Schiebinger, 1990).

8 Freeman (2000) argued that Mead based her information on sexuality on the accounts of two key informants, and suspected her of having been hoaxed. Freeman’s account has in turn been critiqued by Shankman (2013), based on interviews with one of Mead’s key informants. Apart

fieldwork on Samoa in the 1920s, as ‘the developing girl is a constant factor in America and in Samoa; the civilisation of America and the civilisation of Samoa are different’ (*Ibid.*, p. 130). This made a comparison possible, and Mead found that, instead of a period of storm and stress, orderly maturing interests and activities characterized adolescence on Samoa. Thus, she argued, ‘there must be something in the two civilizations that accounts for the difference’ (*Ibid.*, p. 131). She found those differences in the general casualness of Samoan society to be different from the United States where children were growing up in a ‘world of choices’ and facing ‘half a dozen standards of morality’ when it comes to sexuality (*Ibid.*, p. 133). The Samoan child, Mead continued, does not face the same choices and dilemmas because in Samoa ‘sex is a natural, pleasurable thing’ (*Ibid.*, p. 134), not surrounded by secrecy or age-appropriate discourses. One of the first anthropological studies into adolescence, that also paid attention to sexuality, thus showed how adolescence was interpreted and lived differently in different places. These insights, Mead suggested, should be used as a mirror to consider how one’s own society deals with issues of adolescence and sexuality.

Schools, gender and sexuality

The considerable body of research on cultural models of sexuality that followed the insights of Mead did not replace but co-existed with biological models that locate the cause of ‘storm and stress’ in the adolescent body. Likewise, the notion that ‘savages’ are driven primarily by their instincts, resurfaces regularly in public⁹ and academic debates (Spronk, 2014b),

from these questions about her research method, a second critique of Mead’s work concerns the lack of attention that was paid to the colonial context (Lyons & Lyons, 2004). Despite these commentaries, the insights with regard to adolescence that were produced by Mead’s study remain pertinent.

9 When, in the first weeks of 2016, rumors of an alleged ‘mass-sexual assault’ in Cologne spread, Dutch MP Geert Wilders proposed to close the Dutch borders to asylum seekers and all immigrants from Islamic countries. He referred to the alleged perpetrators as ‘Islamic testosterone bombs’, stating that these ‘Arab men’ are causing a ‘rape-epidemic’ (Algemeen Dagblad, 2016) among Western European women. Police investigations later showed that refugees were not or hardly involved (Soenens, 2016), but this did not change the general sentiment towards ‘Islamic refugees’, or ‘Arab men’ and their supposedly dangerous sexual drives. This was also discussed

although many studies have debunked this problematic notion (see Lesko, 2001). Similar to earlier conceptions of the instincts of ‘savages’, adolescents are often characterized as flushed by hormones and lacking the brain capacity to tame their bodily drives. In one of the schools that I studied, the parental board invited a puberty-coach to talk about the challenges of raising an adolescent. Puberty-coach Marieke¹⁰ described adolescence as follows:

Suddenly your child is an adolescent. It is like putting a Ferrari motor in a Fiat – everything is going too fast, the child cannot handle it. The impulse-brake-system is not ripe yet.¹¹

Likening the body to a machine, an increase in hormones (according to coach Marieke an 800% increase of testosterone in boys) to a Ferrari motor and the ‘unripe brain’¹² to a Fiat, drives home the message that problems are unavoidable during puberty, especially in relation to sexuality: ‘The increase in testosterone results in action: sports, women, sex. They will start to sweat and smell bad. But don’t worry, as soon as he gets a girlfriend, he will start to shower’. Clearly directing her advice to parents of (heterosexual) boys, coach Marieke placed sexuality at the center of the life stage of adolescence. This notion has become ingrained in academic and popular conceptualizations of youth, in which sexuality is presented as a drive

on the talk show *De Wereld Draait Door* (5-2-2016). The talkshow host asked a guest from the Rutgers expertise center on sexuality how ‘these’ boys will be educated on sexuality. In less dramatic and insulting words, this question created the same split between native Dutch boys and boys who(se parents) were born elsewhere, a split that is made through sexuality.

¹⁰ Throughout this dissertation, I use synonyms for schools, places and persons to ensure anonymity.

¹¹ Dutch was spoken during the observations and interviews. Quotes were translated by the author as literally as possible

¹² Although this notion of an immature brain has been linked to high-risk behaviors in adolescents, for example in the Dutch bestselling book *Het puberende brein*, [the adolescent brain] (Crone, 2008), this idea is not supported by more recent neuroimaging studies (for a review see Crone & Dahl, 2012). Despite these new insights that highlight the plasticity and flexibility of the brain, the popular notion of the immature adolescent brain circulates widely. Not just in the presentation by puberty coach Marieke, but also in a newspaper article about sexting, in which a youth worker says, ‘The adolescent brain is not yet capable of overseeing the consequences of such an action [sending a sexually explicit selfie]’ (NOS, 2016). A similar, equally rigid understanding of the brain, despite studies pointing in another direction, has been noted in relation to the ‘sex of the brain’; see Jordan-Young (2011) and Fine, Jordan-Young, Kaiser and Rippon (2013).

that is overpowering if not held in check, especially for boys (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Lesko, 2001). Understood as a biological drive that can be disrupted through negative cultural influences such as sexualized media, porn or peer pressure, adolescent sexuality requires adult intervention and guidance. The approximately 55 mothers and six fathers that were present during the presentation on the adolescent brain were urged to engage in a conversation about sexuality with their adolescent child – a recommendation that fits with the way in which adolescent sexuality is generally approached in the Netherlands (Schalet, 2011).

