Advocacy Beyond Identity: A Dutch Gay/Lesbian Organization’s Embrace of a Public Policy Strategy

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Advocacy Beyond Identity: A Dutch Gay/Lesbian Organization’s Embrace of a Public Policy Strategy

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ABSTRACT
The gay/lesbian social movement has primarily been understood as an identity movement. This article contributes to expanding understandings of the gay/lesbian movement by following the advocacy of the Dutch Association for the Integration of Homosexuality COC (COC) as a case of a gay/lesbian movement organization’s expansion of its action repertoire to include public policy goals. On the basis of archival and interview data, this article identifies several factors that enabled the COC to see the Dutch government as a potential public policy partner. Previous legal successes and facilitation by the institutionalized wing of the women’s movement, coupled with a constitutional change, resulted in the COC’s development of a policy strategy. By tracing the history of the COC’s strategic interactions, this article demonstrates that, while an identity strategy was constant throughout the COC’s advocacy, the organization could combine an identity strategy with strategies of legal change, cultural change, and public policy.

While the gay/lesbian movement has been understood as a typical identity movement (Duyvendak, 1995; Duyvendak & Giugni, 1995), several scholars have recently emphasized the ways that gay/lesbian movement organizations have engaged conventional political institutions to make legal and policy demands. Ayoub (2016) documented various ways a number of gay/lesbian organizations have mobilized the “politics of visibility” in struggles over LGBT rights in national and transnational advocacy. In a historical analysis of state-oriented gay/lesbian movement organizations in the United States, Bernstein demonstrated, “challenging culture is as important a goal of social movements as changing laws and politics, but political and cultural goals are not mutually exclusive” (2002, p. 537).

Political goals pursued by the gay/lesbian movement beyond identity strategies have been understood primarily in legal terms, as studies have focused on gay/lesbian organizations’ attempts to remove discriminatory legislation (Bernstein, 2003), enact antidiscrimination legislation (Vanhala, 2009), and open marriage (Kollman, 2017) to same-sex couples. Gay/lesbian
social movement organizations can potentially combine strategies of identity-building, cultural change, legal change, and public policy development. This article contributes to the expanding understanding of the gay/lesbian movement’s advocacy by examining the movement’s demands for the implementation of public policy on homosexuality.²

Public policy demands require an active investment by a government in increasing the acceptance of homosexuality in society, and executing public policy on homosexuality often involves close cooperation with gay/lesbian movement organizations. In order for a movement organization to demand that a government invest in gay/lesbian acceptance, the movement organization must see the government as a potential partner that could be willing to promote gay/lesbian acceptance. This article examines the process through which a gay/lesbian movement organization can come to see a government as a potential policy partner and answers the following question: Which factors enable gay/lesbian movement organizations to expand their action repertoire to include public policy goals?

**Case selection**

The history of the strategic interactions and political objectives of the Dutch Association for the Integration of Homosexuality COC³ (COC) is studied as a case of a gay/lesbian movement organization’s expansion of its action repertoire to include a public policy strategy. The Netherlands was one of the first countries to implement public policy on homosexuality to promote the social acceptance of gays/lesbians. *Overheidsbeleid en Homoseksualiteit* (hereafter: *Government Policy and Homosexuality*; Tweede Kamer, 1985–1986) was the first of several white papers⁴ in the first wave of Dutch national policy on homosexuality that lasted from 1986 to 1992. The government’s introduction of public policy on homosexuality was the product of political struggle waged by the COC and a number of other actors and was largely a response to the COC’s own policy brief, titled *Homoseksualiteit in het Overheidsbeleid* (hereafter: *Homosexuality in Government Policy*; NVIH COC, 1983a), which it presented to the government in 1983.

In its 1983 policy brief, the COC called on the government to take several actions: strengthen the gay/lesbian movement; protect gay/lesbian rights and interests in international relations; research, register, and heavily prosecute anti-gay/lesbian violence and verbal discrimination; allow foreign partners to be entitled to a residence permit; include homosexuality in sexual education; promote gay/lesbian studies at the university level; make inheritance possible for non-married couples; include gay/lesbian themes in state-sponsored media; and fight heterosexism.⁵

The implementation of public policy on homosexuality is currently a priority shared by the COC and the Dutch government, but such an alignment of goals
and level of cooperation did not always exist. Until the mid-1980s, the Dutch government did not engage in coordinated public policy on homosexuality. Until the early 1980s, the COC had been concerned primarily with fighting legal inequality, building gay/lesbian identities, and promoting cultural change regarding gay/lesbian acceptance. Pursuing public policy on homosexuality became a strategic priority of the COC only during the early 1980s.

In the existing literature on the gay/lesbian movement in the Netherlands, several scholars have argued that the policy prioritization of the COC and the policy’s implementation by the Dutch government came in response to a violent counter-demonstration at a gay/lesbian protest in the city of Amersfoort in 1982 (Hekma, 2004; Schuyf, 2008; Swiebel, 2011). On June 26, 1982 between 4,000 and 6,000 gay/lesbian protestors arrived in the city of Amersfoort, where they were met by roughly 350 counter-protestors. The counter-protestors yelled epithets and threw stones and eggs at the gays and lesbians present. Thirteen counter-demonstrators were arrested, one gay man and one lesbian were hospitalized, and two police officers were wounded (Dagblad Rijn en Gouwe, 1982). While the experience of such violence must have been deeply unsettling, many responses to such an occurrence were possible. The occurrence of violence in Amersfoort does not sufficiently explain why the COC came to see the Dutch national government as a potential public policy partner and in turn adopt a public policy strategy.

