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Making sex, moving difference

An ethnography of sexuality and diversity in Dutch schools

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Chapter 7

Conclusion

Girls cheered in the PE hall as the teacher decided they were to use the changing room with the mirror from now on. Tags used to identify teams for a ball game were described as having a menstrual colour. In the afternoon a pupil and her class teacher discussed a fight that revolved around calling someone's mother a slut. In another classroom, a lively conversation on masturbation was proceeding amidst expressions of joy, excitement and laughter, but also tears, expressions of anger and loneliness. These moments from my first day of fieldwork in a secondary school foreshadowed the themes of this dissertation. On that first day, I was surprised by the many times and ways in which sexuality and gender were evoked, and to what effect.

Most studies of youth sexuality set out to understand problems with sexual health. According to the World Health Organization (2006), to be sexually healthy means being in 'a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality' while problems such as teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, early sexual activity, homophobia, and sexual violence undermine this broadly defined state of sexual health. These problems of youth sexuality have been addressed by scientific disciplines ranging from sexology, epidemiology and public health to sociology and anthropology. All have focused on solving a particular part of the puzzle of youth sexual health – a puzzle consisting of behaviours, contexts, attitudes, norms, and drives.

Insights from such studies inform public campaigns, health policies, insurance provisions, contraceptive methods, school-based sex education and individual counselling. Different though they may be, these interventions all aim to improve sexual health and wellbeing by persuading individuals to change their behaviour. In the Netherlands, many of these interventions are set in schools, where adolescents quite literally form a captive audience.

School-based sex education in the Netherlands has been effective in changing the ‘predictive determinants’ of behaviour including attitudes, knowledge and intentions. Such outcomes – combined with favourable rankings in country comparisons of teenage pregnancy⁵² – portray the Dutch as successful teachers of sexuality in schools.

But as the preceding chapters have shown, both the interventions and the problems they are said to address are not self-evident, stable entities. Scholars do not just study problems, and interventions do not just address them – both actively shape how problems are defined. The current study, in contrast, did not set out to solve a predefined problem, but to understand how sexuality is enacted within mundane school life. What practices come together in school life? What do these practices make of sexuality? In particular, I was interested in how sexuality becomes part and parcel of the making of differences and similarities among youth. In this concluding chapter I outline the dissertation’s main contributions to the field.

Enacting sexuality

Sexuality is often used as a self-evident concept, one that is rarely defined or explained in scholarly work (Spronk, 2012). Obligatory references to broad definitions of sexual health (like my quoting of the WHO above) notwithstanding, sexuality is generally treated as if we already know what it is, thus hiding the work that goes into the making of definitions and the consolidating of understandings. This in turn leads to the naturalization of sexuality. To counter this tendency, I did not begin this study with a definition, but with the idea that what sexuality is remains an empirical question. Sexuality emerges through practices of social commentary, arranging classes, making jokes, dressing up, flirting online, and much else. Nor is sexuality an object that exists independently from the doings

⁵² Determining the causes of favorable outcomes such as low rates of teenage pregnancy is far from straightforward and beyond the scope of this study. While causality is often attributed to sex education in schools, this ignores the normalization of the use of the contraceptive pill among teenagers (used by 66% of 15-year old girls in the Netherlands versus the European average of 30%) (Inchley et al., 2016).

of researchers, an object that can be described from a distance, its various factors clearly separated and added up. As Mol (2002) argues, different ways of studying an object do not add up to a single coherent object, but enact different versions of it. Sexuality, although presented as singular in theory, is multiple in practice. In some research traditions, it is located in (specific parts of) the body; others locate sexuality in feelings, practices, social norms, intersubjective experiences, desires, stories, moralities, or some combination thereof. In line with the tradition of material-semiotics, the current study has examined how sexuality is enacted in schools.

My ethnographic fieldwork revealed that scientific approaches to understanding sexuality – with their neat separation of factors, causal directions and layered models – stand in stark contrast to the messiness of school life. Dealing with this messiness was a daily reality for both teachers and pupils. When, where, and how sexuality mattered varied a great deal. In chapter three, for example, sexuality emerged in relation to personal wellbeing: teachers questioned the overall wellbeing of a girl (Zoe) whose nude picture had been circulated. Here, sexuality lined up with ‘being troublesome at home’, ‘seeing boys from a different village’, and ‘going down the wrong path’.