The incentive to talk about sex with adolescents is not just a parental matter. As the study *Sex under the age of 25* concludes:

The most important concerns resulting from this study, such as sexual coercion, homonegativity, and sexual problems, should get more attention in sexuality education (Soa AIDS Nederland & RutgersWPF, 2012, p. 7).

Schools are thus pinpointed as the site where important concerns, such as homonegativity and sexual coercion, should be addressed. These concerns become located in the individuals that attend schools, as something they bring with them to the schools. The schools, in turn, are seen as the site of intervention, the container that holds the youth with problematic attitudes, and the place where these concerns can be addressed. This has been one of the tasks that sex education is increasingly being charged with. Thus, this conclusion not only communicates what the most important concerns are, but also where they are located (in the individual) and where they should be addressed (in schools).

How does this view align with the observation that sexuality is invoked throughout mundane schooldays like in the vignettes in the beginning of this chapter? How should sex education relate to these daily references to and negotiations of sexuality? While *Sex under the age of 25* expresses and evokes concerns about sexuality, the ways in which these should be addressed remain unclear. The study does not tell us how to address these issues, nor does it inform us about the ways in which these concerns – of

homonegativity and coercion - become part and parcel of school life. Instead of developing ‘Dutch lessons in love’¹³ which treat the country as an exemplary case with regard to youth sexuality, I opt for a different route. I focus on enactments of sexuality in schools as social sites in themselves out of which no straightforward generalizations or success factors can be distilled. It is not just the site where ‘important concerns’ around sexuality can be negated through sex education, but it is also the site where such concerns are made, play out, and create effects.

The inclusion of homonegativity and sexual coercion in a study on sexual health is the result of a long history of intense debate over the what, who and how of the study of sexuality in academia. There is an extensive anthropological critique of health definitions of sexuality, pointing out the limits of individualistic behavioral research paradigms (for example, Parker, 2001; Spronk, 2012). The ‘extreme empiricism’ (Parker & Aggleton, 2007, p. 3) in the field of public health is the result of the incorporation of a tradition of sexology research. In this tradition, sexual behavior was conceptualized as the outcome of natural, biological drives that formed the basis of social experiences, a conceptualization that opposed earlier moral models of sexuality (Mottier, 2008). During their work at the Kinsey Institute, sociologists Gagnon and Simon became interested in the presumptions behind sexual classifications, and argued that all behavior, including sexual behavior, is socially scripted (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Their work, together with that of Foucault, shaped the ‘new critical sexualities studies’ (Plummer, 2011).

Tracing the history of sexuality, Foucault described a ‘discursive explosion’, a confessional imperative around sexuality that shifted from church to science. Instead of sexuality as continuously repressed, and ‘freed’ from its regulative bounds during the sexual revolution, Foucault famously argued that there was a continuity of talking about sex – and that this should not be understood merely as repressive but in fact as productive as well. Productive, as it shapes the way we understand sexuality: the concept

¹³ *Dutch Lessons in Love* is a documentary film made by sexuality expertise center Rutgers in response to ‘questions from abroad’ on how the ‘open climate’ with regard to sexuality was established in the Netherlands (Rutgers, 2015).

sexuality itself is a result of this discourse, and the same goes for sexual identities. These identities are not merely expressed through discourse, but are constituted by it. Early sexological studies, the 'scientia sexualis' (Foucault, 1976), transformed confessions into the 'truth' about sex, cataloguing and classifying sexual behaviors and phantasies, differentiating between normal and abnormal sexual behavior. This important interference with sexuality was based on the confessional model that proclaims sexuality to be the key to individual authenticity and identity. As such, sexuality became 'the stamp of individuality' (Foucault, 1976, p. 146), but, at the same time, it was an indication of a society's strength. Foucault's intervention formed an important impetus to the study of sexuality, and moved this study in the direction of social constructionism. Importantly, biological, cultural and social constructionist understandings of sexuality did not neatly follow one another, but co-exist, and sometimes form strange hybrids.

Social constructionist approaches to the study of sexuality have sparked interest in the school as one of the sites of constructing sexuality and gender. In the 1980s, Connell typified schools as 'masculinity making devices' (Connell, 1989, p. 291), and considered them to be agents in making particular types of gender. Most of this work on schools and sexuality has conceptualized schools as spaces where gendered and sexual identities are performed and policed.¹⁴ A large and important body of literature has emphasized the *doing* and the *effort* that it takes for hegemonic forms of gender to appear natural. For example, Nayak and Kehily have argued that heterosexual masculinity is not something that can be asserted once, but continually has to be 'asserted, regulated and performed' (Nayak

¹⁴ My focus here is on secondary schools. However, although children are often seen as nonsexual, sexuality is by no means irrelevant to primary schools, as ethnographic work has shown (Kuik, 2013; Renold, 2005; Thorne, 1993). Emma Renold introduced the concept 'sexual generationing' – the positioning of boys and girls in age-appropriate discourses, in which childhood is seen as asexual, and adolescence as defined by sexuality (Renold, 2005, p. 17). In one of the first studies on gender (and to a lesser extent sexuality) in primary schools, based on fieldwork in the late 1970s, Barrie Thorne drew on the metaphor of play to indicate the active production of gender categories in everyday life, and employed the term borderwork to characterize the ways in which children continuously established and differentiated boys from girls (Thorne, 1993). In ethnographic research in Dutch primary schools, similar processes were observed. A study by Kuik (2013) showed that primary school pupils were actively drawing in puberty by referring to sexuality, and posited it is thus not just a biological or developmental phenomenon, but a social phenomenon as well (Kuik, 2013).