**Theory**

A central approach to social movements, the political process theory (Duyvendak & Giugni, 1995), proposes that by structuring the context for advocacy, governmental institutions influence the claims and strategies of social movements (Paternotte, Tremblay, & Johnson, 2011). In dialogue with the political process approach, the strategic interaction perspective (SIP) proposes that government institutions are not merely the context in which advocacy occurs. Instead, the SIP understands the state as consisting of multiple (types of) actors that engage with other actors, including those from social movements, in various arenas of contention. The SIP makes three contributions to understanding government–movement relations. First, the government is not seen as monolithic, and multiple actors internal and external to government can engage with and influence social movements in various ways. Second, movement actors can strategically interact with government actors in a variety of different arenas, each of which have their own rules of engagement. Third, the strategies and tactics pursued by a social movement organization can change over time and are dependent on the arena(s) and actor(s) engaged.

Duyvendak and Jasper (2015) emphasized that within the SIP, the aim is to move away from large generalizations, such as “the state” and “the social movement,” to focus on the actions of specific players. Players can be either “simple”
Players play in relation to other players, who may be allies, enemies, or somewhere in between. For instance, femocrats, or feminist bureaucrats, have been able to ally with and facilitate some feminist movements (Outshoorn, 1994). Pettinicchio identified the ways in which institutional activists, or “those with access to resources and power who proactively work on issues shared with grassroots challengers” (2012, p. 499) can facilitate movements from positions within government institutions. Strategic interaction can involve more actors than only those of one social movement and one government, and social movements can influence each other through spillover. According to Meyer and Whittier, spillover occurs when “successful tactical innovations developed by one social movement become part of a collective action repertoire upon which subsequent social movements draw” (1994, p. 287). Players can, thus, interact competitively and cooperatively.

Strategic interaction occurs between players in arenas of contention. Jasper explained that arenas “are sets of resources and rules that channel contention into certain kinds of actions and offer rewards and outcomes” (2004, p. 5). Within each arena, there may be players occupying official positions, which “are useful, because they bring control of resources and allow their holders to make certain moves” (2004, p. 6). Players are able to operate within multiple arenas, and in some situations they may be able to use one arena to pressure another arena. Through strategic engagement, players may be able to effect changes in the rules of the arenas, the positions of the players, and/or the types and amounts of resources they possess and are able to use.

Strategy refers to the overarching goals pursued by an actor, while tactics are the more specific actions that an actor engages in to achieve a broader strategy (Jasper, 2008, p. 4). Players may pursue a number of strategies simultaneously, and they may engage in one strategy in a particular arena and another strategy in another arena. From the SIP, movement actors are not expected to be focused on either identity politics or conventional politics. Instead, the strategies they pursue are expected to depend on where, or in which arenas, strategic interaction takes place. As strategy is oriented toward the attainment of future goals, strategy will most likely shift over time as previously held goals are achieved or abandoned.

**Method**

In this article, the COC’s strategic interactions with multiple actors and in multiple arenas are traced from its founding in 1946 until the 1983 presentation of its policy brief to the Dutch government, in which it demanded coordinated public policy on homosexuality. The COC’s strategic interactions were historically mapped by gathering and coding archival data. The archival data were supplemented with data collected from nine semistructured interviews with eight individuals who held key functions within the
gay/lesbian movement, if not within the COC itself and/or government. All interviewees agreed to be cited by name. The interview data were cross-checked with the archival data for verification.

The archival data were gathered from six different archives: The International Institute for Social History (IISG), IHLIA LGBT Heritage (IHLIA), Staten-Generaal Digitaal (SGD, Archives of the Dutch Parliament), the internal archive of the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport (VWS), the Dutch National Archive (Nationaal Archief), and Atria (Institute on Gender Equality and Women’s History). The case was studied between 2013 and 2017 by gathering and analyzing thousands of pages of documents regarding the social movement organization the COC, correspondence, media accounts, and related policy documents (Vaughan, 1996).

Data and analysis

1946 to the early 1970s: From identity-building to making legal demands

From its founding in 1946 until the mid-1960s, the COC functioned as a place where its members could meet each other to build a social network, meet potential partners, and learn more about homosexuality while being shielded from the homophobic outside world. The first two names the organization used, the “Center for Culture and Relaxation” and the “Shakespeare Club,” were reflective of the organization’s initially closeted orientation that was focused on the identity formation of its members (Schuyf, 2000; Warmerdam & Koenders, 1987). The COC “came out” in 1964 when its chairperson, Benno Premse, appeared on television and discussed his homosexuality and the COC without being anonymized. After the author Gerard Reve, Premse was the second person to discuss his homosexuality openly on Dutch television. From that point in time onward, the COC began to more openly engage Dutch society to raise awareness about homosexuality. To reflect the COC’s more outwardly oriented politics, the organization changed its name in 1964 to the “Dutch Society for Homophiles C.O.C.” (Warmerdam & Koenders, 1987) and began producing the magazine Dialoog (hereafter: Dialogue), which was a member magazine that simultaneously engaged in a dialogue with Dutch society on homosexuality (Warmerdam & Koenders, 1987).

