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Normaal is gek genoeg: Homonormativity & Inclusivity in Amsterdam's LGBTQ Community

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Normaal is gek genoeg:

Homonormativity & Inclusivity in Amsterdam's LGBTQ Community

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SIT Study Abroad, Fall 2014



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Abstract

This paper examines the mechanics of inclusivity and exclusion within a homonormative framework in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) spaces in modern-day Amsterdam. Using interviews from five participants involved in various capacities with LGBT/Q spaces in the city, the following paper asserts that the divide between the LGB and TQ communities in the city is predicated, in large part, on the openness in each community towards nonnormative sexual and (especially) gender expressions. In conclusion, it offers suggestions for further inquiry into intersectional inclusion and exclusion factors in these spaces, as well as an examination of the pronounced political divide between LGB and TQ spaces in Amsterdam.

Key Words: LGBTQ •homonormativity •gender •lesbian •gay •bisexual •transgender
•queer spaces •queer

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Introduction

The Netherlands is viewed worldwide as a bastion of tolerance, especially for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals. Amsterdam, in particular, holds a reputation as a gay capital. However, a drive towards assimilation has become commonplace for Dutch LGBTQ people, promoting a model of heteronormativity—or, in this case, homonormativity—in order to exist peacefully and quietly in Dutch society. For LGBTQ individuals, including queer, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals, The Netherlands' model puts into practice the Dutch phrase, *Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg*—"act normal, as that is crazy enough" (Robinson, 2012).

In order to be tolerated in and outside of the LGBTQ community, members of this community must adhere to a normative, and preferably binary, expression of their sexual and gender identities. This conundrum has led me to my research question: How does compulsory homonormative assimilation in Amsterdam's LGBTQ community affect the inclusivity of this community; in other words, who is 'allowed' or 'wanted' in the community, and who is left out?

Justification

My interest in this topic stems from the dissonance I perceived between reputation and reality almost as soon as I arrived in Amsterdam. The city touts itself as something of a gay haven, a place where anything goes and anyone of any sexuality can find a good time. However, upon talking to members of Amsterdam's much smaller *queer* community, it was evident that a "gay capital" is really only a good time if one is gay—and white, cisgender, middle-class, etc. In seeking out and meeting queer Amsterdammers disillusioned by the state of the LGBTQ landscape, I became interested in examining the divide between a mainstream, world-renowned lesbian, gay, and bisexual (though mostly gay male) culture in Amsterdam and a far smaller and more radical culture of queerness. As a queer, transmasculine visitor to the city, where might I find a place during my time here? Where are other people like me represented, and where are they not accommodated, or even not welcome? These personal motivations have fueled my inquiry into an aspect of Amsterdam's LGBTQ landscape that appears to be widely known but largely unexplored. My intention in presenting this research is to provide a starting point for continued exploration of the nuances of Amsterdam's modern-day LGBTQ spaces and how The Netherlands' culture of homonormativity continues to shape inclusivity even in the city's queerest spaces.

Literature Review

The current shape of the LGBT landscape in Amsterdam results from the confluence of several factors. As Hekma and Duyvendak (2011) argue, by the mid-twentieth century, The Netherlands became recognized as “the most liberal nation in the world on issues of sexual morality:”

Ever since the ‘sexual revolution’ of the 1960s, the Netherlands has been at the forefront of championing erotic freedoms. Amsterdam became internationally renowned as a city of sex, drugs and rock & roll—the gay and sex capital of the world, wide open to the celebration of erotic pleasures. The change for the Netherlands was dramatic: from a society ruled by Christian political parties and a conservative morality to a nation where sex could be enjoyed by locals and foreigners alike. (p. 625)

In the time since it has embraced the sexual revolution, The Netherlands has operated in a post-liberation framework: one in which the country touts itself as a modern, progressive beacon of sexual freedom, especially for its lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) citizens.

However, LGBT acceptance in The Netherlands exists within a prominent framework of homonormativity. Duggan (2002) defines homonormativity as “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 179). Though she refers to homonormativity in relation to American neoliberal gay politics as embodied by the Log Cabin Republicans, Duggan’s definition is applicable to the “depoliticized gay culture” (*Ibid.*) so prevalent in Amsterdam and throughout The Netherlands.

Duyvendak (1996) offers context for the lack of radical politicization among LGBT citizens in The Netherlands: Contrary to the trajectory of national responses to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s in countries like France and the United States, where radical activist groups like AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) formed in the wake of continued silence and homophobic stigmatization of people with AIDS, “the Dutch authorities were content to play a supporting role” in the Dutch fight against AIDS (Duyvendak 1996, p. 423). As a result, the perceived lack of need for Dutch gays to politicize has been positioned in The Netherlands as preferable to “the radicalization of the gay movement elsewhere in the world...homosexuals did not have to take to the streets in the Netherlands—after all, the campaign against the epidemic was in their hands” (*Ibid.*, p. 424). For the past three decades or so, the gay Dutch community has mitigated any allegiance to queer politics, having no perceived need to do so. Coupled with the post-liberation ideology seen in the Dutch LGB(T) community after the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2001, LGBT integration in The Netherlands is situated perfectly within Duggan’s definition of homonormativity, being both “depoliticized...[and] anchored in domesticity” (p.179).

However, this integration into Dutch society is not available to everyone equally. In order to be tolerated, Dutch LGBT individuals can be publicly “out” as long as they adhere to a normative—or, even better, an invisible—gay identity. In other words, one can be gay but must stop short of transgressing normative expectations of sexual practice and gender identity, at least in the public eye. The resulting drive to assimilate into a quietly gay identity puts into practice the common Dutch phrase *doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg*—“act normal, as that is crazy enough” (Robinson, 2012, p. 331).

Robinson locates gender as an integral and highly regulated facet of this normative framework. As heteronormativity is constructed and enforced around a strict gender binary with two discrete poles, homonormative society in The Netherlands follows suit, discouraging expressions of gender nonconformity that are often interpreted as expressions of non-normative sexualities, which should remain separate from the public sphere. Thus, sexuality and gender are conflated in the Dutch homonormative model, and both are regulated as a result:

Homonormativity does not challenge the gender binary, but rather, it uses gender as one of its main means to regulate sexual recognition. Gender nonconformity is socially read as being sexually nonnormative and as a way to flaunt one's sexuality in the public sphere (Keuzenkamp 2011; Buijs et al. 2011). To avoid stigmatization and to be seen as (homo) normal, one regulates and ingroup purifies the gender nonconformers. (Homo)normalization requires sexuality to remain private, rendering nonnormative gender expressions out of the public sphere. (333)

In this sense, acceptance both by the LGBT “community” and by (hetero)normative society in The Netherlands is predicated upon the imperative to *either* be invisible while otherwise fitting into “normal” (straight, cisgender) Dutch society, *or* to render oneself visible and visibly “other.”

Attaining acceptance with these terms and conditions of regulated identity is especially problematic for transgender and gender non-conforming Dutch citizens. “Within this homonormative discourse, transgender individuals are always rendered abject,” continues Robinson (2012). “Homonormativity seems to gain its recognition and power of normalization through the assimilation of gays and lesbians, and there may be no room for transgender people to assimilate under this model” (p. 333). Trans individuals in The Netherlands must choose between an invisible transgender identity and

a recognized, and therefore transgressive, identity. To opt for the latter is to be ostracized from normative Dutch society as well as from a normative Dutch LGB(T) identity:

For transgender people in the Netherlands, blending in and being perceived as simply male or female allow [*sic*] them to achieve recognition by society and to be able to sustain viable lives. This recognition requires that transgender people reify the gender binary by becoming “passable” men and women, not something else or in between. Therefore, normalization and recognition causes self-regulation of being invisible and “acting normal,” which ultimately leaves heteronormativity and its sociosexual arrangement unquestioned and intact (Hekma 1998, 2004).