& Kehily, 2006, p. 464). Similarly, CJ Pascoe, in her study of masculinity in high schools, presents the school as a major socializing institution in which gender and sexuality are performed (Pascoe, 2007). Studies into femininity repeatedly showed the importance for girls to display a sexy, desirable hetero-femininity, a position that easily shifts into one of undesirability if one dresses or behaves 'too' sexy or sexual, resulting in exclusion and ridicule (Epstein, 1997; Pomerantz, 2008; Ringrose, 2013; Tolman, 2002).

Instead of conceptualizing sexuality as a natural, individual drive, these studies understand sex and gender as coming about in doing. In employing such an understanding, many scholars have been inspired by the work of Butler, especially her theorization of gender as performative, as an effect of repeated speech acts. The notion of gender performativity holds that gender is not something we have or are, but something that we do: 'that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (Butler, 1990, p. 185). These acts need to be repeated, a repetition that is 'at once a reenactment and reexperience of a set of actions already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation' (Butler, 1990, p. 191). Inspired by the work of Butler, studies of gender and sexuality in schools have focused on, for example, the subversion of or escape from gender norms (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2012; Holford, Renold, & Huuki, 2013; Renold, 2006a; Ringrose & Renold, 2014); sexual subjectivity (Allen, 2005a, 2009; Epstein, Flynn, & Telford, 2013; Kehily, 2004; Miller, 2013); and the policing of heterosexuality in schools (Chambers, Tincknell, & Loon, 2004; Epstein et al., 2013; Kehily, 2001; Renold, 2006b; Sanjakdar et al., 2015).

The various points raised in this literature show that sexuality is not confined to specific times and places of sex education, and that it is related to but not contained by bodies. The tendency in these studies, however, is to rely on narrative accounts and, in such analyses, to focus on the formation of subjectivity in a web of power relations (Spronk, 2014a); hence the investigation often focuses on either conforming to or subverting gendered norms. Many studies have provided substantial knowledge of processes through which youth, mainly girls, constitute sexual subjectivities. As gender

and sexuality are seen to be socially formed, the focus is on the individual – and how the agency of this individual is constrained by normative discourses. In contrast, this study shifts the interest from individual negotiations of a gendered norm, or subversion of that norm, to the collective processes in which sexuality has a role and takes shape, setting out to understand not cultural representation or subjectivity, but the enactment of sexuality.

Sexualities and diversities

Did you know that adolescence is over 500,000 years old? Many allochthonous parents do not know very well what puberty is. In western society, someone is an adolescent at the moment of ejaculation or menstruation. In Africa, this means that you can join the tribe to go hunting. In western society there are more demands for the adolescent: becoming an adult takes longer.

Continuing the lecture on the adolescent brain, coach Marieke invoked a universal model of biological development, in which menstruation and ejaculation are important markers. However, they are taken to mean different things: in ‘western society’ they indicate the onset of puberty; in ‘Africa’ they attest to the ability to go hunting. This explanation combines biological and cultural elements, and at the same time is firmly based in Dutch society with its particular division of the population into allochthones and autochthones.¹⁵ These issues have prompted several questions: Why is the distinction allochthone-autochthone relevant here? How should we understand the opposition between ‘western society’ and ‘Africa’? How do these categorizations matter to the children of those being lectured and who inhabit the school?

15 The term allochthonous (lit.: not from the soil) is used to indicate those of non-Dutch birth or ancestry, whereas autochthonous (lit. from the soil) is used for those of Netherlands birth and ancestry. The terms acquired this usage in public policy and national statistics, and have become mainstream in public discourse (Essed & Nimako, 2006; Geschiere, 2009). In the remark by the puberty coach, allochthonous parents are located firmly outside of ‘western society’. Allochthonous parents are imagined to be absent from the group of parents that attends this evening. For notions of self and other in this particular school, see chapter 6. On the notion of autochthony in the Netherlands, see Mepschen (2016).

A study into sexuality in the 1960s (Van der Veen, 1963) divided its sample of participants along the lines of the dominant social groups that formed the famous Dutch ‘pillars’ (Lijphart, 1989). Social life was largely organized through these four groups (Catholics, Protestants, socialists and liberals) from the end of the nineteenth century through the 1960s. In the absence of a majority, the political elites of these minority groups together developed a style of politics through compromise rather than conflict (see Davidson, 2015).¹⁶ Although the division into the four pillars is no longer deemed to be the most important in sexuality research, a preoccupation with differences between groups remains. Ethnicity has taken over the position of the most used marker of difference. This shift occurred when the Netherlands saw remarkably fast societal changes in the 1960s that were facilitated by a rapid secularization and depillarization. This gave new social movements, such as gay and lesbian movements, much influence (Davidson, 2015) and they were incorporated into the political system easily, contributing to the idea of Dutch ‘traditions of tolerance’ (Mepschen, Duyvendak, & Tonkens, 2010, p. 967).