The COC’s dialogue with Dutch society on homosexuality soon garnered attention from the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Social Welfare (CRM). The Schorer Foundation was founded in 1967, partly through subsidies provided by CRM, and the Minister of CRM, Marga Klompé of the Catholic People’s Party (KVP), participated in the festive opening of the organization. The foundation was focused on gay/lesbian health issues and was named after Jacob Schorer, who had founded the Nederlandsch Wetenschappelijk
Humanitair Komitee (Dutch Scientific Humanitarian Committee)\textsuperscript{15} to combat the discrimination of homosexuals in 1912. CRM funded several paid positions at the Schorer Foundation, and some of that personnel was used by the COC with the tacit consent of the Ministry of CRM.

In addition to building gay/lesbian identities and engaging in dialogue on homosexuality with Dutch society, the COC also focused on fighting legal inequality, beginning in the 1960s. One of the first legal battles the COC engaged in, together with a number of other actors, was for the repeal of the law 248bis, which set the age of consent for opposite-sex sexual acts at 16 and the age of consent for same-sex sexual acts at 21. Homosexuality in and of itself had not been illegal in the Netherlands since the introduction of the Napoleonic Code in 1811. Based on the idea that homosexuality was a learned behavior, the 248bis legislation was introduced in 1911 and was subsequently used to police homosexuals, as many were prosecuted for sexual relations with “minors,” meaning those under 21 (Hekma & van der Meer, 2011). The COC was particularly subject to policing, as plainclothes police visited the meetings of the COC to ensure no “minors” attended (Tamboer, 1972).

To protest the law, the COC helped to organize the first gay/lesbian demonstration in the Netherlands, which took place on January 21, 1969 at the Dutch Parliament. While the COC paid for the demonstration, it did not attach its name to it, as it feared that being associated with the protest would jeopardize its negotiations with the Labor Party (PvdA\textsuperscript{16}) on removing 248bis. The discussion in parliament on 248bis lasted for two years, and during that time the COC’s advising of the PvdA was noted in the parliamentary minutes\textsuperscript{17} (Tweede Kamer, 1969–1970a). A committee was installed by the government to formulate an answer to the question of whether homosexuality was a learned behavior or inborn. During the committee’s meetings, a delegation of the COC and of the board of Dialogue were invited to make a case for repealing the law (Tweede Kamer, 1969–1970b). The committee was unable to determine if homosexuality was inborn or not, but it argued that homosexuality was set from the age of 6 and most likely the result of social and biological factors. Regardless, as they argued that homosexuality was not a behavior learned in adolescence, they unanimously advised the government to repeal 248bis. Parliament followed the committee’s advice, and the law was repealed in 1971.

Some of the students mobilized for the protest had different strategic objectives than the national board of the COC. In 1969 the Federatie Studenten Werkgroepen Homoseksualiteit (Federation of Student Working Groups on Homosexuality) challenged the COC to focus more actively on changing society (Branderhorst et al., 1969). The COC shifted to focusing more on social change and adopted a new name in 1971: the Dutch Association for the Integration of Homosexuality COC (Hekma & Duyvendak, 2011).

Another battle the COC was engaged in, which had been going on since 1961, was the COC’s demand for the royal approval of its statutes,\textsuperscript{18} which
amounted to the organization receiving legal personality. Legal personality would ensure that board members would not be held personally responsible for financial losses of the organization, and at the time it was also important for matters ranging from getting a telephone line to the rental and purchase of property. The COC’s requests for legal personality in 1961, 1963, and 1967 were all denied. After having legal personality denied so many times by the Ministry of Justice, the struggle over legal personality also became a struggle for recognition and legitimacy. The government then lacked a coordinated policy vision on homosexuality: CRM subsidized the Schorer Foundation and knew that some of those subsidies were flowing to the COC, while the Ministry of Justice refused to grant the COC legal personality.

The Den Uyl cabinet took power in 1973, which was the first coalition with the Labor Party lasting for more than a year and a half since 1956. After a Labor parliamentarian had advocated on the COC’s behalf and consulted the COC in the discussion on 248bis, it had become important to the party’s own legitimacy that the COC be given legal personality. Additionally, the Den Uyl cabinet prided itself on “doing things differently,” and one way it demonstrated that was by granting legal personality to the COC soon after it took power in 1973.

Having succeeded in seeing 248bis repealed and gaining legal personality, the COC grew bolder. The military had used homosexuality as a reason to label conscripts as psychologically unstable and reject them from military service with the label “S-5” (Van der Schrier, 2011). Particularly in those days of mandatory male conscription, an S-5 designation could be detrimental to a man’s career. The COC began a project in 1973 to challenge the exclusion of homosexuals from the military and established contact with the Minister of Defense, Henk Vredeling (PvdA). The COC gained yet another success from the Den Uyl cabinet when Minister Vredeling removed homosexuality as a reason to be rejected and discharged from the military in February 1974 (NVIH COC, 1977a).

The mid- to late-1970s: Identity-building, cultural change, and demonstration

The COC had originated as a meeting place for gays/lesbians, and that function remained central throughout the 1970s. The COC operated a number of cafés, bars, and nightlife establishments throughout the Netherlands for gays/lesbians. In some provincial towns, the café run by the COC was the only meeting place for gays/lesbians for many surrounding kilometers. The establishments were staffed by volunteers, and the COC used the profits to subsidize its activism. The COC also facilitated a number of discussion groups within its buildings to facilitate self-acceptance and gay/lesbian identity-building.