Not “passing” in accordance with a strictly-upheld gender binary thus becomes a liability for trans and gender-variant people beyond just finding a place within the Dutch LGB(T) community; it also positions them as a perceived threat to the public respectability of that community.

Dutch homonormativity creates a situation in which some forms of visibility are championed over others. To be acknowledged as a “normal” Dutch gay (not bisexual, lesbian, or transgender) person is to be a token of assimilation: normatively integrated into Dutch society *in addition* to being openly gay. Being visible in a way that does not align with the values and expectations of that social normativity positions one as an outlier, as Martina (2012) explores:

...only certain types of ‘being visible’ and ‘speaking out’ are considered ‘gewoon’ and ‘normaal.’ Both ‘gewoon’ and ‘normaal’ function as disciplinary, normalizing techniques. If you’re not ‘gewoon’ you’re pathologized. Being ‘gewoon’ ...is a sign of belonging, of being ‘één van ons,’ *one of us*. (n/p)

To be “one of us” is generally to *not* be a number of other things: queer; transgender; gender-variant; radical; Muslim; of color. The invisibility of various queer and trans identities in The Netherlands silences these identities for the benefit of maintaining a

façade of sameness, a unified idea of what it is to be gay ‘appropriately.’ In presenting this *one* gay identity as desirable and respectable, and therefore worthy of integration in the public sphere, other queer identities are thus problematized as either not existing or being deviant while the resulting racism, sexism, transphobia, and xenophobia rampant in a collective, socially-sanctioned gay identity can also be rendered invisible. These dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are reflected in the divide between mainstream, homonormative LGB spaces and transgressive or marginalized T/Q spaces in Amsterdam.

Methodology

For this research, I interviewed five Amsterdam residents who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, etc. Participants were found through a variety of channels: two were contacted by my ISP advisor, two were contacted by my host mom, and one offered to be interviewed at the ISP speed date dinner. All participants were consenting adults over the age of eighteen. My participants were interviewed one time each, with the average interview lasting forty-five minutes. The longest interview was seventy-six minutes; the shortest lasted about sixteen. My standard interview questions can be found in Appendix B: Interview guide. Interviews were recorded using the Voice Memo app on an iPhone and have since been deleted from that device; they temporarily reside on my computer, which is password-protected. All interview recordings have been kept confidential and will be destroyed upon submission of this paper.

All five of my interviewees were alerted to their right to withdraw from this study, with four participants signing a written consent form and one participant giving verbal consent. While only one of my participants opted to use a pseudonym, all five were given the option to choose one as they saw fit. Interviewees had complete control over selecting their preferred interview location. Participants also received follow-up emails after our interviews so that they had the chance to clarify information that I had recorded in the interviews. Upon submission of this paper, all interviewees will be given the option of having an electronic copy sent to them.

Positionality & Limitations

I must acknowledge several aspects of my positionality and the limitations presented therein that no doubt have had an impact on this study. First, I am a queer, transmasculine individual. This means that my interviews with participants who are cisgender or who otherwise do not identify as transgender went differently compared to the interviews with people who conversely do not identify as cisgender. Everyone's experience of queer and/or trans identity is different; however, sharing this common ground with some of my interviewees provided a basis of mutual experience and understanding lacking from interviews in which this commonality was not present. The same would be true were these interviews merely conversations and not part of a greater research project, though the implications, of course, are different. While I have made an effort to present my findings in an unbiased manner, my identity as a queer male person will have informed my research.

Additionally, I am an American student abroad whose first language is English and who has rudimentary Dutch language skills. I come from a country and an academic discipline in which the notion of queerness is much more widely implemented than in The Netherlands. Attempting to interview Amsterdammers from a variety of backgrounds (both academic and non-academic) about their definitions of and experiences around queerness, a concept that is quite literally foreign to many Dutch people, in a language that was not their first, posed a unique set of challenges in some interviews, and in some sense or another, this will also have informed the results of my research.

My greatest caveat for readers and future researchers is this: I am white, as were all five of my interviewees. This aspect of my sampling and research was entirely circumstantial. However, I will be the first to acknowledge that this poses enormous consequences for the results of my research, especially as this paper explores inclusivity in the context of LGBT/Q spaces in Amsterdam and Dutch people of color are arguably impacted by these dynamics more than most when inhabiting or not inhabiting those spaces. I encourage readers to examine my suggestions for further research at the end of this paper as a basis for continued inquiry into this topic as it pertains to the intersecting experiences of queer people of color in Amsterdam's queer and LGB/T scenes.

It must also be said that this is by no means a definitive investigation of homonormativity and inclusivity in the LGBTQ landscape of Amsterdam, nor does it serve as a firsthand perspective. This is merely an honest attempt at an overview by someone not from this place. I have done my best to relay the experiences of my interviewees as they told them to me; in that sense, many collective years of navigating queer as well as mainstream LGBT spaces in Amsterdam are documented by this paper. However, my research was conducted over the course of a month and my knowledge, my experiences, of Amsterdam has been limited to the three months I've lived here. The analysis presented herein merely scratches the surface of the dynamics of inclusivity and exclusion within the LGBTQ landscape of Amsterdam. With that said, I will now present the experiences of the real authorities on this topic: my respondents.

“There are a thousand ways to be gay.”

Stephanie¹

For some Amsterdammers, the city really is a gay capital, a place where one can truly feel safe and comfortable to be oneself. In general, Stephanie feels that it is possible to express one’s gender identity and sexual orientation freely almost anywhere in Amsterdam. She rarely feels ostracized in any way because of her identity as a lesbian. “Sometimes I realize that I’m an exception,” she comments. “But normally I don’t.”

She also indicates that even in spaces not designated specifically for lesbians, she perceives a general acceptance of LGBT Amsterdammers, trans people included. Stephanie comments, “Also...not in lesbian things, but also in the normal things, it’s very open in Amsterdam, I think. Not everywhere, but there are a lot of places here where you are always welcome. And that’s why I live in Amsterdam....” As a quite privileged member of the LGBT community, Stephanie exhibits great ease in navigating the spaces carved out for people like her.

When I define homonormativity as the idea that there is only one way to be gay, Stephanie interjects, “No way. No. [laughs] There are a thousand ways to be gay.” She says that she does not perceive any pressure to conform to a certain gay identity in Amsterdam, which is not the case in other places she has been; notably, on a recent trip to San Francisco, she noticed that lesbians have one of two options to conform to. “You are more like, manly, or more feminine,” she says. “And here you have mixed everything, and yeah, it’s not [those] stereotypes.”

¹ Stephanie is a thirty-five year old cisgender woman who identifies as a lesbian.

Stephanie's main involvement with the Amsterdam LGBT community is through sports clubs, primarily Smashing Pink, an LGB-centric tennis club, and a women's soccer club. She feels that she can comfortably and safely express her lesbian identity "almost everywhere in Amsterdam," but her preferred spot for socializing is the Café Saarein. Saarein has been her go-to since she came out of the closet about fifteen years ago. She appreciates the diversity of events there, as well as the welcoming atmosphere of the space, which she says is open to everyone: "You have, like, transgender people, you have, like, gay men, gay women, straight people...." Stephanie describes Saarein as "the most open pub in the city. Everyone, everyone is welcome. Old people who live in the neighborhood are sitting there as well. Like a grandpa of seventy is sitting there between the lesbian girls."