A similar approach of tolerance has been noted in relation to sex education in schools. Gradually, during the 1960s and 1970s, the role of schools was recognized (Röling, 1994, 2003). The Dutch government acknowledged adolescent sexual activity as a fact: displaying pragmatism instead of moralization. Pragmatism, then, is portrayed as neutral whereas morality is connected to religion (Bang Svendsen, 2017; Rasmussen, 2015; Schalet, 2011).¹⁷ Through this acceptance of teenage sexuality as a fact, there were no fierce political debates about how to manage this – as opposed to

¹⁶ The system of pillarization was also reflected in the organization of schools. In 1917 it was instituted in the constitution that denominations could found schools based on their own system of beliefs with State financing, the so-called ‘freedom of education’ (Wingerden & Sturm, 2003). This system is still in place, and public, special (religious denomination) and general special (f.e. Montessori, Dalton) schools are funded in the same way by the state and are subjected to the same set of regulations to ensure quality education. The special schools are allowed by law to exclude pupils or staff members when they do not subscribe to the values of the school. This law is not used often, but has led for example to the suspension of a gay teacher from a Christian school in 2009, a case in which the school stated that this ‘sexual orientation did not fit the foundations of the school’ (‘School met de Bijbel Ernst stelt homoseksuele leraar op non-actief’, 2009).

¹⁷ Between 1911 and 1971, article 248bis of the Dutch law criminalized sexual relations between those above and those below 21. The law only pertained to homosexual relations. Since 1971, the age of consent is 16 for both homosexual and heterosexual contact (Hekma & Van der Meer, 2011).

other countries, notably the US (Irvine, 2000). Instead, and characteristic of the politics of compromise, the management of teenage sexuality was passed over by the government to professionals in the field, who are expected to work based on 'scientific evidence alone' (Lewis & Knijn, 2002, p. 675). Whereas the government sets a general 'attainment target', stating what pupils should know about sexuality by the end of secondary school, the way in which this goal is reached is up to individual schools.¹⁸ As such, sexuality could be included in primary and secondary school curricula without much political turmoil.¹⁹ This approach, referred to as a Dutch tradition of the normalization of adolescent sexuality (Schalet, 2004) is, according to many, under threat from immigrants (for example, see Schalet, 2011). As opposed to the Dutch, presented as secular in this narrative, immigrants (especially Muslims) are said to bring along religious beliefs that interfere with a rational approach to sexuality. Thus, sex education and youth sexuality are somehow implied in a narrative of (secular) Dutchness. Scholarship has thus far neglected to address the question of how youth sexuality figures exactly in this narrative, and how the narrative plays into youth sexuality in schools.

The type of sex education that the Netherlands became famous for is characterized as 'comprehensive', 'planned' and 'evidence-based' (Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck, & Knijn, 2008; Schaalma et al., 1996; Schaalma,

18 In 1998, sexuality was introduced in the attainment targets for primary schools; stating that pupils should learn about human reproduction (Ministerie van Onderwijs Cultuur en Wetenschappen, 1998). In 2012, sexuality was included in attainment target 43 for secondary schools. This target stated that: "the pupil learns about similarities, differences and changes in culture and ideologies in the Netherlands to relate these to one's own and other's way of life, learns the significance of the respect of each other's attitudes and ways of life for the society, and learns to respectfully deal with sexuality and diversity within society, including sexual diversity" (Kamerbrief Kerndoelen [Parliamentary decree attainment targets], 2012, p. 2). This attainment goal institutes homotolerance as an important objective – turning tolerance of homosexuality into a learning goal for pupils (Rothing, 2008).

19 This does not mean that some resistance to sex education has not been voiced. As stated, in general schools can decide on the content and manner of teaching sexuality and reproduction. When a national educational TV program for primary schools, however, included an item on sexuality called 'Doctor Corrie', angry parents united. These mostly Christian parents wrote to an MP of the Christian Party (CU), who asked parliamentary questions to the state secretary of education. The state secretary answered by saying that schools are free to choose whether or not they will watch the educational TV show (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2013). In this case, in which the content of the sex education is fixed and included in an educational TV-program, resistance does happen and quite easily translates to parliamentary questions which require an official answer from the government.

Abraham, Gillmore, & Kok, 2004). This type of sex education provides information about sex on the basis of which pupils can make rational choices, choices that should not to be diverted by ‘cultural and religious norms and values’ (Smerecnik, Schaalma, Kok, Meijer, & Poelman, 2010, p. 7). The approach is often praised for its effectiveness, measured through pre- and post-intervention surveys on knowledge, attitudes and intentions for behavior (Schutte et al., 2014; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2016). The same type of sex education, however, is also critiqued for its naturalization and individualization sexuality, and its lack of taking into account the interplay of sexuality with gender, race, religion and class (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Bredstrom, 2005; Lamb, 2013; Lesko, 2010; Rasmussen, 2012). In a country that regards sexual progressiveness as a defining characteristic of its culture (Mepschen et al., 2010), religion is often deflected onto those deemed non-Dutch. In other words, sexual progressiveness is regarded as incompatible with religious values (Bracke, 2011; Moors, 2011). This conflation between Dutchness and secularism works to mark those deemed non-Dutch as religious, resulting in a conflation of religion and ethnicity.²⁰ Combined with a tradition of epidemiological research to distinguish ethnic groups, these divisions are easily turned into a mechanism that separates the so-called progressive Dutch from the conservative, religious other. It legitimizes subjecting ethnic minorities to heightened surveillance and education (Van den Berg & Duyvendak, 2012), to civic integration exams in which sexual freedom becomes an instrument of coercion (Butler, 2009), and even frames migrants and their children as a threat to the sexual health of the ‘native’ Dutch population (Proctor, Krumeich, & Meershoek, 2011).