One tactic the COC used to change society was to attempt to influence the opinions of youth on homosexuality. To that end, the COC developed an educational program run by volunteers who traveled to high schools
throughout the Netherlands to discuss homosexuality. The stories of the COC’s educators were often personal and focused on the social aspects of homosexuality, initiating discussions of sexuality outside of the biological realm and confronting youth, often for the first time, with the issue of homosexuality.

Gay/lesbian subculture began to bloom throughout the 1970s, and the gay/lesbian movement saw the birth of new organizations and a general orientation toward identity-building and cultural change. A number of organizations split off or organized separately from the COC. A group of women split from the COC and formed the organization Paarse September (Purple September) in 1972. The organization was critical of sexism within the COC, which it discussed in its magazine, *Purple September* (Meijer, 1989). Purple September itself lasted only until 1974, but gender politics within the COC and the position of lesbians within Dutch society continued to be debated by Lesbian Nation, which was formed in 1974, and the International Lesbian Alliance Netherlands, formed in 1977 (Fobear, 2012).

Another group that arose from a split with the COC was the Flikker Front (hereafter: Faggot Front). Much as the term *queer* would later be reclaimed as a term of pride, *flikker* was reclaimed as a positive term. The Faggot Front opposed the COC’s integrationist politics and critically challenged the social position of homosexuality and social institutions, such as marriage and the family (Sanders, 1982). The Faggot Front was joined in 1975 by the Rooie Flikkers (hereafter: Red Faggots), which lasted until 1980 and took a more cultural approach to social transformation by showing how life could be lived outside of monogamous relationships and gender binaries (Duyves, 1985). Those more radical groups pulled the COC in the direction of gay liberation and cultural change, even though they continued to find the COC to be too mainstream and overly focused on integration.

In addition to new gay/lesbian movement groups, gay/lesbian groups also formed within several Dutch institutions in the late 1970s. Gay/lesbian groups were formed within most political parties between 1979 and 1981. Gay/lesbian groups also emerged within workers’ unions. The gay/lesbian movement was still growing by the late 1970s, and the COC was no longer the only player in the gay/lesbian advocacy field. While the COC was challenged by and competed with some of the newly formed groups within the gay/lesbian movement, those organizations pulled the COC more in the direction of pursuing cultural change. One initiative in which many gay/lesbian groups worked together was the Roze Front (hereafter: Pink Front).

In 1979, a demonstration was organized that would turn into a yearly protest event; the event would be called “Pink Saturday” and be organized by the Pink Front. Joannes Gijsen had been appointed as the Bishop of Roermond, in the south of the Netherlands, in 1972 to bring some conservative order back to Dutch Catholicism. After he made statements in an interview
about, among other topics, refusing communion to gays/lesbians (Bricó, 1979), he became the target of a large demonstration that took place in Roermond. The demonstration was organized by the COC together with a number of other gay/lesbian civil society and political organizations on Saturday, April 14, 1979 (Rotterdams Nieuwsblad, 1979). Between 4,000 and 5,000 people marched that day for gay/lesbian acceptance (Van Gijzel, 1979).

As the two days preceding the demonstration were known in the Dutch Catholic faith as White Thursday and Good Friday, respectively, the demonstration itself was called Roze Zaterdag (hereafter: Pink Saturday). In the Netherlands, the color pink had long been associated with homosexuality. Another demonstration under the name of “Pink Saturday” took place in Amsterdam on June 30, 1979, and “Pink Saturday” became a protest event organized by gay/lesbian civil society that took place each year on the last Saturday of June.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the COC began engaging more with Dutch society on the issue of homosexuality, in addition to focusing on gay/lesbian identity-building. Internal conflict resulted in the formation of new groups that were critical of the COC’s integrationist stance and pushed the COC to focus on cultural change. Joke Swiebel, member of the national board of the COC from 1969–1971 and from 1973–1975 and member of Amersfoorts Beraad (hereafter: Amersfoort’s Deliberation; see below), described the general attitude of the movement as follows:

During the 70s, the revolution broke free. Red faggots, purple dykes, we had everything… Singing and dancing, so also in the gay/lesbian movement there wasn’t any concept of policy, because what do you mean? Government policy is dirty, disgusting, we don’t want anything to do with it. We are going for the fight! What that fight is, I’m not sure of—freedom! Dancing on the square, enjoying life… so if you had then shouted, “We need gay/lesbian policy,” then you would have been put in the same category as conforming, social democracy, selling-out, co-optation, you name it. (personal communication, August 24, 2016)

Many organizations from the movement united in the Pink Front to organize the Pink Saturday demonstration to promote cultural change by raising awareness of homosexuality in Dutch society.

While the movement generally and the COC specifically were not focused on public policy during the 1970s, the COC welcomed government subsidies for its cultural work. In 1977, during the last months of the Den Uyl cabinet, the Minister of CRM, Harry van Doorn Politieke Partij Radikalen (PPR), met with the COC to discuss a new subsidy construction in which the Schorer Foundation would be subsidized for specific tasks and the COC would directly receive some subsidies for salaried personnel from CRM (Ministry of CRM, 1978). That discussion was continued in 1978 under the Van Agt I cabinet with the new Minister of CRM, Til Gardeniers-Berendsen from the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA).24 The COC was able to secure direct subsidization
from the minister for salaried personnel, and in 1981 it also received a subsidy of \( f175,000 \) from CRM to purchase a building on the Rozenstraat in Amsterdam for its headquarters (NVIH COC, 1981). The COC developed a financial relationship with the Dutch government through the Ministry of CRM during the 1970s.