When asked how open Saarein is for trans people, Stephanie replies, "Very open. There are special nights for transgender people as well. Or there were, and they're still coming, yeah, when I go there, I think every time there are a couple transgender people. Yeah, it's very open and it's normal." I ask the same question about people who appear androgynous or "alternative," which is to say, visibly queer. To this, Stephanie says, "I do notice people in the Saarein who are androgynous and alternative. They are treated very normal. *Those people* are not everywhere treated that way [emphasis mine]. In the alternative scene it will be good, I expect." Here, she makes a distinction between the spaces she inhabits, like Saarein, and a separate, "alternative" scene more open to gender variance—to people not like her.

When I ask Stephanie for her personal definition of queerness, she seems unfamiliar with the concept. "It's, uh, a boy dressing like a girl, isn't it? I'm not sure.

I'm not sure, I don't know." She goes on to say, "I think it's something with he/she. [laughs] I don't know what, exactly." She is also unfamiliar with the term 'cisgender.' She appears to conflate being queer with being transgender, basing the concept in transgressive gender presentation and identity. Regardless, she conceptualizes queerness as something different from her; a community and identity of which she is not a part.

It's safe to assume that Stephanie's comfort navigating most spaces in Amsterdam as a lesbian stems from the fact that she is a white, cisgender woman who holds a job with the city and fits neatly into a homonormative ideal of what a lesbian "should" look like. When I ask her if she thinks most people are quick to assume that she is a lesbian, she replies, "I'm not aware of that most of the times. Sometimes I tell people that I've a girlfriend. Sometimes they already thought, sometimes they are surprised." In this sense, even in situations where she does not "pass" as straight, Stephanie does not often experience discrimination or adversity based on her lesbian identity.

Her understanding of trans identities seems indicative of the way trans and gender-variant people are regarded in spaces throughout Amsterdam. In describing a friend of hers, Stephanie makes the following comment:

I play soccer in a soccer team, and it's a very open club, and there are also people [who are] transgender, and it's happening in the team, and...there it's also very normal and it's cool. So, in my old team—now I'm in a new team—there was a girl, she wants to be a he, and she did all the operations and stuff like that, and now she can't play with us anymore because it's a he. It's not possible with the rules...you know? But she is still, every time, on the birthdays, and.... [CITE]

Listening to her relay this story, I notice a few things. First, it seems clear that she does not intend to misgender² her friend; in fact, she frames his transition as a very normal and

² See Appendix A: Definition of Terms.

well-received process among his teammates.³ It is worth pointing out, though, that Stephanie perceives Amsterdam's LGBT spaces to generally be welcoming to trans people even though she—and, presumably, other people like her (which is to say, cisgender Amsterdammers who are themselves either lesbian, gay, or bisexual or accepting of LGBT acquaintances)—is unintentionally insensitive in talking about trans people.

In a post-liberation, assimilationist framework, to be welcomed and ostensibly integrated into LGBT/Q space is enough. This is much easier to do when one additionally fits the description desired by a homonormative society. For people like Stephanie, who are not associated with Amsterdam's queer scene, who are cisgender, and who are largely normative members of the city's LGBT community, acceptance and comfort within LGBT spaces is more accessible than for Amsterdammers who do not hold these privileges.

³ It is important to note here that Dutch is Stephanie's first language. While her English is perfectly fine, it is possible that misgendering her friend could be a result of our conducting the interview in a language she does not often need to use.

“...if you really think ‘inclusive,’ then everything of me belongs there.”

Marten⁴

Amsterdam is considered a gay capital, *especially* for cisgender gay men. However, even for the people for whom the “gay scene” is made, the city’s offerings do not fully accommodate nuanced sexual and gender identities. Marten identifies as a gay man, but does not consider his sexual orientation to be the most important part of himself. “Being gay is not so interesting for me,” he says. “It’s like, it’s my sexual preference, but [*diminutive noise*]*—who cares?*”

For Marten, gender identity is far more salient. He elaborates:

I consider myself as a man, and as gay, and at the same time I know that I’m not. So that’s, yeah. What I said, you know, especially, I think my gender identity is for me much more important than my sexual identity because I think as being a man is much more visible and is much more of a struggle for me, especially the way I look, at six foot seven so people think of me, that’s the Viking and the [...] guy, and whatever, you know, and then I think whoa, you know, you have no idea how much I have been fighting.

Finding like-minded individuals open to discussions and inclusion of various gender identities in gay male spaces proves difficult.

What I see is that a lot of gay men, especially, they try to organize not that inclusive....They are quite exclusive. They’re mostly white, they’re mostly in the same age range, they are not really very much interested in the other cultures that are in the neighborhood.

Often, Marten finds more fulfillment in spaces carved out by and for transgender men than in those inhabited primarily by cisgender gay men because “they really give me a lot of chance to reflect on my masculinity and my femininity and so that’s, for me that’s very interesting.” He also finds like-minded individuals through his involvement in bicultural

⁴ Marten is fifty-nine. For the past year or so, he has been employed by the COC as a coordinator of neighborhood activities. He is also very active in several bicultural LGBT organizations in Amsterdam-Oost, where he lives.

organizations in his neighborhood, though he adds that these groups are also part of a “straight bicultural world.”

Marten notes that younger people are far more aware of the diversity of LGBTQIA identities than are gay men, especially men around his age. Because of this generational divide, he feels at odds with the exclusivity of the spaces for gay men over forty in Amsterdam, but also seems to feel caught between the scene for older gay men and a younger queer scene. As a result of his perceived status as an outsider in several communities throughout the city, as well as his experience founding new neighborhood organizations, “it’s more and more like, okay, then I make the ground where I belong. Which is quite outside the Dutch society.” In this way, Marten contributes to improving the diversity and inclusivity of Amsterdam for himself as well as for other people by creating new spaces for people who need them.

Marten regards inclusivity as an important aspect of creating and maintaining spaces for everyone. I ask him how he defines the term ‘inclusivity,’ and he has this to say:

For me, ‘inclusive’ means, like, everything that I am belongs to this society and this society belongs to everything I am. And that’s, for me, very important. And those scenes, I don’t find them a lot, but I create them. That’s what makes me happy. So then I go and see, okay, how can I create a group of friends and work, and so.

He mentions, too, that inclusivity in the city’s spaces must include every aspect of a person, not just sexual orientation or gender identity. “I really like the word ‘inclusive,’ because I think if you really think inclusive, then everything of me belongs there,” he says. This comment underlines the need for addressing and accommodating identities at the intersections: Marten’s primary work is with bicultural Amsterdammers, including

lesbian and gay Muslim residents. In order to truly improve inclusivity in LGBT spaces in Amsterdam, more attention must be paid to the comfort and safety needs of multicultural LGBT people in Amsterdam as well. “We need to be more bicultural,” Marten remarks, “and if we are more bicultural, the sexual diversity will also be involved, and the gender diversity as well.”

Marten views a younger generation of LGBTQ people as the key to more inclusive spaces in Amsterdam:

DH: How do you think that inclusivity can be improved?