This centrality of sexuality to nationalism is not new. In nineteenth-century ideologies of bourgeois respectability, sexuality functioned to designate both Jews and homosexuals as the nation’s outsiders, and, thus, sexuality was crucial in defining the nation as well as those that belong to it (Mosse, 1982; Nagel, 2002). Racial elements of the structures and methodologies of comparative anatomy were used by nineteenth-century sexologists in their quest to establish differences between normal and

²⁰ Essed and Trienekens (2008) call this the muslimification of racism.

homosexual people and bodies (Dudink, 2011; Somerville, 1994).²¹ It resulted in the emerging of ‘a host of naturalized and racialized categories and characters’ (Dudink, 2011, p. 260), such as the nation, and the Jew and the homosexual as its racialized others. Similarly to more recent forms of sexual nationalism, then, we see a strong connection between race and homosexuality, albeit the other way around. In recent debates on homosexuality and the nation, homosexuality functions as a racial category: it represents whiteness (Dudink, 2011).

Although the Netherlands is often seen as an example of a country that successfully addresses issues of youth and sexuality, there has been little room for critical inquiry into the realities that are enacted through sex education and the discourse on progressiveness in general. Sexual nationalism has mainly been studied in political discourse in relation to homosexuality (Dudink, 2017; Jivraj & de Jong, 2011; Mepschen et al., 2010),²² not in relation to youth sexuality.²³ Questions about the ways in which it interferes with the enactment of sexuality by youth remain unexplored, which implicitly constructs them as unaffected by political discourse. This dissertation takes issue with the idea that youth are somehow exempt from this nationalist politics of sexuality. Although the contemporary focus on ethnic minority youth in sexual health research speaks to a long history of studying the sexuality of others, the effects of this research focus have not

21 Magnus Hirschfeld, for example, was inspired by the work of criminologist Lombroso in his quest for detecting ‘real homosexuality’ in physically recognizable features (similar to the efforts of Lombroso to find ‘real criminals’). Havelock Ellis studied what has been more recently called transgender identity, and was one of the first scholars to classify this as a distinct construction from sexual inversion and homosexuality (Mottier, 2008). It is important here to understand that the term heterosexual also is the result of these scientific practices. Heterosexuality did not always have a status of normalcy – it was first catalogued by Richard von Krafft-Ebing as a perversion in 1893 (being a non-procreative desire). See Katz (2007).

22 This political discourse is not only the terrain of nationalist right-wing parties such as the PVV. In a letter to ‘all Dutch citizens’ published in all major national newspapers at the beginning of the 2017 electoral campaign, Prime Minister Mark Rutte (VVD, liberal party) wrote: ‘We feel a growing unease when people misuse our freedom to mess things up here, while they came to our country because of that freedom. People who do not want to adjust, criticize our habits and reject our values. That pester gays, hoot at women in short skirts, or call normal Dutchmen racists. I understand very well that people think: if you reject our country that fundamentally, I would rather want you to leave. Because that is the feeling that I have as well. Act normal or leave’ (Rutte, 2017).

23 An exception to this is a study by Duits (2006) on the clothing choices of girls of primary school age, positioned within debates on sexualization and increasing societal concern about Islam in the Netherlands.

been questioned in the Netherlands. In what (new) ways does research enact ethnic minority youth's sexuality as different or problematic? How do these conceptualizations play out in public discourse and how do they influence schooling? How are youth differently shaped by sexualized nationalism? And how do they relate to this?

The puberty coach finished her talk by urging parents to guide their adolescent kids as they 'experiment, take risks', and start to get interested in sex at a life stage in which 'self-reflection is gone'. After the lecture, drinks were served, and one of the mothers present told me that her daughter was increasingly paying attention to her clothes: 'She is on WhatsApp with her friends before going to school, taking pictures of her pants to ask whether they are not too short'. Communicating worries about the increased attention her daughter paid to her own looks and how much of her time this consumed, the mother demonstrated perfectly well her daughter's abilities to engage in reflection. Although it may not be the reflection meant by coach Marieke, there was a process of reflection and deliberation through a WhatsApp group with friends. The principal told me briefly about an incident earlier that day, when a pupil photographed the behind of one of her teachers: 'She thought it was nice to show her parents, she really had no clue'. This was an underestimation not only of the pupil but also of the power of sexualized images and the currency they can carry for youth (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). That this pupil took the picture became known to a teacher through another girl in the same class, with whom the first girl was having a fight – thus the picture had a role in a specific relation between pupils.

This short example shows that the kind of issues that the puberty coach was addressing might not have been the most prominent for the parents (and teachers) in the audience. How is the school positioned in the proposed model of adolescent development? What is the role of technologies such as smartphones with cameras and the capability for instant messaging? And what role do friendships and opposition between friendship groups play? In this study, I re-address the focus of research and propose a shift from individual bodies to social processes in which sexuality appears and disappears in different forms and with different effects. These processes, forms and their effects will be central in this dissertation.

Main question and analytical approach

The papers that make up this dissertation collectively explore what sexuality *is made to be*, and what it *does* in schools. To guide this exploration, it asks:

How is sexuality enacted in mundane practices in schools and how is this process of enactment implied in the making of differences and similarities among youth?