**The late 1970s to the early 1980s: Spillover from the women’s movement**

The Commission Cals-Donner began formulating suggestions for a significant revision of the Dutch constitution in 1967. On the basis of the commission’s advice, the Den Uyl cabinet submitted its proposal for a revised Dutch constitution to parliament in 1974 (Tweede Kamer, 1973–1974). The cabinet’s proposal included a new Article 1 that would offer protection against a number of forms of discrimination. Article 1 would eventually read: “All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted” (Parlement & Politiek). It was not immediately clear, however, which unnamed categories would be protected under Article 1.

The Den Uyl cabinet had institutionalized a wing of the women’s movement in 1974 as the Emancipation Commission (EK\(^{26}\); Ribberink, 1998). The EK provided advice to the government on women’s issues. As lesbian women fell under the policy domain of the EK, the EK was asked to evaluate Article 1 and advise the government on whether or not to include homosexuality as a protected category. The EK’s advice was to include homosexuality as a protected category, but before presenting their report to the government, the EK contacted the COC for advice on how to best integrate sexual preference into their report. Several members of the national board of the COC worked together with the EK to integrate sexual preference into the report and to provide examples of discrimination against gays and lesbians that could demonstrate the necessity of such protection (NVIH COC, 1977b).

The Den Uyl cabinet’s interpretation of Article 1 was that it included homosexuality as a category protected from discrimination (Tweede Kamer, 1975–1976). The subsequent cabinet, the CDA-led Van Agt I cabinet, accepted the EK’s advice to include sexual preference as a protected category under Article 1 but argued that the social desirability and consequences of prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual preference needed to be researched. To that end, a working group was formed by the Interdepartmental Coordinating Commission on Emancipation Policy (ICE\(^{27}\)), which included representatives from various government ministries, the Netherlands Institute for Social Sexological Research (NISSO\(^{28}\), the Dutch Family Council,\(^{29}\) and the COC (Ministry of CRM, 1981). The working group’s report, approved by the Van Agt I cabinet and published by CRM in 1981, confirmed the ministry’s
interpretation of Article 1 as including sexual preference as a protected category and emphasized the need for homosexuality to be explicitly named in antidiscrimination legislation (Ministry of CRM, 1981).

Willemien Ruygrok, policy officer at the national office of the COC from 1981–1992 and founder of Amersfoort’s Deliberation (see below), explained:

The women’s movement supported the gay/lesbian movement for a long time. And the women’s movement had already obtained a position [within the government] … Joop den Uyl had, of course, opened the door [to the government] for the women’s movement, and the gay/lesbian movement could move in the slipstream of that… People like Hedy d’Ancona, and Liesbeth den Uyl, Joop den Uyl’s wife, they all played a large role, and they were willing to bring gays/lesbians along with them. (personal communication, September 8, 2016)

The institutionalized wing of the women’s movement, in collaboration with the COC, helped the gay/lesbian movement by contributing to the ministry’s interpretation of Article 1 as including homosexuality as a protected category. There were, however, few direct results of interpreting Article 1 as including homosexuality as a protected category, since there is no constitutional court or judicial review in the Netherlands. The constitution must be given form through parliamentary legislation and is unenforceable without such legislation (NVIH COC, 1977a). Antidiscrimination legislation was thus necessary to enforce the protections guaranteed in little more than writing by the constitution.

As a result of the new Article 1 and its interpretation by the EK and CRM, political parties began drafting proposals for an Equal Treatment Act (AWGB30), which would codify Article 1 of the constitution. The EK’s interpretation of including homosexuality as a protected category resulted in all political parties engaging with the issue in their legislative proposals. The Van Agt I cabinet presented a bill for an AWGB in September 1981. It was immediately an issue of great debate and contestation in parliament (Waaldijk, 1983), as confessional parties, including the CDA, were afraid that they would lose the sovereignty within (government-funded) Christian schools to fire gay/lesbian teachers and expel gay/lesbian students if an AWGB were to be passed.31

In response to discussions on the AWGB, the COC began to formulate public policy goals in January of 1982, and in its official reaction to an AWGB bill, the COC wrote:

The COC trusts that such a law will contribute to the recognition of the general equal treatment of all people. But the COC also expresses the hope that it can trust the government to pursue an active emancipation policy: a policy to stimulate the emancipation of men and women, of which gay/lesbian emancipation will be an integrated component… The COC is one of the organizations from the gay/lesbian movement that is prepared to think through and discuss with the government how to put such a policy into practice. (NVIH COC, 1982a, p. 23)
A shift can be observed here within the COC from a focus on fighting the government’s discriminatory laws to calling on the government to enact proactive measures to contribute to the welfare of gays/lesbians through public policy. The prospect of legal protection, in the form of Article 1’s codification through an AWGB, was welcomed by the COC, but the COC also realized that legal change would not be enough; proactive public policies would also be necessary to combat social discrimination of gays/lesbians. From January of 1982, the COC saw the Dutch government as a potential policy partner and began formulating a public policy strategy, which was before “Amersfoort” occurred. By 1982 the COC was not the only player pursuing public policy on homosexuality. Some of the first concrete proposals for public policy on homosexuality were made in May of 1982 when a member of the Pacifistisch-Socialistische Partij (PSP) in the Amsterdam City Council introduced a policy brief to the Amsterdam City Council calling for the formulation and implementation of gay/lesbian policy in Amsterdam (Van Schijndel, 1982).