MB: I think by giving more space to the younger generation. *[laughs]* Yeah, I think the older generation doesn't do it anymore, you know? Some exceptions, like I'm one of the crazy guys who thinks that it's really important to mix. And there are more. I'm not the only one, there are much more around me. But I think we really need the younger generation to take over. And you know, only the thing that now, it's not just the gay or lesbian community, but the LGBTQIA, whatever, and I think the more people notice that, that this whole range of sexual and gender diversity is there, and I think the younger generation sees that, the more it takes over and it also gives a more, the face of the community.

Speaking about Canal Pride, Amsterdam's annual gay pride parade, he notes, “when I see some of the boats where the young people are, those boats are really mixed. So that's my kind of hope, and I think, you know, the older generation just has to step back and let the younger generation take over.”

Marten also sees queerness as a vehicle for improved inclusivity because of the seemingly limitless possibilities contained within that term. I ask him how he defines the word ‘queer,’ to which he replies:

I think that's the problem with queer. *[laughs]* I think it's more like, don't define me. This is me. So for me to...yeah. Queer is kind of a contradiction in identity. Because it's a possibility to get out of these identities and to just be me in whatever form or way or sexuality or gender pronunciation I want. So I like that whole thought. It's, I think, gives more possibilities.

Despite viewing queerness as a starting point for more diverse possibilities, Marten also acknowledges the tension between desiring to be visible as a queer person and the need to be integrated into Dutch society. Through speaking to his friends at LGBTQ Amsterdam, most of whom are trans men, he has deduced that homonormativity in The Netherlands serves a regulatory function for people who might not otherwise fit into a normative mold:

...I also see that, for example, the transgender movement and especially the—I know now since a couple of years quite some guys who are transgender, and they also say, ‘yeah, but we, first we need to make our transgender move to being a trans man.’ And so they like the queer thing somehow in the middle, like, it’s catalyzing this energy, but at the same time they’re like, no, but I really need and I want to be involved with other trans men to see how we do it. And I also see this, the movement of the people with the intersexual [*sic*] condition, they also have something like, *we still have to get our place*. And if we are too much in the queer, we are not seen. [emphasis mine]

Of note here is the double-bind faced by LGBTQ individuals in The Netherlands, as Marten highlights above: one can either be invisible as a queer person within the queer community by assimilating within a homonormative identity—by finding one’s “place”—or one can choose to be visible as a queer or otherwise non-normative individual and thus be rendered invisible in Dutch society.

Regardless, Marten believes that “the queer movement, for as far as it’s a movement, it’s kind of questioning all these things, and I think that’s really nice and good.” He takes comfort in knowing that he is not alone in thinking this:

...that’s nice to know that there’s a big group inside The Netherlands who is thinking in the same...it’s not a big group, but there’s a group and you can get involved in that, and that’s, for me, is very interesting. And then, you know, sometimes I go to this transgender café [LGBTQ Amsterdam] and sometimes I go to other places and I’m like, oh, you know, there’s more people who don’t belong, who are excluded in a way or in many ways.

Because of his involvement with multicultural Amsterdammers, some of whom identify as lesbian or gay, Marten also acknowledges that the inclusivity of the city's spaces needs to be improved in more ways than one. Working together with other people who don't find representation or like minds in Amsterdam's LGBTQ spaces, Marten has high hopes for a more inclusive Amsterdam: "I'm quite positive about that future in that way."

“...there’s always gonna be something that gets set outside...”

Juno⁵

Finding spaces in Amsterdam that are open to queer and gender-variant identities can be a challenge. Even harder to find are queer spaces that are not constructed around a cis-centric idea of what queerness can look like. The clearest embodiment of this dynamic in Amsterdam may be De Trut. De Trut is a collective of twenty-one members who manage a fund that distributes money to LGBT causes. The collective also oversees a physical club, maintained as a safe queer space, where its Sunday-night parties see full-capacity crowds.

Juno, a member of the collective and long-time worker in the space, notes that when De Trut was founded, “the idea was to make a safe queer space. To do whatever you want.” The club’s rules reflect this mission, and have served as a template for other similar spaces in Amsterdam:

If you want to take your clothes off, that’s fine. It used to happen a lot more. We don’t have a lot of standards in that respect, so actually the more crazy, the better. We don’t let people take photos in there, so there’s no telephones, either. So if you take out your telephone even to tell [the time]...we actually ask people to turn them all off at the door. So we try to make a safe space so people can go loose. I mean, that’s the idea.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of De Trut is its rule discouraging opposite-sex affection.

According to Juno, “We do not welcome straight-acting behavior. So if someone who’s visibly male kisses someone visibly female, that would not be looked well upon.”

Essentially, “opposite-sex” behavior is not allowed, and straight individuals are unwelcome in the club, though they are technically allowed to enter.

⁵ Juno is forty-five years old. She is a cisgender woman who identifies as a butch dyke, and lives in Amsterdam with her wife.

This rule serves as a point of contention, both for De Trut's patrons and for some in the collective. "I don't like rules that you can't enforce and I don't like rules that have a lot of grey areas, which I think that one does," says Juno. "But we have visibly above the door, 'Queers and dykes only.'"⁶

De Trut's policies can be seen as an answer to the often unmet need for safe queer spaces in Amsterdam. In a city where the proper way to be queer is to be quiet, a queer-only club promoting a safe space to "go loose" is a radical idea. However, the static nature of De Trut's standards also reflects the dominant mentality in the time it was founded—the club space was originally established nearly three decades ago—as well as the dominant mindset held throughout The Netherlands in regard to gender identity (Trut Fonds, accessed 29 November 2014). Juno's justification for the no-straight rule highlights De Trut's zeitgeist:

These rules were set up quite a long time ago *when it was much more, very clear boundaries*, and I think also with, also young people today, they're also much more fluid in some respect. So I think that's an interesting one and people just don't talk about it anymore, because it's just awkward. But that is actually one of our rules. [emphasis mine]

Conflict arises between who the space is for and who is "allowed" to inhabit that space. The result of De Trut's rule prohibiting straight behavior models the cis-centric strictures on queer identities found nearly everywhere in the city.

It is clear that the goal of the rule is ostensibly to keep "straight people" out of what is meant to be a queer space. The tacit implication of the rule is that it prohibits *cisgender* opposite-sex affection; however, it also affects trans people as well as queer people who show affection to a person perceived as being of the "opposite" sex as them

⁶ To the best of my knowledge, the sign above the door reads, "Faggots and Dykes Only."

within a binary mentality. Juno elaborates that while De Trut is welcoming to trans and gender-variant people, the no-straight-behavior rule has been a problem with regards to the inclusivity of the collective's events:

DH: How welcoming do you think De Trut is to trans people? Or to, I guess you could extend that to anyone who isn't cisgender.

JG: That's a hard question because of that rule. Because that's a weird rule. So that, that could end up having problems with trans identity, of course. I wouldn't say...they're definitely not anti-, of course, but I wouldn't say...we don't get a lot of trans people, actually, that I know of. So maybe in that respect we're not.

It feels safe to assume that the lack of trans visibility in this space can be attributed to a rule that serves to exclude many trans people from expressing themselves with the same freedom afforded to lesbian, gay, and queer cisgender patrons. The rule's impact also extends to patrons who do not identify as trans, but who are cisgender and bisexual. It can also be a sticking point for club-goers whose gender expression, or even whose mode of dress on a given night, will be read by, and thus policed by, members of the collective in situations where acts perceived as "straight behavior" are witnessed.

Juno remarks that the crowd De Trut usually draws is not what she would classify as "alternative." Describing De Trut's patrons, she says:

Our clientele, like the people who come, that's also a sticking point for us, is not a really alternative crowd, in some way. I mean, maybe they are, maybe it's so different because they're young, but they're quite a different group than us....So it's quite a different scene, the people that come there and actually come every week and to actually the people who run it.