The case also revealed that how sexuality matters depends on the place and concerns with which it becomes associated – the context that is made to matter. The fact that the nude picture was circulated in school clearly mattered: it caused ‘unrest’ in a period of ‘sexting panic’ (Hasinoff, 2015), the latest in a series of panics over girls’ sexualisation (Duits & van Zoonen, 2011; Renold & Ringrose, 2011). The panic furthermore left no room for Zoe’s version of the event: rather than seeing herself as going ‘down the wrong path’, she felt betrayed by her friends. For her friends, the problem was the boy she sent the picture to: he attended a different school, a school coded as ‘black’. For Zoe’s friends, the problem had everything to do with race. Despite these multiple dimensions, the sexting case became part of the script ‘when-girl-sends-nude-picture-to-boy’ – a script that divides roles and responsibilities and leaves no room for other versions to appear than the one in which an insecure, naïve, adolescent girl tries to impress a boy she fancied through sexuality.

To say that sexuality is enacted is not to say that sexuality is ‘made’ from scratch, that it can be something entirely different each time, outside of previous understandings of sex, schools, and adolescents. Instead, each enactment involves already-formed ideas about sexuality, including racialized, gendered and classed notions that grace academic and popular knowledge. Some ways of doing sexuality in practice are more obvious than others because they have been more solidified, or *scripted*, through repetition. In the remainder of this chapter, I turn to three common refrains about youth and sexuality: sexuality as a natural attribute of the body; sexuality as a cause of problems when silenced; and sexuality as individual identity. After outlining the various effects of these understandings, I revisit through the dissertation’s chapters how sexuality is enacted in schools, where it is tied to sociality and friendships, and to the making of similarities and differences.

Bodies growing up

*You’re changing!
A lot changes in puberty. Your body is growing up.
Sometimes you’ll feel insecure or awkward.
You’ll also be more independent, start going out with friends perhaps.
You may fall in love and get a boyfriend or girlfriend.
How is it affecting you?
(Long Live Love, 2012, p. 1)*

The lines above open a widely used sex education teaching pack in the Netherlands. They suggest that puberty begins with bodily changes that affect psychological wellbeing (feeling insecure or awkward), one’s social life (becoming independent, spending time with friends) and which fuel romantic feelings (falling in love). They prepare pupils for the topics that will be covered in sex education, and for how they will be addressed: in an individualized, personal tone. This is about you and your body. Your body is ‘growing up’, ‘things are happening to you’ (Long Live Love, 2012, p. 1). While the approach is exemplary of sex education curricula, it is not always

accepted by pupils. One student wondered aloud when it was announced that the next class would be sex education: ‘why did sexuality suddenly become so important?’ Although the question was addressed to no one in particular and disappeared in the buzz of voices in the classroom, it confirmed the inevitability of sexuality in the secondary school.

The inevitability of sexuality in secondary school stems from the omnipresent biological narrative of its blossoming during the life stage called adolescence (Lesko, 2001). When pupils are still in primary school, teachers and parents often read sexualized behaviour or references to sexuality as play – and therefore as not real (Kuik, 2013; Thorne, 1993). But the meanings attached to sexual behaviour and utterances change when pupils enter adolescence. This biological understanding of sexuality – which feminist science and technology scholars have shown to be deeply culturally inflected (Jordan-Young, 2011; M’charek, 2005; Martin, 1991; Richardson, 2013; Roberts, 2007) – posit adolescence as one of the most important life phases of sexual development.

Adolescence is gendered from the outset. The onset of puberty in boys is defined as first ejaculation; for girls, first menstruation. Boys’ changing bodies thus have to do with sexual pleasure; for girls, reproduction (Holland et al., 2004). Teeming with adolescents said to be experiencing profound physical changes, secondary schools become sites for regulating sexuality. Problems caused by raging hormones, peer pressure, media influence, or a lack of reflection are considered inevitable, a part of adolescence and the development of sexuality. As the preceding chapters have shown, a multitude of problems were explained by referring to adolescence and sexuality: deteriorating grades, the crossing of private boundaries, wanting the wrong kind of attention, being boisterous in class, sexy posing for pictures, tight clothing, etc. Through such rationales, used by both pupils and teachers, this biological understanding of sexuality – its unruliness and problems necessitating regulation – gained in reality.

