Introduction: Queer Figures and Sources in 'LGBT History'

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A History of the LGBT Present

Sexuality is often considered a private matter, but state regulations, church teachings, psychiatry, mass media, and popular culture have regulated and shaped how we understand sexual and gender identities today. In order to better contextualize today's movements that advocate for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT), queer, pansexual, and more (+) people, historians must ask new questions about sexuality and gender identity, past and present. In doing so, we inherently intertwine queer studies with economic, social, legal and political histories.

It is with great pleasure that we introduce *Leidschrift*'s first special issue devoted to 'LGBT History'. Or to phrase it in less of an anachronistic way – as the term 'LGBT' only gained prominence since the 1990s – this special issue historicizes today's LGBT identities, communities, and movements via four new studies of homosexuality and gender non-conformity in history. Two of the articles focus on late-medieval and early-modern Europe (roughly 1400-1700); and two look at the twentieth century, with a focus on the radical changes of the 1960s-70s. In situating their studies within larger histories—of religion, medicine, literature—the authors not only provide 'queer' histories of sexual and gender deviations, but they also demonstrate *how* 'to queer' more established areas of history.

We introduce this special issue as the co-founders of the Leiden Queer History Network. The Network brings together Leiden's students, its staff, community members, and outside researchers, to discuss topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity in history. Since 2019, our events have attracted over one-hundred smiling faces. Outside guests included the following: Laura Belmonte (Virginia Tech), 'Writing the History of the International LGBT Rights Movement', with discussant David Paternotte (Université libre de Bruxelles); Judit Takács (Hungarian Academy of Sciences), 'Disciplining Gender and (Homo)sexuality in Hungary' and Kateřina Lišková (Masaryk University), 'Sexual Misfits and State Socialism: Dealing with Male Homosexuality and Male Sexual Deviance in Czechoslovakia'. The Network has also connected the Institute of History with those working in other faculties at Leiden: Eliza Steinbock, from Leiden's Centre for Arts and

Society, presented their 2019 book *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change* in conversation with doctoral students Stephanie Noach (Leiden) and Lieke Hettinga (Central European University, Utrecht University).[1] Sary Zananiri (Leiden Centre for Linguistics) provided a queer reading of the University's vast photograph collection by Frank Scholten in Mandate Palestine. The themes covered during these events represent just a sliver of the immense breadth of possibilities – thematic, geographical, chronological – for writing and doing queer history.

It is no coincidence that a queer history network would attract so much interest in Leiden. Despite centuries of intolerance toward homosexuals and gender non-conforming people in the Netherlands – in religion, law, psychiatry – Dutch individuals and organizations helped usher in dramatic changes in social attitudes toward sexuality and transgender identities, especially in the last fifty years. Filmmaker Sebastiaan Kes highlighted these unique aspects of Dutch activism in the twentieth century in his 2017 documentary *Monument van Trots (Monument of Pride)*, which he presented at the Network's first event in The Hague.[2] To give just one example: the Netherlands erected the world's first public memorial to recognize homosexuals persecuted in the Holocaust. As the documentary shows, public recognition of LGBT history does not happen overnight; acknowledgment of LGBT histories – whether in the form of statues, Purple Fridays, or a 'special issue' of a journal like this – are testaments to decades of activism led by generations of individuals and groups.

Situating this Special Issue in Historical Debates

The four articles in this special issue – detailed later in this introduction – shed light on some larger debates in queer history. The first relates to the definition of the subject itself: how do we define the history of 'queer' gender and sexuality? The second problem relates to sources: in the absence of explicit documents about sexual desire, how can an historian identify a truly

[1] Eliza Steinbock, *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change* (Durham and London 2019).
[2] *Monument van Trots*, directed by Sebastiaan Kes (Human Focus 2017).

'queer' figure? This historiography centers on central and northwest Europe, but similar questions could be asked of other geographies.[3]

The first debate – on how to define 'queer' history – benefits from a deeper look into debates among historians about doing the history of male homosexuality (we will turn to the puzzles of female homosexuality below). In today's parlance, a 'gay man' – and there is certainly not *one* definition for this term – is a man (often cisgender) who has (the desire for) sexual intercourse with other men. This definition is admittedly weak, and could apply also to bisexual and pansexual men. But to continue: stereotypes still abound that 'gay men' might display aspects of gender non-conformity – wittingly or unwittingly; and yet gender 'deviance' is not central to one's identity or categorization as a homosexual. How does today's understanding of 'gay' men relate to other queer figures of the past?

In 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', historian David Halperin outlines different figures from history that help comprise a genealogy of the twentieth-century 'homosexual'. Nevertheless, these historical figures diverge from contemporary understandings of LGBT identities. For example, European history is filled with examples of 'effeminate' men, and an historian today might be tempted to view effeminate men from history as proto-'gays'. But interpretations of effeminate behavior change over time: as Halperin writes, the 'classical stereotype of effeminacy' included men who 'pursued a life of pleasure, who made love instead of war'.[4] It might sound contradictory by today's standards, but some of these effeminate men were 'womanizers' who sought heterosexual sex in excess: 'O sweet Juliet / Thy beauty hath made me effeminate', Romeo declares with exasperation for the lover who made him weak.[5] A history of *masculinity* could reflect on the ways these effeminate men challenged gender roles; but it would not be wise to include all effeminate men in a history of *homosexuality*.

Another queer figure that Halperin discusses is the 'invert' who receives attention in late-1800s medical texts; this could be someone with a

[3] To point to just a few queer non-European histories: Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (California, CA 2005); Sabine Lang, *Men as Women, Women as Men: Changing Gender in Native American Cultures* (Texas, TX 1998); Audrey Yue and Jun Zubillaga-Pow eds., *Queer Singapore: Illiberal Citizenship and Mediated Cultures* (Hong Kong 2012).