When I ask what she means by alternative, Juno clarifies:

JG: ...I think you have also then political queers and non-, and so that's more the differentiation that I see happening. That's what I think is...[trails off]

DH: And so is that what you mean by 'alternative spaces,' that there is more of a sort of politicized scene that resides in those spaces?

JG: Yeah, that's what I—I think the group that I'm very, like that I'm part of, that like runs the Spellbound, De Trut, active in the Homomonument, the people who run the Vrankrijk, it's actually kind of a small group of quite alternative people

and then there's of course a lot of people who come who aren't really political. Or don't seem to be. Maybe they're active in something else. But I think it's much more mainstream.

For Juno, the distinction between “mainstream” and “alternative” LGBTQ spaces resides in the politicization, or lack thereof, represented within them. A space like Vrankrijk, which is explicitly centered on anti-(homo)nationalist⁷ queer politics, draws a slightly different audience from other notable queer spaces in town, De Trut included.

Juno appears to see a connection, too, between the (queer) political leanings of spaces in Amsterdam and the visibility of queer identity among these spaces' clientele. People who come to De Trut on Sunday nights do not seem to present visibly queer in a way that Juno recognizes or in the way she feels herself to be:

I work in a shop, I work in a bike shop so sometimes these young women come up to me and say, 'oh, you work at De Trut,' and I have no idea who they are. Because...they just look straight to me, that doesn't have any connection to my world.

Describing herself as “just a bit of a butch dyke, really. That's pretty much it. Run of the mill,” Juno sees very little representation of butch identities like hers in Amsterdam:

...one of the things—and I had a lot of jokes sometimes with Americans, particularly...a friend of mine, actually, was saying, when she was in Canada, she was like, saying, where's all the femme-y dykes, to her friend, and then when she came here she sent a letter back, said 'I've found them all, they're all in The Netherlands.' So it's a really different scene. There's actually not a real big butch visibility here. And I probably would think there's only quite a handful of people that I know that really identify in that way.

Comparing herself to other women who come to De Trut, she says, “...I feel like I'm much more stereotypical than they are, so in my world I feel like I'm quite identifiable in

⁷ See Appendix A: Definition of Terms.

who I am, I think that's quite visible, and I don't know if they are."⁸ In The Netherlands, the imperative to be straight-passing leaves little room for transgressive expressions of gender and sexuality.

De Trut was originally established as a safe queer space, perhaps the one place in Amsterdam where queer people are encouraged to "go loose." However, it is clear that the homonormative influence prevalent in Amsterdam's LGBT/Q spaces is felt both from the inside and the outside in De Trut, as reflected by the collective's static rules of conduct and the lack of "alternative" people frequenting the space. The interplay of safe space and inclusion is of particular note in examining the homonormativity of De Trut's standards of conduct. Speaking to the collective's rationale for maintaining the space as it does, Juno says:

That's the idea that straight people are not encouraged to come, because...only 230 people can come and it was made as a safe space for that. And of course to do that, if you set up rules to say who can come, there's always gonna be something that gets set outside that. So in some ways, to protect that space, they made rules that can be quite difficult....

In the case of De Trut, the demographic that gets "set outside" is, in part, the one most in need of a safe space in the city to be freely visible and queer.

⁸ Juno is not originally from The Netherlands; born in Ireland and raised in Australia, she has lived in Amsterdam for a total of ten years. Commenting on the cultural differences in queer visibility between Australia and The Netherlands, she says, "I also think culturally, I'm also from, a bit more like American/Australian culture where those things are much more visible."

“There is no solidarity in a meat market.”Emma⁹

The absence of welcoming spaces for queer and trans identities in The Netherlands is no doubt the product of the country’s homonormativity and binary conceptualization of gender. “This is cis country,” remarks Emma. “There are some successful examples here of a cis incarnation or like a cis...ideal of what a queer space might look like, or what gay spaces, or gay folks might be. And for most of my friends, it’s a completely irrelevant archetype.”

Emma helps maintain Vrankrijk, a locus of queer activism and explicitly anti-nationalist politics in an otherwise depoliticized LGBT landscape in Amsterdam. The idea behind Vrankrijk’s current incarnation is “creating a space for queers that is not a pick-up bar,” but rather, a platform for queer and trans issues and politics not found elsewhere in the city. “There is no solidarity in a meat market,” Emma asserts. “It’s a competition, isn’t it?” Vrankrijk was envisioned as a “third space” in which queerness could be enacted and discussed, a platform sorely lacking from the LGBT scene in Amsterdam until recently:

When I first moved here six years ago my guy friends here, they told me that men and women didn’t even spend time together in the queer community. So if you, you can imagine that there was no really even notion of ‘queer.’ And I of course never felt like I would ever fit into that. So, you know, the Vrankrijk was obviously also an opportunity to really create sort of a third space. Up until then it was only that there were girl bars and there were boy bars and I never felt like I was really comfortable in either.

⁹ Emma is 28 and originally from Queens, New York. They identify as queer. When asked about their preferred pronouns, they respond, “Yeah, um, it’s ‘choose your own adventure.’ I really don’t mind.” To avoid relegating their identity to strict binary terms, I have opted to use singular-they/them pronouns for Emma throughout this chapter.

By creating a space for queers that is neither hyper-sexualized nor hyper-gender-segregated, Vrankrijk fills a gap in the Amsterdam LGBT/Q scene detected by Emma and others dissatisfied by the city's limited offerings for queer people.

Emma characterizes the omnipresent influence of homonormativity in The Netherlands as the erasure of queer identities for the sake of 'passing' in normative society. "I can imagine for a lot of folks, it's incentivizing to pass," they explain. "To go back into this extreme on whatever end of the spectrum." In their words:

Here, the quietness is something that I think can become such a formidable silencer and obstacle. You can either be so close to straight looking that people will not notice you, which also means that if you move here you're lonely, you're not gonna meet queer people—I mean, how do you identify? What is the identifier? There's no spaces for you. You have to pass in polite society. So then there is only this sort of space of sexual deviance left. Yeah. So like that's still like a very 1975 construct of queer as sexual deviance. If you don't wanna pass or if you're just angry, like me, about that, then you can, yes, go to the other end of the spectrum, sure. But even then, people are patronizing about this. They're condescending. They think it's satisfying to tell you that they know something's different, you know?

They believe that the lack of inclusive gender-safe spaces in Amsterdam is reflective of Dutch society as a whole. Especially for trans people in Amsterdam, cis-centric queer spaces pose a huge obstacle to inclusivity, and more importantly, to safe spaces, as Emma reports:

Trans politics have absolutely no representation in this city whatsoever besides what we're doing [at Vrankrijk and related initiatives]. At all. And that's because we're the first people ever to actually put...a platform up for trans folks. You know? I mean, I have a very, very strong feeling that a lot of the times the folks that are even in our spaces, this is the first interaction they've ever had with trans folks.

Emma acknowledges that while they identify as queer, they absolutely benefit from straight-passing privilege in a way many trans and gender-variant people in Amsterdam cannot access. "Acceptability in Holland is entirely predicated on how close you are

willing to pass at one or the other end of the spectrum,” they comment. Therein lies the problem faced by queers across the city: “what if you *don’t* pass?” In this sense, Vrankrijk aims to be a safe space for queer people who may not otherwise find safe or comfortable spaces in the city.