Problems and speakability

*Say clearly what you do and don't want
Talk beforehand about how far you want to go
If you don't like something, say so
(Long Live Love, 2012, p. 19)*

The same teaching pack emphasizes the need to talk about sexuality. Pupils are encouraged to talk about what they want, what they do not want, and what they are ready for. This need to talk goes beyond the negotiation of sexual acts between two teenagers; it is a general imperative. 'Speakability' – the ability to engage in dialogue with others about sexuality – has almost become a goal in itself: to talk is to prevent problems, while the repertoire of disclosure is seen as crucial to individual empowerment. Nevertheless, the speakability imperative can also lead to silencing same-sex experiences that do not follow the narrative of coming out (Jivraj & de Jong, 2011; Wekker, 2009). As Hardon and Posel point out, there is the risk that “the prescription to be ‘open’ about these issues will become monochromatic, blunt and unduly coercive, based on a misreading of more nuanced ways of knowing and telling” (Hardon & Posel, 2012, p. S3).

As Foucault argued, talking about sexuality is not only a matter of providing information; it brings sexuality into being. Rather than turning its back on sexuality, modern society has “put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it” (Foucault, 1976, p. 69). The cases discussed in this dissertation revealed that sexuality becomes speakable only in a highly specific format, one that excludes how sexuality is discussed among youths themselves – that is, talk about who is posting pictures that are sexy, or too sexual; gossip about who has kissed or made out; about who is attractive and who is not. Such concerns, however, were not recognized as proper ways to talk about sexuality within the format of sex education. In the format of speakability, sexuality is pertinent to youth and natural. But it is also risky: problems are expected, given the lack of reflexivity that adolescents are said to suffer from.

In ‘making sexuality speakable’, adolescents are called upon to become rational agents capable of choosing their own partners, sexual activities, and contraceptive methods. But during adolescence, rationality is seen as compromised: hormones cloud decision-making while peer pressure leads individuals to engage in things they otherwise would not. Establishing who you *really* are, and what you *really* want, become key goals of sex education, reinforcing the idea of sexuality as a stamp of individuality (Foucault, 1976).

As anthropologists have shown, such authentic identities or representations of the ‘real’ are never outside of culture (Alldred, 1998; Garcia, 2012; Spronk, 2016). Appeals to rational choice, authenticity, and talk all invoke a notion of neutrality that often suffuses Dutch treatments of sexuality.⁵³ In this constellation, the Dutch are said to deal with youth sexuality pragmatically rather than through moralism (Schalet, 2011). Studies of youth and sex in the Netherlands often posit a division between normative and pragmatic approaches to youth sexuality. The former is the terrain of religious influence; the latter – the ‘Dutch approach’ – is that of secular realism, posited as politically and morally neutral and therefore desirable. Nevertheless, my study revealed that this neat division breaks down in practice. Pragmatism did not replace moralism as normativities were embedded in, maintained, and reproduced through everyday dealings with sexuality. Speakability, then, becomes the right way to ‘do’ sexuality, while engaging in ‘open’ sex talk in public becomes a way of doing Dutchness.

Enabling an environment of openness in secondary schools where talk about sexuality could emerge was difficult in practice as teachers had to deal with tricky questions from pupils, who used the promise of ‘open and honest communication’ to breach the personal boundaries of teachers or to disrupt the class. As we saw in chapter four, interventions do not take place in a vacuum, but in classrooms where pupils and teachers have already established patterns of interaction, a hierarchy of popularity and, importantly, of ‘speakability’ (who is to speak, when and where, with what audience). While speakability was encouraged in the classroom, it was also highly regulated and policed, reinforcing and destabilizing the notion of speakability at the same time.

⁵³ Not only in regards to sexuality: see Vogel (2016) for an analysis of how science is posited as value-neutral in Dutch debates on overweight.

Kinds of persons

*What kind of person are you when it comes to love?
Do you have certain rules for what you do? Or are you more spontaneous?
Tip: Always trust your intuition. If it feels right, it's OK
(Long Live Love, 2012, p. 14)*

In the teaching pack, the relation is made explicit: what one does when it comes to love⁵⁴ is bound up with the kind of person one is. Choosing and acting almost become synonymous. We see, as in many public health accounts of sexuality, a focus on the intuitions, rationales, and choices of individual persons. But as my ethnography clearly revealed, school life is collective: all pupils begin the day at the same time, have their morning breaks together, and eat lunch in one of two designated time slots. Classmates have the same timetables, teachers, and tests. A sense of togetherness was omnipresent. Whereas sex education usually contrasts the responsibility of individual choice to the dangers of peer pressure, being alone – for pupils – meant being vulnerable to jokes, gossip, and bullying. This bracketing of the influence of peers informs the ideal of individual responsibility in most sex education projects; to become a good sexual citizen, one must learn to exert individual agency and to take responsibility for one's choices and actions (Cameron-Lewis & Allen, 2013; Elliott, 2014; Fields & Tolman, 2006).