Often introduced as a self-evident concept, sexuality is hardly defined or explained in scholarly work (Spronk, 2012): some find it in bodies, others in feelings, practices, social norms, desires, moralities, or a combination of those. Though this can be problematic, since it assumes sexuality to be self-evident, essentializing the phenomenon, I also not define or pin down sexuality before starting this study, in line with the tradition of material-semiotics. I do this not because I consider sexuality to be self-evident, located in a singular place and influenced by stable factors, but to be able to study what it is made to be and what it does in practice. This approach does not look for a singular version or explanation of sexuality but allows for multiplicity and relationality. It is open to sexuality being located in and articulated through bodies, norms, desires, discourses, practices, or a combination of those – recognizing that the way in which sexuality is popularly known influences how it is enacted in practice, while allowing for new versions to emerge.

Many studies in gender and sexuality studies that focus on youth and sexuality in school separate sex (biological) from gender (sociocultural), and focus on the latter. Instead of conceptualizing sexuality as a biological phenomenon that is socially mediated (Vance, 1991) and focusing on the (changeable) mechanisms of this social mediation, scholars in science and technology studies (STS), by contrast, reject this nature-culture divide, as well as the associated division of academic labor. Thus, they argue, science does not speak objectively, and biology does not lie ‘out there’ for researchers to discover. Rather, what we think of as biological facts are ‘rooted in specific histories, practices, languages and peoples’ (Haraway, 1997, p. 217). Science

scholars thus closely interrogate the scientific practices through which such facts come about (Adams & Pigg, 2005; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Studies into, for instance, sex hormones (Roberts, 2007), sex differences in the brain (Jordan-Young, 2011), sex chromosomes (Richardson, 2013), the genes (M'charek, 2005), reproductive organs in scientific textbooks (Martin, 1991), and the development of the male pill (Oudshoorn, 2003), showed how social and practical factors are entwined with scientific research and the outcomes this research produces.

These studies contribute to an understanding of science not as revealing the truth about a particular phenomenon, but as contributing to, and co-producing those truths. This active notion of science can be captured by different metaphors such as that of construction, performativity or enactment. The notion of construction, however, implies a social or individual builder that builds something stable (Law, 2009). There is a risk of understanding the metaphor of performativity, which has sparked many studies into gender, as like a theater with a front stage and a backstage – a front stage where performance takes place and a backstage where the 'real' is hiding, as suggested by Goffman (1956). In gender studies, the notion of performativity is used differently, warranting that there is no 'doer behind the deed' (Butler, 1990, p. 25). However, to completely shed the suggestion of a 'real' and a 'performer', as well as that of the stable object built through construction, I use the term enactment (Mol, 2002), indicating that activities take place, but the actor stays vague – there is no single builder or performer, building site or theater. The question, then, is not one of finding true knowledge, but of finding out what different knowledges do in practice.

Although my study is indebted to science and technology studies it is also different: it did not set out from the start to compare and contrast how sexuality is 'done' in different scientific practices and settings. Instead, it traces how certain more or less stabilized notions of sexuality: as natural, gendered, different among differently categorized groups of people, play out and get remade in schools. It analyzes how the making of differences and similarities among youth is implied in this process. Drawing on insights of material semiotics helps me to study sexuality empirically, to not locate it a priori in bodies, subjectivities, norms, discourses, or sciences, but to

understand it as emerging from their relations. I do so by analyzing mundane practices in schools, including walking through hallways, hanging out in the canteen, and following classes. Although the practices are mundane, the issues are not necessarily: controversial issues such as sexting and sex education also figure in these schools.

How is the enactment of sexuality implicated in the making of differences and similarities among youth? As we have seen at several moments throughout this chapter, sexuality is often linked to ethnicity: by the puberty coach that invoked distinctions between allochthone and autochthone understandings of puberty, by the systematic breaking down of statistics in *Sex under the age of 25*, or by linking sex education to Dutchness. The approach in this study is not to look for 'social differences in sexual health', separating the sexual and the social, but to analyze how differences are the effect of practices, and the role that sexuality plays in processes of differentiating. Understanding differences and similarities as the effects of practices implies that they will not be located in the bodies of some, but are found in relations and the investments in the relations that produce them (M'charek, 2010). Doing so does not exempt youth from the politics of sexuality, but shows how they get implied in, have to relate to, and change these politics. It is an approach that is open to differences and similarities other than those of ethnicity, broadening the scope of stories about sexuality to include, for example, friendship, education, and social media. These stories can be used to understand and question the politics around youth and sexuality in the Netherlands.

Study sites and ethnographic method

This dissertation is based on ethnographic fieldwork, conducted between March 2013 and December 2014, in four secondary schools in the Netherlands. Here, I introduce the schools and outline the ethnographic approach.

The schools that I studied varied in terms of educational level and geographic location. The system for secondary education in the Netherlands is divided

into three levels, namely pre-vocational secondary education (vmbo), general secondary education (havo), and pre-university education (vwo).²⁴ The duration of the programs differs: pre-vocational is four years, general five, and pre-university education six years. Around half of the pupils that have finished elementary school continue their education on the pre-vocational level. The other half is almost equally divided between general and pre-university education (Ministerie van Onderwijs Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2013). This division in school levels is followed approximately in the current study, in which three pre-vocational classes, one general and one pre-university education class were studied. This allows for contrasting the ways in which these levels invite certain identifications and practices and refuse others (see chapter 5).