Politicization is both a central tenet of Vrankrijk’s mission and a crucial facet of queer identity in Amsterdam. “Queer is the answer to the LGBT thing for me,” they state. Emma believes that most LGBT spaces in Amsterdam are “oversexed and not political enough,” something which they noticed upon first becoming involved with the city’s queer community:

For me it is a political distinction. I don’t care what you find sexy or who you go to bed with, really. You know? In this way that was really lacking for me and I also felt that that was a part of why I was noticing a lack of political consciousness in the queer community. I wouldn’t say queers; the gay community here at that time. I felt that I was confronted with men being sexist, gay men being sexist, I was confronted with white people being racist, xenophobic, just flippant about their privilege, flippant about their entitlements...

Events like Vrankrijk’s queer night, What the Fuck Wednesdays, and other initiatives in that space attempt to combat this complacency around queer issues by “essentially trying to create a scenario where punks start to really politicize themselves when it comes to gender politics and expression,” Emma explains. “And for some of the queers in this town actually, also, to move away from a little bit of this sort of like homonormative LGBT—not even T, LGB, you know— community.” As they see it, the best way to resist the influence of apolitical homonormativity is to embrace and promote radical queer politicization not embraced elsewhere in LGBT spaces in Amsterdam.

Emma characterizes their role in this ongoing process of community-building at Vrankrijk as “a custodian of that space. You know, it’s something that we want to leave

for queers when we are doing something else or, you know, moving away from here...we want to bring up another generation of kids underneath us as well.” Part and parcel of creating sustainability in a space like Vrankrijk is ensuring that it reflects and responds to the dynamic nature of the community it serves:

I think paying attention to it being like a living organism has been a very very useful tool. And understanding that a community is not a finite thing. And community building, certainly, also has a lot to do with letting the community build itself a bit as well. Its sort of like you know, like you're like a gardener, you're not growing the thing, you're just like clipping it and dead-heading it and making sure that it has space. So that's a constant job. I like that. I think that it's taught me a lot the errors of other spaces, the ways that that was not achieved.

One space in particular that Emma refers to is De Trut,¹⁰ the collective upon which Vrankrijk bases some of its rules of conduct; for instance, the decision not to allow photography in the space of Vrankrijk is modeled after the same rule at De Trut. The approach to maintaining a safe queer space, however, differs radically. “The idea that behavior can be a currency of inclusion and exclusion is a very interesting idea to me,” Emma states. “It's something that we are really, really trying to do.” In the past, “I've had to kick people out of our parties by the tens who will tell me that the word ‘transphobia’ doesn't even exist.”

But their vigilance in ensuring that Vrankrijk remains the space it promises to be does not entail following hard and fast rules of inclusion and exclusion. Rather, they believe that responding to the needs of the space moment to moment is the best way to preserve the integrity of the space:

...I'm hoping that we can continue to, sort of, at every turn, not assume, but actually stop and look at the environment and actually make decisions at that moment on how to do this. It has worked but I think if we come up with some sort

¹⁰ See Juno's chapter.

of just overall approach on how to keep a place safe or how to keep it inclusive, it won't be.

This constant attention to both safety and inclusion ensures that Vrankrijk can function as something more than a bar or a social outlet for queer people. "There are moments where I feel that, like, doing this at the intersection point of nightlife and socialization, like social gathering, this is at once very insurrectional," Emma comments.

..There's a tremendous amount of agency there, a tremendous amount of potential. And we've seen the success of that. The other part of it is, you know, where's the line? Because for me sometimes it feels like we have to maintain this vigilance all the time to ensure that the place never becomes a bar or a venue, or that what we are putting together are not parties, or what we are doing is not just in vain as a sort of, like, masturbatorial self-congratulation of like, 'hey, we're queer, we're here, we're drinkin' beer.' In this way, I feel it's a subtle and very careful approach we have to take to continue to keep people open to this like, constant shock that we give them when we take away their fun and make them pay attention, or take away their fun and confront them, or take away their fun and make them sad.

By striking a balance between maintaining a space for queers to socialize and mobilize, Vrankrijk fills a unique need in Amsterdam's LGBTQ landscape. "It's all about space," Emma emphasizes. "It's always been about space." In a city where even specifically queer spaces sometimes fall short of true inclusivity for marginalized members of the Dutch LGBTQ community, being provided not only a safe space but a platform for visibility is a huge step.

“We just need to be fucking acknowledged.”Queer Siren¹¹

Emma’s comments on a lack of spaces for gender-variant spaces in Amsterdam are especially apt for Queer Siren. When asked to expound upon their gender identity and sexual orientation, they say the following:

My gender identity, I lost ages ago. I left it under some stone, probably, or I lost it on the road. And actually, I did not really care to find [it] back. So I would describe myself as a happy multiple, because I do not really identify as specifically one or two things, let alone male or female. My expression, also, is a bit variable. Sexual orientation, also something like, yeah, good question. I have one. But it’s not so clear-cut. So in that sense, queer and genderqueer¹² fit perfectly for me.

Queer Siren notes that there are few spaces in the city in which it feels safe to express their gender identity, saying, “Gender-safe, I feel hardly anywhere except with most Queeristan organizers and the core group of the Vrankrijk.” Queer Siren feels that What the Fuck Wednesdays at Vrankrijk are often their best bet:

I think that Vrankrijk on Wednesdays is the best place because it’s run by a bunch of queers. It’s queer organized. It’s people whose gender expression and/or identities and/or sexual orientations are quite variable also....And that’s where I feel pretty much at home. I know the people for some ten years now, most of them. At least the core of them.

However, they also acknowledge that even Vrankrijk does not always feel entirely safe, nor is it free from homonormativity:

Let’s be friendly; seventy-five percent of the visitors on the queer nights at Vrankrijk are homonormative. And that’s quite problematic for, yeah, hardcore

¹¹ Queer Siren is 51. Their involvements in the Amsterdam LGBTQ community in recent years are numerous, and include organizing the Queeristan festival, being part of the now-defunct organization Queer NL, working as an advocacy officer for the Transgender Network Netherlands, offering input at the COC in conversations on national policy affecting trans, queer, and intersex people, and occasionally organizing events at Vrankrijk.

¹² See Appendix A: Definition of Terms.

queers. Because...talking about myself, I'm accepted, but I'm not understood. People do not understand me. When asked where they see examples of homonormativity in the city, Queer Siren responds, "Actually, every place in Amsterdam." Vrankrijk, while perhaps better than most spaces in the city in terms of queer representation, is not exempt from this influence:

Vrankrijk has a lot of people who don't buy into the concept [of homonormativity], but there are also lots of visitors who definitely are homonationalist/homonormative because they cannot imagine anything else, any identity or sexual orientation having value except for the things they are familiar with. And familiarity means gay, lesbian, maybe bisexual, cis...

This lack of awareness of queer possibilities on the part of visitors to Vrankrijk tends to negatively affect the safety of that space for Queer Siren. "Since they don't have a concept, don't, and also behave usually rather cissexist, surely when there's a party—and if you have a body that can be read somehow a bit feminine, female/feminine, then you're prone to be touched." They also state that while harassment of this sort is a possibility at Vrankrijk, diligence is shown in removing perpetrators and maintaining as safe a space as possible:

When it's seen or recognized, these guys are escorted out of the place. I mean, we've got a good policy on that, and as soon as anyone goes there, goes to the bar crew or to the regulars saying hey, someone's harassing me or someone is making trouble with me, depending on the situation, they either get a warning or get kicked out immediately.