The EK went beyond interpreting Article 1 as including homosexuality as a protected category. In May of 1982 it published Een analyse van het “Vrouwenvraagstuk” (hereafter: Analysis of the “Woman Question”; van der A, Dijkstra, Grotenhuis, Meyer, & Swiebel). In the report, commissioned by then State Secretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) Hedy d’Ancona, “compulsory heterosexuality” was explicitly discussed as a hindrance to women’s emancipation. The report thus brought the combating of compulsory heterosexuality within the purview of the government by presenting it as a goal of women’s emancipation policy.

1982 and 1983: “Amersfoort” and the COC’s expansion of its public policy strategy

Pink Saturday had been organized in Amsterdam in 1979 and 1980, after which the Pink Front decided to take the demonstration out of the city and into the provinces where the need for cultural change was thought to be greater. Pink Saturday took place in ‘s-Hertogenbosch in 1981. In June of 1982, a week of events was organized by the Pink Front, of which the COC was a central player, in the Dutch city of Amersfoort. The theme for the week of activism was “opgevoed tot hetero, lesbies/flikker durven zijn” (raised to be straight, dare to be a lesbian/faggot). The events culminated in the Pink Saturday protest on June 26, 1982. On that day the gays and lesbians present were confronted with a wave of violence that they had neither expected nor were prepared to combat, and the successes of the previous two decades only increased the shock. Judith Schuyf, a founding member of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Gay Studies at the University of Utrecht and member of the COC, stated, “We thought that we had things pretty well organized in the gay/lesbian movement,
and because of that we were even more surprised when the demonstration ['Amersfoort'] got so out of hand” (personal communication, August 25, 2016).

A number of government players participated in some way in the events in Amersfoort organized by the Pink Front in 1982. D’Ancona, then state secretary of SZW, opened a conference titled “Education and Homosexuality” in Amersfoort organized by the Pink Front at the beginning of the week that would culminate in the Pink Saturday protest. The Pink Front consisted of the following organizations: the COC; the gay/lesbian youth council; the pink triangle from Eindhoven; the PANN Foundation; an organization for (previously) married homosexuals (Orpheus); the commission Homosexuality and the Armed Forces; gay/lesbian groups from unions and teachers’ organizations; and gay/lesbian groups from political parties the Labor Party (PvdA), the Liberal Party (VVD), the Radical Party (PPR), the Pacifist Socialist Party (PSP), the Communist Party in the Netherlands (CPN), and Democrats ’66 (D66; De Stad Amersfoort, 1982). The participation of a diverse number of government and civil society players in the events during the week that culminated in the Pink Saturday march resulted in even more surprise and anger when the demonstration was met with violence.

The national board of the COC immediately began formulating a response to what happened in Amersfoort. Sylvia Borren, member of the national board of the COC from 1980 to 1985 recalled:

Immediately the day after [“Amersfoort”], we decided three things in the national board [of the COC]: We are going to have another demonstration, which we held a few days later in Nijmegen. Second, we are going to organize nonviolent resistance trainings based on Gandhi so that we can nonviolently defend ourselves at the next demonstration. And third was that we are citizens of this country, and the government has a role to play in fighting violence. (personal communication, November 22, 2016)

The COC sent a letter to then–Prime Minister Van Agt on June 28, 1982, two days after the violence in Amersfoort, arguing that violence against gays and lesbians was increasing (NVIH COC, 1982b). In that letter, the COC requested that Van Agt install an interdepartmental working group to investigate the state of anti-gay/lesbian violence in the Netherlands. While the CDA-led Van Agt III cabinet was resistant to AWGB legislation that would decrease the freedom of Christian schools to hire and fire gays/lesbians, Van Agt could agree that gays/lesbians should not be the victims of violence in the streets. Van Agt conceded to the COC’s demand and solicited research on violence against and discrimination of gays/lesbians, which would be published in 1984 (Dobbeling & Koenders, 1984).

The national board of the COC was not, however, satisfied with only having been promised research on violence against gays and lesbians. To
develop a more detailed public policy response, Ruygrok formed the committee Amersfoort’s Deliberation (NVIH COC, 1983b). Ruygrok explained:

There were several people who had been active in the national COC who had stopped in the years before [“Amersfoort”]. Rob Tielman, Ben Bussink, who was a policy officer at CRM, just like Joke Swiebel, and a few others. They had stopped, because they found that the COC was moving too much in the “flower power” direction, so to say, was too focused on individual resistance, and was not focused enough on policy. And I was able to bring them back by telling them, “Yes, you are completely right that the COC has become pathetic, but if you don’t come back it will remain pathetic. So let’s put together what we would like from each ministry, including wishes we already have and some new points.” And that became the first memo. (personal communication, September 8, 2016)

The COC already had public policy demands from early 1982 coming from discussions on Article 1, and those demands were expanded and further specified by Amersfoort’s Deliberation.