Nevertheless, personal choices regarding sexuality have consequences outside of romantic and sexual relations and individual health. The choice to engage sexually with a boyfriend has consequences beyond the two romantically involved teenagers. As we saw with Jenna in chapter five, her actions led her to be ostracized by her friends. Befriending a different group of girls was her solution to keep both her boyfriend and friends at school. While this worked on some days, two lunch breaks during the week did not coincide with that of her new friends. Jenna thus had to hang out with the group that previously spread false rumours about her having an abortion.

As argued by Foucault in *History of Sexuality Part 1*, sexuality in the nineteenth century emerged as a stamp of individuality as well as

54 Ironically, the word love is used as a euphemism for sex in the curriculum.

an indication of a society's strength – it “ exists at the point where body and population meet” (Foucault, 2003, p. 252). This was apparent in the twenty-first century classroom as well, with sex education celebrating the notion of rational agency while presenting the Dutch national character as quintessentially modern and enlightened, one that knows how to deal with sexuality. Chapter two showed that this national character gains reality through the research practices of recruiting participants, assigning ethnicity, making groups, testing differences and advancing recommendations: “the kind and the knowledge grow together” (Hacking, 1995, p. 361). When asked in sex education class whether they have ‘rules or are spontaneous’, pupils turned the discussion towards religion and culture, which they considered the sources of rules. Thus secular and tolerant Dutchness became the mirror opposite of Muslim orthodoxy and intolerance. In many ways, this was hardly surprising: youth do not stand outside of the politics of sexual nationalism, but imbibe and solidify the connections made between sexuality and national cultures in sex education curricula, in questions by teachers, and in remarks by classmates.

None of the participants in my study openly identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual at the time of study. In her school ethnography, Youdell (2010, p. 94) explains how she felt compelled to read some girls as ‘lesbians-in-the-making’ despite her concern not to essentialize her subjects. I have been asked to make such assessments by colleagues worried about the oppression of otherness and heterosexual norms dominating the school environment. Individual sexual identity is indeed a common trope in sex education. But I did not ask participants to identify themselves in terms of sexual identity; my interests lay elsewhere, in the workings of heteronormativity. As I argued in chapter five, heterosexuality – light-heartedly incorporated into friendships and teaching relations – not only affects individual sexual orientations but the making and maintaining of friendships. This complicates the common trope of coming out of the closet during secondary school: it is not (only) about expressing a sexual orientation that might not be accepted at school, but one in which friendships can be at stake. At issue is not lack of acceptance by friends, but the inability to participate in friendship activities where heterosexuality is central. The focus on kinds of people, and on individual identities, obscures such processes.

Sexuality, sociality and schools

*Emotional rollercoaster – Stormy?
All these changes might lead to arguments
with your parents or friends
(Long Live Love, 2012, p. 1)*

The chapters of this dissertation highlighted the role of sexuality in schools – at times ‘stormy’ and leading to arguments, at times enjoyable and fun. As in the Long Live Love teaching pack, pupils in secondary schools were often addressed as individuals, albeit as individuals easily influenced by their peers, especially when it comes to sex. As I set out to examine the role played by sexuality in the making of collectives, I saw that my study participants were already part of numerous (tight or loose-knit) groups: groups that cycle to school together, classes, schools, families, villages, neighbourhoods, cities and social media networks. They were also made to be part of other collectives: of pupils, generations, adolescents, educational track levels, ethnic groups, and genders – categorizations that mattered, as argued in chapter two, in creating knowledge about youth sexuality. Sexual activities such as kissing, taking sexy pictures, dating and making out played out in, and were constitutive of, these collectives. From the making and breaking of friendships to outing a peer as sexually active, from positioning oneself or someone else in a ‘cultural group’ to establishing similarities and differences between the sexually active or attractive and the others – all of these different collectives became important at different moments. Chapter six, which focused on diversity, showed through the examples of hair brushing and the questioning of social groups in history class how collectives are mobilized to emphasize or undo differences, for instance how a collective of girls undoes differences of ethnicity.

Taken together, the dissertation’s chapters pointed to the prominence of sociality over the rational, individual subject that often takes centre stage in sexuality research. For example, the chapter on friendship and heteronormativity showed how female sociality was constructed by expressing cross-sex desire together (watching six-packs on *hot or not*).