Even though safety at Vrankrijk is vigilantly maintained by the people responsible for the space, Queer Siren still really only feels safe and comfortable "as long as many of my pals are there."

Another space Queer Siren generally feels comfortable in is Café Saarein. While technically established as a lesbian bar, its clientele is much more diverse than just

lesbians or even just women. “I feel pretty much at home there,” Queer Siren remarks. “I’m an old regular, so they know me and they know what they can and what they cannot do with me, what jokes they can make and what jokes they cannot make, and in general that goes pretty well.” It is important to note, however, that even though Saarein feels more welcoming than many other places in the city, it is still difficult for Queer Siren to feel completely at home in women’s spaces”...because I’m genderqueer. And that means as someone who sort of started out male, I got assigned male at birth, so educated male, then not identifying female [in those spaces] is also a liability.”

As someone who is heavily involved in gender and sexuality activism in multiple capacities, Queer Siren sees a lack of education as the root of many problems in Amsterdam’s LGBTQ scene, and a major contributor to the homonormativity so rampant in the city. “Most people don’t have real concepts to handle it,” they say, referring to difficulties they encounter describing their identities to other people. “Even if I’d say, ‘I’m transgender’ or ‘I’m genderqueer,’ like, sort of well-known concepts, they do not really have the idea—they cannot really grasp it because they’re not really familiar with it.” Specifically, they believe that gender education is much needed in these spaces, a problem they describe as “...a vicious circle. I try to do gender education with [people] in their organization, but they usually do not let me because they don’t understand the need for it, which is exactly because they need this education!”

As a result of this educational deficiency, they also sense dissonance between the self-touted “progressiveness” of The Netherlands and the permissiveness they see in actual practice. This permissive approach manifests in the lack of space given to

facilitation of conversations on queerness and gender identity even in LGBT spaces, a dynamic that Queer Siren describes as follows:

QS: You're welcome to come [to these spaces] but we don't facilitate anything.

DH: Yeah. And we don't understand you, necessarily.

QS: Exactly. We don't facilitate, not because we don't want to facilitate, but why should we facilitate a special group, like, like the special rights discourse, we're a special group within the LGBTQ, so we need special things. No. We just need to be fucking acknowledged and recognized.

Even in various ostensibly "queer" spaces throughout the city, Queer Siren perceives a lack of nuance in the treatment of queer spaces and queer issues.

They mention two notable examples of spaces carved out for queer folks that fall short of their needs and expectations: De Trut,¹³ a decades-old queer collective on Bilderdijkstraat, and LGBTQ Amsterdam, a group operating out of the Manor Hotel in Oost. Queer Siren describes the former as "very homonormative." This characterization is largely based on a long-standing rule that opposite-sex affection is not tolerated in that space, which is a sticking point for bisexual visitors as well as queer patrons displaying behavior with a partner who is perceived as being of the opposite sex. LGBTQ Amsterdam, according to Queer Siren, is an attempt by a trans man in the city to open up a dialogue with cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual citizens about trans identities and issues; however, they also think that "most people active in the group or active in organizing the events are very gender and/or sexually normative. And [the program] is utterly boring."

Queer Siren indicates that even some of the most prominent queer and trans spaces in Amsterdam follow a cisgender model. For them, and no doubt for other

¹³ See Juno's chapter.

genderqueer and gender-variant residents of Amsterdam, the lack of space given to their identity makes for a challenge—not only in finding spaces which acknowledge and explore the diversity of gender identities, but especially in finding spaces in which those identities can be safe.

Analysis

Across interviews, participants note a dearth of safe spaces to socialize for queer people. Especially for transgender and genderqueer Amsterdammers and other people who express outside of the gender binary, Amsterdam lacks spaces in which to comfortably come together for conversation or a drink in a space not rigidly segregated by a gender binary.

My interviewees repeatedly mention a handful of spaces, indicating that there are few establishments in the city where people with varying sexual and gender identities feel most comfortable. In this sense, the small, tight-knit nature of Amsterdam's queer community seems to be a defining feature. "It is still a very small town," Emma notes. "It's still a very paternalistic society. Most of us feel very uncomfortable elsewhere." Queer Siren echoes this sentiment, explaining that aside from one or two spaces that they visit, they prefer "meeting with other friends and activists in other places. My life preferably is around activism and activists."

Of note, too, is the interplay of safe space and inclusion in this community. De Trut stands as a notable example of this balance. Both Emma and Queer Siren express qualms with the collective's rules of conduct, saying that the rule prohibiting opposite-sex affection inhibits the inclusivity of the space for many visitors. Juno, a member of De Trut, also admits that the rule may create problems for queer and trans patrons of the space. In this sense, De Trut strives to be a safe space but seems to take an exclusionary, rather than inclusive, approach to maintaining that safety.

The Café Saarein generally feels safe and comfortable for the interviewees who mention it. Formerly a women's bar, it now sees a mixed clientele that includes straight

people and elderly neighborhood residents as well as lesbians and trans people. Emma describes Saarein as “ageless, fun, [and] very very safe feeling.” Stephanie has patronized Saarein for over a decade now and counts its diverse clientele as one of the bar’s main attractions. Queer Siren also speaks highly of Saarein, though as a genderqueer person, the space still does not feel welcoming or comfortable to them one hundred percent of the time. Overall, the safety and comfort many interviewees feel in this space appear to be in part because of the diversity of its patrons. While still not perfect, Saarein can be said to implement an approach opposite to De Trut—by championing inclusivity, both diversity and safety are preserved.

Queer Siren considers Vrankrijk to be their safest bet in Amsterdam much of the time, and even this space does not always accommodate their gender identity because of the unpredictability of its clientele from night to night. However, they emphasize that they are close with the core members of Vrankrijk and feel safe with that group of people. Emma, part of that core group, notes that Vrankrijk is not a bar or a concert venue, nor is it purely a space for queer nightlife; it serves, in part, to educate visitors and mobilize Amsterdam’s queers.

Sustaining a balance between politicization and safe fun proves to be a challenge. Because of the diligence with which safety at Vrankrijk is monitored, Juno gets the impression that the space is even more exclusive than De Trut, remarking, “they really just run it for themselves. It’s just really their space, they make it, they don’t care even if nobody comes....” Emma supports Juno’s analysis as they explain that constant diligence in maintaining both inclusivity and safety at Vrankrijk is incredibly tricky. “Right now we’re at the best we’ve ever been, but when I first started organizing queer

stuff in Amsterdam, I was kicking out fifteen people a night,” they say. “I kept saying to them all, ‘I really don’t care if there are two people here.’”

Emma’s comments, as well as Marten’s involvement in creating new spaces and organizations for underrepresented Amsterdammers in his neighborhood, point to the extent to which queer people in the city have had to carve out their own place rather than relying on other spaces to represent their identities. For a respondent like Stephanie, these spaces already exist; when one fits into normative expectations of what it means and looks like to be ‘gay,’ Amsterdam remains a fantastic city for nightlife and socializing. Queer Siren reinforces this point as they speak about The Netherlands’ reputation as a ‘progressive’ country:

I find it more permissive. And that only in a sort of social sense where it is around “gay things,” because as soon as it concerns women and alternative behavior or raciality and different behavior or really queer and different behavior, The Netherlands is not permissive anymore. Nor progressive.

The homonormativity so prevalent in LGBT spaces, which appears to be neither permissive nor progressive, excludes queer and gender-variant people—and, in Marten’s case, even different opinions—to the extent that it becomes a necessity for queer people to create spaces in which they feel safe and represented.