The study comprises schools that are situated within and outside the Randstad, which is the region spanning the four largest cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht), where an estimated 7 out of the 16 million people in the Netherlands live. The Randstad is also the part of the country where most studies are being conducted, based on the assumption that it is in these urban areas where most social problems, including those that relate to sexuality, reside (see chapter 2). To be able to contrast schools, two were situated within, and two outside of the Randstad. The latter ones were more welcoming of me, as they were less burdened with requests to participate in research, and for organizational reasons.²⁵ My presence there could therefore also be slightly more continuous than in the two other schools in which a stricter start and end date of the research were negotiated.

In the first school, Florius College, one of the teachers invited me to take part in the sex education lessons that she offered on Friday afternoons during a period of four months. I observed the elaborate sessions on sex

24 The vocational track has been divided into three levels (basic, general, theoretical). The pre-university track consists of two levels (atheneum and gymnasium). Next to the three general levels of education (vmbo, havo, vwo) that have been described, about 5% of secondary school pupils attend special or practical education, a type of education that is outside of the scope of this study.

25 At Nexus High my participation started halfway through the school year, and since this was the year before the final exams I did not extend the research beyond the summer break. Florius College was about to go through a large reorganization which limited the research period.

education that were based on a curriculum and supplemented with fieldtrips and guest lectures. The school was situated in a large city in the Netherlands, in a neighborhood on the outskirts of the city, and provided prevocational education (vmbo) and general secondary education (havo). The class that was studied was in the havo track. In the other three schools my presence was more substantial and intensive. The second school, Rijnsbergcollege, was a small school for vocational education, situated in a more rural area. Here, I studied two different classes, one in the 'basic-track' and one in the 'general/theoretical track'. I studied both classes for one day a week, over a period of 15 months, mostly in their second year and several months in the third year. The third school, Bernarduslyceum, was a school for higher education and pre-university education in a provincial town. In this relatively strict and traditional school, I followed a pre-university class of pupils at the athenaeum and gymnasium levels in the second year of the six-year track, for a period of eight months. Finally, Nexus High was a large school for prevocational education in a city in the Randstad. Here I followed a class in the third year of the four-year vmbo track (general) for a period of six months.

All school administrators suggested that it would be most practical for me to be assigned to one particular class. Three classes were in the second year, one was in the third year (Nexus High). Most pupils were between the ages of 13-15, while some were a bit older, 16 or 17 – at Nexus High and Florius College. The choices of which classes to study were mostly made by school administrators based on their knowledge of the group and the class teacher. Being assigned to a particular class meant that I followed the pupils around through classes, breaks, and events. Like they did, I also got acquainted with others during those out-of-class moments in which more mingling happened.

The contradiction between the rigidity of planned activities and strict time schedules, and my own research method of tagging along, waiting, observing and participating, was aptly pointed out by one pupil when he remarked, 'You basically get paid for sitting here and doing nothing all day?' Most of the empirical material that this dissertation relies on comes from participant observation, or, as this one pupil characterized it: 'doing nothing

all day'. What I was doing, indeed, seemed to resemble 'nothing', as this was exactly how many pupils described their schooldays to me when I missed one: 'We did nothing, we learned nothing, nothing happened'. Still, they were doing many things, things I increasingly participated in: walking from one class to the next while sharing the hallways with other pupils, trying to be in a seat before the bell rang and the hallways became silent; standing still in a corner of the playground, eating, drinking, checking their phones, chatting, and waiting for the bell to ring again to announce the next class; listening to each other's stories, talking about weekends, about homework, questioning each other about a particular interaction with a boy or girl. I was walking, waiting, chatting, listening to them and, often when they were working on a specific task during class, writing notes about the previous hours.

Adolescent culture has been conceptualized as different and mysterious, a conceptualization which ignores the connections between young people's cultures and those of adults, especially in schools, which are organized and mostly controlled by adults who can employ institutional resources (Raby, 2007). The difference between me and the pupils was most tangible in the fact that they were obliged to be in school every day, while I could sometimes skip a class or a day without repercussions. My presence was at times questioned, but the longer I was there, the more accustomed the pupils became to me. This became clear when one pupil said to a friend that I had not met, 'Why are you looking like that, that's Willemijn, she is just walking along with us'. No further questions asked or elaboration needed. Pupils tried to make sense of me as much as I was trying to make sense of them, asking questions about my youth, private life, clothing, and hairstyle. As adolescence is often seen as a state between childhood and adulthood, I occupied a position of in-betweenness for the pupils: I had finished secondary school but was still in some form of schooling and had not yet entered 'adulthood', which they associated with having a permanent job, being married, owning a house and, ultimately, being a parent – none of which applied to me.

Creating rapport with pupils also involved showing on many occasions that I could be trusted. For example, during one of the first months at

Rijnsbergcollege, a few pupils went to someone's house when a class was cancelled. I joined, but within half an hour pupils started to drink beer and liquor. Upon returning to school, the principal found out two boys were intoxicated. She came into class and demanded that everyone who was at the house where the drinking happened raise their hands. I raised my hand too, but did not tell the teachers or school officials what exactly happened or who drank alcohol and who did not. Luckily, the school officials did not push me to. This showed the pupils I could be trusted. On many other occasions I never opposed gossiping or joking about teachers when I heard it, sometimes being complicit in it by laughing, winking or raising an eyebrow. Similarly, there were many cases in which I saw the copying of homework or cheating during exams. At Nexus High, I even helped Michelle during a social science test by whispering an answer to her (when she asked me, 'What is the name of that state secretary of justice of ours again, the fat one?'). She came out of the test chuckling and telling her friends I had helped her to pass the exam. That same afternoon, she and two of her friends offered up part of their lunchbreak to do a group interview with me.