The youth whom I studied were highly invested in establishing similarities. As Paul once explained to me, the most important thing in school is not to be alone. While being able to ‘be yourself’ is a requirement in dominant discourses of self-realization, in the schools that I studied, ‘not being *by* yourself’ was more important. This depended on one’s ability to blend in, to be authentic, but not visibly different. Similarities, then, involve a process of *making* – just as difference does not follow naturally from the body. Continuous investment was needed to remain ‘the same’ as someone else. But forming socialities also required the distancing of others – often in terms of sexuality, for example in the case of sexting described in chapter three.

Making moves

Who makes the first move, a boy or a girl?

Jay, age 15: ‘I think boys should make the first move. We don’t often get a bad reputation. If a girl starts chatting up boys, she could be seen as a bit of a slag’

Sharon, age 16: ‘I took the initiative. My boyfriend liked that.

He likes girls who know what they want’

(Long Live Love, 2012, p. 7)

The fields of sexual health and sexology largely focus on behaviour, with their different schools and streams employing specific methods to measure sexuality and categorize sexual behaviour. Ultimately, the aim is to reduce instances of sexual behaviour deemed unhealthy. Due to this focus on (mapping) behaviour, health scientists are sometimes seen as ‘extreme empiricists’ (Parker & Aggleton, 2007, p. 3) who do not take into account wider structural factors influencing youth sexuality. Their categories are said to be reductionist by ignoring the social dimensions of sexuality (Young & Meyer, 2005). Although implicated in nationalism and identity politics, their focus on behaviour gives these studies the appearance of moral neutrality (Adams & Pigg, 2005).

Critical studies of sexuality have emerged in opposition to approaches

that rely on measuring and mapping sexual behaviour. Building on Foucault, this literature argues that the sexual sciences are implicated in the making of sex. Authors in this tradition emphasize the social production of sexuality, and focus on the ways in which discourse and power constitute the domain of sexuality. Queer theory has further deconstructed the presumed natural relation between sex, gender, and desire (Butler, 1990; Rubin, 1984). As for youth sexuality, queer theorists often focus on ‘subjectification’, thereby privileging the moment in which discourse constitutes identity (Nelson, 1999; Valentine, 2007). Within studies of sexuality in schools, the focus on power dynamics has resulted in ‘a relentless search for “agency”’ (Talburtt & Rasmussen, 2010, p. 2) and for liberated subjects and liberating moments (*Ibid*, p. 2). Heteronormativity is presented as the universal adversary; the school as the universally heteronormative institute *par excellence* (Rasmussen, Gowlett, & Connell, 2014). Paradoxically, this risks universalizing discourses of gender and sexuality, as the process of how subjects are constituted is abstracted from time and place.

The literature on sexuality thus moves between two poles, one that posits sexuality as natural and another that explores sexuality as a social construction. These positions are so pervasive that it becomes difficult to explore the notions of ‘adolescence’ and ‘sexuality’ without getting caught up in them. This is not merely an academic discussion as these understandings enter into schools as well, where different understandings of sexuality co-exist.

The dissertation’s first *theoretical move* was one away from discursivity and subjectivity. I did not foreground the process of gendered subject formation through performativity, citation and repetition, but focused on other discernible movements and actors in the making of sexualities and diversities. While acknowledging concerns surrounding the role of power, politics, and the sciences, I opted for an approach that brings together feminist theory, material semiotic scholarship, and the anthropology of sexuality to further our understanding of the relations between sexuality and diversity in schools. The dissertation’s second theoretical move was towards *relationality*, of analysing sexuality in relation to sociality. As we saw in the previous chapters, sexuality is not an isolated, individual asset or

drive, but emerges in and through the relations of which it is a part. These go beyond romantic relationships to include friendships, teacher-pupil relations, and family. The third theoretical move concerns *enactment* – that is, studying sexuality as it is brought about in practice. The enactment of sexuality variably involved pupils, teachers, school buildings, bike sheds, mobile phones, pictures, popular media, and scientific and popularized understandings of youth, adolescence and sexuality.

In part, these theoretical moves follow from my choice of methods: ethnography, immersion in different schools for long periods of time, relying on observation as well as gleaning insights from (group) interviews. Taking on the sensibilities of material-semiotics allowed me to engage with mundane practices that may have otherwise remained outside of the ethnographic account and analysis. Through the methods I employed, I was able to trace the connections between social networks and sexting, the making and unmaking of similarities, and the temporary (dis)identifications of youths.