The institutionalized wing of the women’s movement contributed to the perception among the members of Amersfoort’s Deliberation that the government could become a policy partner. As Swiebel noted:

It [Amersfoort’s Deliberation] was, of course, begun in the short period of that Van Agt cabinet [Van Agt III cabinet]. And then we had this feeling like, “Hey, it’s true that you have to make compromises, but things are really possible.” The fact that Hedy d’Ancona became state secretary for emancipation and made a lot of progress and that Analysis of the “Woman Question” was published, which was totally radical, yes, that resulted in a feeling of, “We have to take a step further, and if we don’t do it now, then it will never happen.” (personal communication, August 24, 2016)

The women’s movement contributed to the feeling within the COC and Amersfoort’s Deliberation that change was possible and also inadvertently provided some members of Amersfoort’s Deliberation with technical knowledge on how to formulate public policy demands. Swiebel recalled:

I had been working at the Ministry of CRM, and the whole of emancipation policy moved from CRM to SZW when Hedy d’Ancona became state secretary in 1981. In other words, I had, as a civil servant coming from the movement, in this case the women’s movement, a great deal of insight into how that worked in The Hague and how you moved from social movement to policy. And a number of others who were in Amersfoort’s Deliberation had that as well from other perspectives, including Willemien [Ruygrok], who had always been very active in the Labor Party and the women’s movement. So that Amersfoort’s Deliberation was, well, not a copy of the women’s movement, but if you read that piece with those 70 or however many proposals, that was largely inspired by what we knew from the women’s emancipation movement regarding how to get the ministries to actually do something. (personal communication, August 24, 2016)

The context that had been created by the women’s movement and its institutionalization contributed to the COC seeing the Dutch government
as a potential policy partner, as it had also done for some migrant social movements (Shield, 2017), and provided a model for the members of Amersfoort’s Deliberation of how to write the policy brief.

The policy brief produced by Amersfoort’s Deliberation had been ready during the end of the Van Agt III cabinet, but as that cabinet had already officially resigned, the COC waited to send the memo until the new Lubbers I cabinet was formed. Amersfoort’s Deliberation’s policy brief titled *Homosexuality in Government Policy* was sent to Prime Minister Lubbers (CDA) and the rest of the ministers in 1983.

The COC made explicit appeals to Article 1 of the constitution in its policy brief. Even in the absence of an AWGB, Amersfoort’s Deliberation, on behalf of the COC, argued that it is the government’s responsibility to act according to its own principles and norms of nondiscrimination outlined in the constitution, writing, “If it is the case that Article 1 of the constitution is also applicable to homosexuals, then heterosexism is in violation of the constitution, and the government must carry out clear and targeted policy” (NVIH COC, 1983a, p. 2). The COC’s demand for government policy was not immediately granted by the government. The white paper *Government Policy and Homosexuality* (Tweede Kamer, 1985–1986) was only presented three and a half years later, after players with positions in a number of political arenas joined forces to pressure the government to develop policy on homosexuality. The government invested in public policy on homosexuality beginning in 1986 (Davidson, 2015), and by the end of the first wave of coordinated policy on homosexuality in 1992, most of the policy goals demanded by the COC had been achieved (Davidson, 2018).

**Discussion**

In the case studied, the government came to be seen as a potential policy partner through a history of successful interactions with government actors and spillover effects from femocrat institutional activists. Ultimately, certain government players influenced the gay/lesbian movement’s expansion of its goals to include a public policy strategy. The violence that occurred in Amersfoort in 1982 took place within the context of a much longer history of gay/lesbian movement–government interactions. The conditions for the COC to expand its goals to include a public policy strategy were laid before “Amersfoort” occurred, and using those conditions as a foundation, the COC further expanded its policy strategy in the wake of Amersfoort.

The COC has engaged in a strategy of identity-building ever since its founding, and from the 1960s onward, the COC has also engaged in the legal strategy of fighting discriminatory legislation. Despite the Dutch government’s lack of a coordinated vision or policy on homosexuality during the 1960s and 1970s, the
COC was able to facilitate a number of legal changes. Beginning in the late 1960s, the COC’s strategy became an issue of debate within the larger social movement and resulted in the formation of new advocacy groups and a growth of the number of organizations comprising the gay/lesbian movement. During the mid- to late-1970s, the COC, in line with the rest of the gay/lesbian movement, prioritized a strategy of cultural change. During that period, the COC was also able to establish subsidy relationships with some government players.

At the end of the 1970s, the institutionalized wing of the women’s movement, through the EK and the ICE, involved the COC in a discussion on whether or not to include homosexuality as a category protected from discrimination by Article 1 of the Dutch constitution. The EK and the ICE lent legitimacy to the COC by including it as an official partner in discussions on Article 1. In their advice to the government to include homosexuality as a category protected from discrimination, the EK and the ICE facilitated the COC’s expansion of its imagined potential relationship with the government, as the government was made potentially responsible for combating the discrimination of gays and lesbians in Dutch society. As a result of the institutionalized wing of the women’s movement, which included the COC in discussions on making homosexuality a category protected from discrimination, the COC began pursuing a policy strategy in January 1982.