The majority of my respondents express that aside from representation and safety for queer and gender-variant people in Amsterdam, even the safest spaces have a long way to go in terms of intersectional inclusivity. Emma says that Vrankrijk still struggles with, “...you know, fat phobia as well, I mean, just like aesthetic stuff in general.” Juno notices that while Amsterdam is home to a thriving gay male scene, with bars, saunas, and sex clubs for men, there are hardly any corresponding spaces for lesbians. Marten and Queer Siren both feel that while queer spaces are often more inclusive than most

others, there is a noticeable generational divide that can leave both of them feeling excluded. Marten feels that his vision for inclusivity in Amsterdam closely aligns with that of many younger queer people in the city, but his age often keeps him separated or closed off from younger people and queer spaces. Queer Siren similarly notes that even at Vrankrijk, where they feel most comfortable, they are still among the oldest regular patrons and again become an outlier in that sense. Juno also feels disconnected from the younger clientele at De Trut, whom she feels is not representative of her identities.

Respondents also comment on the accessibility of Amsterdam's queer spaces for people of varying ability status. For example, both Saarein and Vrankrijk tend to be plagued by cigarette smoke, affecting the ability of people with respiratory ailments or multiple chemical sensitivity to enjoy these spaces. De Trut remains fairly wheelchair-inaccessible. Almost all spaces mentioned, while they do host people of color as patrons and see relative diversity in that sense, remain fairly white spaces. In concert with the omnipresent homonormative framework which structures so many of Amsterdam's LGBT community, these barriers to access and inclusivity create a queer scene that not everyone in the city can enjoy.

Suggestions for Further Research

This paper has covered the experiences of five LGBTQ Amsterdammers in both mainstream LGBT and queer spaces throughout the city in the past five years. As I stated in my Positionality & Limitations section, all five of my respondents were white. It is not at all my intention with this study to conflate the experiences of homonormativity and inclusivity of queer and trans or gender-variant Amsterdammers with the experiences of these phenomena by queer people of color. Nor does this study account for people whose intersecting identities of race and gender-variant identity make for a completely different experience within these spaces in Amsterdam.

Given this limitation in my paper, my foremost suggestion for further research is to examine the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in Amsterdam's queer spaces for those living at the intersection of race and gender/sexuality. Likewise, attention to other intersecting identities, i.e. class, age, and ability status, while briefly addressed by some of my respondents, is largely absent from my research. Paying attention to these fairly unexamined barriers to access could prove fruitful in researching and improving the inclusivity of Amsterdam's LGB/T/Q spaces.

Finally, this paper has largely steered clear of the phenomenon of homonationality¹⁴ in The Netherlands, especially with regards to the binary of nationalism and multiculturalism at play in so many aspects of Dutch life. Amsterdammers who experience both an L/G/B/T/Q identity *and* an allochtoon¹⁵ identity, whether as a Muslim, a person of color, or both, have an entirely different experience with inclusion and exclusion in nearly all aspects of social life in Amsterdam. Puar (2007) offers an

¹⁴ See Appendix A, "Definition of Terms."

¹⁵ See Appendix A, "Definition of Terms."

excellent base upon which to build with her work on homonationalism. Additionally, Wekker (2011) has done fantastic work on Dutch racism and intersectionality. Martina (2012) also provides a hugely insightful look into the ways queer Muslim identities are constructed as allochthonous in The Netherlands. Using these three authors in concert, and paying especial attention to the experiences of queer Dutch Muslims, I recommend further inquiry into the ways in which queerness, as a term and concept that is also not of this place, is constructed as an allochtoon identity within the broader construction of national identity in The Netherlands.

Conclusion

Since becoming the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage, Amsterdam has become known around the world as a tolerant, progressive nation and a city that is open to all people regardless of sexual orientation. However, that tolerance operates within the confines of homonormativity, an influence which dictates that in order to be visible and respected both within Amsterdam's LGBT scene and within Dutch society as a whole, one must conform to a normative ideal of what it is to be gay. In The Netherlands, this ideal strictly adheres to a gender binary and a depoliticized, post-liberation assumption of sexuality.

Queer, transgender, and gender-variant Amsterdammers often get set outside of this framework. When visible queer identities are seen as too *gek* for mainstream LGB/T spaces, queer people in Amsterdam bear the responsibility for creating their own spaces to meet their needs. Even within these spaces, the influence of homonormativity and a largely cisgender conception of queer space combine to once again exclude identities considered too radical or transgressive. Along with various barriers to access for LGBTQ people in Amsterdam who experience other intersecting identities such as class, ability, and race, homonormativity upholds an exclusionary standard of what is *normaal*—a standard that serves to keep many people in the margins of Amsterdam's LGBTQ landscape.

Appendix A: Definition of Terms

Allochtoon – The Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2014) defines an *allochtoon* Dutch citizen as someone who has at least one parent who themselves were not born in The Netherlands. However, the term specifically refers to “non-western immigrants,” who “are counted [as] those who have their origin in Turkey and countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, excluding [the former Dutch Indies]/ Indonesia and Japan. All other persons who do not have their origin in the Netherlands are among the westerners” (CBS, 2014).¹⁶ Thus, distinctions of allochtoon identity, and its counterpart, autochtoon (meaning “of the soil,” or native Dutch) serve a specific discursive purpose in creating racial and ethnic in- and out-groups within Dutch identity.

Cisgender – This term refers to a person whose gender identity aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Genderqueer – see: “Transgender.”

Gender-variant – see: “Transgender.”

Homonationalism – coined by Puar (2007) to describe the othering inherent in tying mainstream visibility and acceptance of LGB identities to patriotism and national identity by creating a dangerous (and, in this case, specifically ‘terrorist’) homophobic counterpart. In the case of the increased Islamophobia witnessed in countries like the United States and The Netherlands in the past decade or so, Muslims are constructed as a threat to a ‘modern,’ ‘secular’ gay identity.

Intersectionality – This term, created by Crenshaw (1989), refers to the ways in which various identities—such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, and age—combine, conflict, and interact within systems of privilege and oppression.

Queer – It is nearly impossible to define the word queer, because, as evidenced by my respondents, nearly every person’s definition will differ. Originally a derogatory term for a gay or lesbian person that has largely been reclaimed, *queer* in its most general sense embodies any and all possibilities beyond normative, binary sexuality and gender identities.

Transgender – refers to a person whose gender identity does not align with the gender they were assigned at birth. Transgender people may identify on the opposite pole of a gender binary from what they were designated at birth; for example, a person designated male at birth can be transgender and identify as female. Trans people may also be non-binary, meaning they do not identify as either male or female on a gender binary, or identify as both, or not exclusively one or the other. Non-binary trans people may identify as genderqueer or gender-variant.

¹⁶ Translated with Google Translate.

Appendix B: Interview Guide

1. What kind of involvement have you had with LGBTQI spaces in Amsterdam in the past five years?
2. Can you please tell me a little bit about your gender identity and sexual orientation?
3. Are there spaces in the city where you feel like these identities are represented?
4. Is the concept of 'homonormativity' familiar to you?
5. Where do you see examples of homonormativity in the spaces you frequent?
6. Can you elaborate on the inclusivity of the LGBTQI spaces you are involved with?
7. What do you think these spaces do well to be inclusive?
8. How can the inclusivity of these spaces be improved?
9. Is the word 'queer' familiar to you?
10. Can you elaborate on the inclusivity of the LGBTQI spaces you are involved with towards people of queer or non-normative sexualities and genders?

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