These group interviews were conducted with friendship groups, as this often helps to create a comfortable atmosphere (Renold, 2005). Indeed, the group interviews that I conducted often resembled casual conversations; the pupils would interrupt each other, laugh, have conversations in between, whisper, tell jokes, get into fights, and gossip about others who were not present. The difference was that these conversations often took place in an empty classroom, individual room or teacher's office, and during class time (and therefore in the interest of the pupils to make them last longer); they were recorded and started off from a question posed by me or from what they thought would be interesting to me. Despite my explanation that these conversations were recorded, and that I would use them for my study, the format did not seem to align with their idea of an interview. This more formal type of interview that the pupils imagined, based on their experiences with teachers and social workers, became clear when Timmy asked halfway during an interview, 'Oh, did the interview already start?'

In individual interviews, this casual atmosphere was harder to establish; discussions were more based on my questions and resulted in relatively short

and abstract answers (see also Nespor 1997). Pupils were not used to this style of conversation with adults; maybe it reminded them of the 5- or 8-minute conversations they had with the class teacher a few times a year to discuss their grades. The interview as a particular style of communication requires skills (to listen to a question, answer, convince the interviewer, give examples, etc.) that only some pupils mastered. In these interviews, it seemed hard to overcome the 'great gulf' that developmentalism has established between knowing adult and unknowing child (Raby, 2007). Attempts to deformalize these conversations, by using informal language, mild teasing, jokes, or by eating food and getting drinks, were not always successful ('ha-ha, there she is again with her bag of candies'). Individual interviews, however, did prove to be helpful when they revolved around a specific incident that I wanted to know their opinion about, in which case the answers were not at all short or abstract, but long, complicated and emotional. The research approach, in other words, did not follow a pre-set strategy but evolved along the way, and was the result of interactions between researcher and researched, school timetables, and available locations.

Overview of the chapters

This dissertation is composed of five empirical chapters that analyze sexuality and diversity.

Chapter two critically examines the production of knowledge about sexuality and ethnicity, through a review of Dutch studies on youth and sexuality between 2000-2011. In these studies, ethnicity is a frequently used measure, and this chapter traces the concept through four research practices, namely the rationales for taking up ethnicity and compiling research populations, the determining of ethnicity, statistical calculations, and the making of recommendations. It will show that ethnicity is a slippery concept: definitions are unclear and contested, and it is operationalized in many, often non-coherent ways. But while the notion of ethnicity is flexible, slippery and changeable throughout these practices, at the same time it becomes solidified and naturalized in relation to sexuality.

Chapter three follows the case of a girl's nude picture being

disseminated in one of the schools that was studied. It argues that sexting has become a widely recognizable phenomenon that is scripted in a specific way, as summarized in the oft repeated phrase ‘when-girl-sends-nude-picture-to-boy’. This scripting through media and academic reports influences the way sexting comes into being. This, in turn determines how such cases are dealt with in practice, as following the case of Zoe over time will show. The analysis complicates debates about sexting by troubling how the script actually produces the phenomenon as well as its gendered and racialized subjects.

Chapter four presents three sex education classes that each took a different pedagogical approach. It uses these three classes to address the question: what else can sex education do? This question opens up the study of sex education beyond the two common modes of seeking to establish effectiveness or to engage in a mode of critique. The analysis of classroom practices shows that sex education is a collective practice that might affect the future health of individuals, but, more importantly, plays into and reinforces patterns of race, gender and popularity. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the ways in which comprehensive sex education either emphasizes or ignores the issue of homosexuality, and how this is related to ethnicity and sexual nationalism. The analysis complicates the ways in which sex education is conceptualized and measured as a health intervention.

Chapter five explores the ways in which heteronormativity is enacted through friendship and teaching practices in and around the schools. Among pupils, heterosexuality was presupposed yet also made in practices of forming, consolidating or ending friendships. In two schools heterosexuality was drawn in to ease teaching relations, while at a third school it was seen as a hindrance to academic achievements and was therefore relegated to the private sphere. This chapter shows that heteronormativity might not only regulate gendered and sexual identity constitution but works in realms of social life that are often thought of as desexualized. It also breaks with the tendency to produce singular accounts of heteronormativity and its effect in schools.

Chapter six engages with questions of diversity in secondary schools. The analysis traces different locations, articulations and problems of diversity for pupils and their teachers. The chapter shows that the categories of social

life are not coherent, homogeneous and consistent, to be found in a person or in the body – in other words, real – but instead that they can *become* or *fail to become* real in social interactions. Whenever diversity was articulated in one of the schools, it was rapidly dealt with in one of three ways: through emphasizing similarities, deflection onto others, or ignorance. Making diversity irrelevant depended on a deflection of racism onto others and in effect maintained the negative connotations of diversity and the locking of its problems into some schools and bodies and not others.

Finally, **chapter seven** revisits the issues raised in the introduction. It will outline the main findings and arguments and its implications for theory, methodology and intervention.