When the Pink Front was confronted with violence in Amersfoort in June 1982, the COC expanded and prioritized its policy strategy and more actively lobbied the Dutch government to introduce public policy on homosexuality. The violence in Amersfoort convinced the COC to further prioritize its public policy demands. Another spillover effect of the women’s movement on gay/lesbian advocacy was the technical knowledge of how to formulate policy demands, which was garnered by civil servants working for the institutionalized wing of the women’s movement, who were also members of the COC and Amersfoort’s Deliberation. In its policy brief, the COC also explicitly mobilized protection under Article 1 of the Dutch constitution. While the COC expanded its action repertoire to include a public policy strategy, it continued to pursue strategies of identity-building, legal change, and cultural change and could mix those strategies in its advocacy.

While Amersfoort did not initiate the COC’s adoption of a public policy strategy, it led the COC to expand and prioritize its policy demands and more actively engage the government to secure the attainment of those goals. In the wake of Amersfoort, the COC demanded that the government follow through on its promise of legal equality based on its interpretation of Article 1, even in the absence of AWGB legislation, by implementing proactive policies to fight the discrimination of gays and lesbians and support the gay/lesbian movement. The COC could not have imagined in the early 1980s that by expanding its action repertoire to include a public policy strategy, it
would start down a path that, more than 30 years later, would result in it becoming a “strategic partner” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and advocating for LGBT rights on behalf of and together with the Dutch government throughout the world (Tweede Kamer, 2014–2015).

Conclusion

The gay/lesbian movement may be a typical identity movement, but it is also much more than that. Gay/lesbian social movement organizations can pursue a number of strategies simultaneously. While an identity strategy was constant throughout the history of the organization studied here, that organization was able to combine an identity strategy with a legal strategy, a strategy of cultural change, and a public policy strategy.

In the case studied, the gay/lesbian movement organization expanded its action repertoire to include public policy goals due to three factors. First, the organization had a number of previous encounters with government players that were successful, particularly in legal arenas. Second, the organization was able to build mutually beneficial relationships with a number of government players. Not all government organizations were facilitative, but some institutional allies were able to provide subsidies for and legitimacy to the gay/lesbian movement organization. Third, and also in collaboration with institutional allies from the women’s movement, a constitutional change was brought about that promised government protection against the discrimination of gays and lesbians. That new government responsibility made the government a potential partner in fighting the discrimination of gays and lesbians, and the movement organization adopted a public policy strategy. An occurrence of violence made the organization even more resolved in pursuing the public policy strategy it had already adopted.

Government institutions are powerful players that control vast amounts of resources. Under the three conditions mentioned above, gay/lesbian organizations may be able to adopt a public policy strategy and, ultimately, partner with government institutions in the development and implementation of public policy on homosexuality. If gay/lesbian movement organizations can partner with government actors in the public policy arena, they can work together to change society to become more accepting of gays and lesbians.

Notes

1. This study will primarily refer to gays and lesbians. While the movement is currently often referred to as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans* (LGBT) movement, bisexual and trans* issues played a very marginal role in the period of the movement’s history analyzed in this article. Some authors include the B and the T driven by a politics of inclusion that
emphasizes solidarity. I do not address those letters, as the issues they represent have been excluded from much of the movement. That choice is not motivated by a rejection of the politics of inclusion but was made to avoid making false claims to an inclusivity that was overwhelmingly absent during the period of analysis.

2. In line with the language used in the COC’s 1983 policy brief Homosexuality in Government Policy and the government’s white paper titled Government Policy and Homosexuality, I use the term homosexuality throughout this article. As is the case in the policy documents, the term refers in this article to both gay men and lesbian women.

3. Nederlandse Vereniging tot Integratie van Homoseksualiteit COC.

4. A white paper is “an official paper outlining the government’s policy on a matter to be brought before parliament” (White paper, n.d.).

5. In its policy brief, the COC did not include any policy demands regarding HIV/AIDS. Attention for HIV/AIDS was ultimately included in the government’s 1986 white paper Homosexuality in Government Policy, but HIV/AIDS policy was separated from public policy on homosexuality from 1987.


8. Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum; in use from 1948, it became the official name of the organization in 1949 and was used until 1964.


10. Nederlandse Vereniging van Homofielen C.O.C.


12. Schorsterstichting.


14. For further reading on Schorer, see Van der Meer (2007).

15. The organization lasted from 1912–1940.

16. Partij van de Arbeid.

17. Before the Stonewall Riots occurred in the United States, the COC had engaged in protests at the Dutch Parliament and was noted in the parliamentary minutes.


19. The Den Uyl cabinet was formed by a coalition between the PvdA, the KVP, the Anti-revolutionary Party (ARP), the PPR, and D66 and lasted from May 11, 1973 to December 19, 1977.

20. COC-legerprojekt.


23. The Van Agt I cabinet was formed by a coalition between the CDA and the VVD and lasted from December 19, 1977 to September 11, 1981.


25. The Dutch currency was then the guilder, also known as the florin, and represented with the sign: f.


27. Interdepartementale Coördinatiecommissie Emancipatiebeleid.


29. Nederlandse Gezinsraad.

30. Algemene wet gelijke behandeling.

31. That point of contention resulted in the AWGB being debated for roughly 15 years and led to the codification of the AWGB in 1994 that included an exception allowing for the discrimination of gays/lesbians in some circumstances (in particular in Christian schools). That exception would only be removed from the law in 2015.
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