Research methods are political and never innocent (Law, 2004). They are implicated in the categorizing of people, the prioritizing of issues, and the locating of problems. Nor are my own methods neutral: from the outset, I was committed to engaging with issues that mattered to youths rather than to health researchers, parents or teachers. I systematically followed the processes through which sexuality emerged in the secondary school, and the differences that were implicated in, and resulted from, these processes of making sex. I did not focus of predetermined subgroups of young people, but explored the fluid distinctions that they themselves drew. These processes of making sex alert us to a final move that I wish to make here, concerning interventions.

Drawing new lines: intervening through practice

*Where do you draw the line?
How far will you go?
What do you want when it comes to sex?
And what not?*
(Long Live Love, 2012, p. 13)

With the naturalization of sexuality comes the naturalization of its potential problems. Schools intervene to counter these problems, in part through the provision of sex education. In the *Long Live Love* program, the metaphor of drawing the line is used to stop a certain situation from running its expected course. This expectation is based on a solidified script of sexual interaction, which in turn is related to the individual and his or her sexual intentions and readiness for sexual activity. In the way it is used in the curriculum, where to draw the line is something to be thought out before the actual occasion materializes.

But there is more to this line, as the analysis in this dissertation has shown. The line that ends a sexual interaction connects to other lines such as those of autonomy, self-determination, speakability, liberalism, modernity, gender equality and Dutchness. Drawing the line in the hypothetical sexual encounter that pupils are confronted with in *Long Live Love* is getting out of a specific sexual encounter by entering accepted discourses of sexuality and self: 'I do not want this'. By describing these lines – as well as by making present others that are severed, obscured or simply ignored – the current study makes other ways of drawing lines and connections possible. It makes an intervention by approaching sexuality as enacted in practice, by exploring how sexuality is done, and by eschewing taken-for-granted understandings of sexuality, its problems, and the actors involved. These are all matters to be studied in practice. Crucially, this makes it possible to think of enacting sexuality otherwise.

Employing ethnographic methods in different schools allowed me to describe the *processes* of making sexuality. This stands in stark contrast to survey and interview research that seeks to understand and predict

behaviour and to evaluate intervention *outcomes*. In public health research, outcomes are defined *a priori*, often in the form of behavioural intentions. But in the schools that I studied, problems were rarely formulated in terms of individual health. Instead, problems concerned disrupted relationships, friendships, and classroom order. Sexuality was said to influence grades and instigate fights, and otherwise threaten orderly conduct in schools. Teachers as well as pupils met such disruptions with different kinds of interventions: appreciation, bullying, compliments, class reprimands and parent phone calls, among others.

Describing practices and processes is an intervention because it destabilizes problems, actors, and contexts. This approach is open to the varying specificities in which a problem is recognized. It asks: what is the problem here? For whom? Who is the intervention for? What does it do? An intervention, then, is not a message to be communicated or a behaviour to be changed, but something that requires constant and evolving deliberation and action: intervening becomes interfering in already evolving situations.

Ethnographic stories and analyses can draw new lines and connections, helping us to understand situational complexities. For example, my analysis of the sexting case in this dissertation, which complicated singular narratives of female victimization, was published on websites covering social affairs and youth issues.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, website editors sought to illustrate the text with pictures of sad-faced young women, a reminder that we cannot predict or control where ethnographic interventions end up having an effect (Latour, 1988). A year later, I learnt that a youth worker had used one of my articles in a workshop to educate police officers about sexting (see Gabeler, 2017). Hopefully this series of translations did not reduce the case to yet another story of a sexting victim and a perpetrator. Instead of divorcing theory from practice, then, the current study intervened theoretically by studying practice, thus embracing the notion of pragmatism often ascribed to Dutch dealings with youth sexuality. Pragmatism – in the sense of focusing on practical effects rather than moral or theoretical principles – helps us to rethink interventions, not at an abstract level where individuals are abstracted from their social situations and relations, but in practice.

55 See Krebbekx (2016a, 2016b).

Talking about or dealing with boyfriends and girlfriends, thongs, bras, six-packs, sleeping over, kissing, cheating, showing too much skin, too much closeness, fancying someone, seeing someone, school hallways, classrooms, mobile phones, pictures, popular media understandings of youth, scientific notions of adolescence and sexuality – all were involved in the making of sex in secondary schools. All were implicated in the making of differences and the evaluations that led to the making of these differences. The aim of this study was not to produce a single, definitive account of sexuality in schools. Rather, it resisted such consolidation by approaching sexuality as enacted – as brought about in practice, as relational and situational. What matters changes from one situation to the other, and over time. What remains stable is that sexuality matters, and that differences move.