[4] David Halperin, 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', *GLQ* 6:1 (2000) 93.

[5] Shakespeare's original text, as quoted in Halperin, 93.

'woman's soul confined by a male body', in the words of German writer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895) (who identified as an invert during these decades). Halperin observes, however, that psychiatrists and other sexologists during this period 'did not distinguish systematically between sexual deviance and gender deviance', and assigned the 'invert' label to a variety of people, including those who claimed no sexual drive.[6] Today such individuals might identify as transgender women, as non-binary, as asexual, or as something else; and while it makes sense to include 'the invert' in an historiography of queerness, historians should be wary to refer to these people as 'homosexuals'. Indeed, European sexologists of the late 1800s wrote on a huge range of sexual deviations: masochism, sadism, voyeurism, exhibitionism, fetishism, and so on. Historian Dagmar Herzog summarized it fantastically when she wrote: 'No one could have guessed around 1900 that homosexuality and heterosexuality would emerge as the great contrast pair organizing the sexual universe' in the last few decades. To a *fin-de-siècle* sexologist, it might seem just as likely that a Leiden student in 2020 would 'come out' as a sadist, or an exhibitionist, before they would identify as a homosexual.

Despite medical professionals' ambiguous definitions of 'inversion', their texts greatly influenced understandings of homosexuality in the twentieth century. To sum up this line of reasoning, we turn to perhaps the most over-quoted line from Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality,* in which he contrasts 'the homosexual' that emerged in these medical writings with previous understandings of same-sex-seeking men: 'The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.'[7] In other words, Europe (in the late 1800s) saw a shift in understandings of homosexuality: from the idea that same-sex intercourse was an enticing *act* (perhaps similar to gambling) to the idea that it was an aspect of one's *identity* (i.e. that saturated a person's narrative from childhood to the present). Foucault's argument was actually much more complex than these twelve words. Yet rather than parse Foucault, we look at a few key pieces that challenge the idea that homosexual identities emerged 'from above' in medical texts in the 1880s. To do so, we take a step back to an age of sodomy persecutions.

In the early 1700s, there were waves of persecutions of sodomites in the Netherlands. The most notorious round of arrests and executions began

[6] Halperin, 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', 107.

[7] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, NY 1980) 42-44.

in 1730; they centered in Utrecht, but there were indeed executions in Leiden (outside the Gravensteen building, where the Leiden Queer History Network gathered for its inaugural lecture). The men accused of sodomy did not necessary resemble today's 'gay'-identified men. But as historian Theo van der Meer argues, there were indeed aspects of a 'sub-culture' among men who had sex with men; and this is evidence that – at least for some – sodomy was more than just an 'act'. Men learned to communicate with gestures that 'could be understood as invitations for sexual encounters' such as 'stepping on one another's toes, waving handkerchiefs, nudging each other with their elbows' as well as using slang vocabularies.[8] Specific areas of parks, specific times for visiting urinals, and even certain inns and taverns were known to be gathering places for men who sought sex with men. Finally, there were sodomitical *networks,* albeit informal, between sex partners. All of these are signs that men had a self-conscious identification with a particular sub-culture. Similar eighteenth-century sodomitical sub-cultures are documented in England and France.[9]

Regarding the history of female homosexuality, one could ask a similar question about the relationship between sexual acts and sexual identities. Yet while much of our knowledge about male homosexuality comes from reading between the lines of court documents, prosecution for sodomy has left behind a more ambiguous historical record for women. Although it is conventionally thought that lesbian sex has never been criminalized, medieval and early modern lawyers, relying on St. Paul's broad definition of sodomy, believed that women, like men, could sin against nature. In 16th-century Spain, for example, standard legal commentary dictated that both male and female sodomites were to be punished by burning. All the same, there are very few records of women being prosecuted under sodomy statutes in Europe. More common were cases in which a woman was tried for having impersonated a man and married another woman—as in the case of Catherina Margaretha Linck and Catherina Margaretha Mühlhahn, prosecuted in Halberdstadt in 1721. Linck and Mühlhahn ran afoul of the law

[8] Theo van Der Meer, 'Sodomy and the Pursuit of a Third Sex in the Early Modern Period', in: Gilbert Herdt eds., *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (New York, NY 1994) 153.

[9] Randolph Trumbach, 'Renaissance Sodomy, 1500–1700' and 'Modern Sodomy: The Origins of Modern Homosexuality, 1700–1800', in: Matt Cook ed., *A Gay History of Britain* (Greenwood 2007); Jeffrey Merrick, *Order and Disorder Under the Ancien Régime* (Oxford 2007) especially chapters 2, 14, 15 and 16.

for counts of theft and heresy – as well as for making sexual use of a 'lifeless leather device' for urination while standing and for penetrative sex.[10] But most often, the cohabitation of 'female husbands' did not attract legal notice, and in the many plays, ballads, and broadsheets that depicted such unions during the eighteenth century, sexual acts were frequently absent. Where are historians to draw the line between platonic female friendships, which received widespread sanction and even celebration, and more romantically or sexually charged relationships, which may or may not have attracted social disapproval? How much does sex matter – and what counts as 'sex' in the first place? Is genital activity inherent to eroticism?[11] Given the scarcity of women's writing about their own sexual experiences, these questions are difficult to answer—although there is evidence that some unmarried women understood themselves as different from those who lived in close familial and romantic relationships with men. [12] But different in what way? As practitioners of the new transgender history make clear, we do the past a disservice if we ask questions about sexuality alone.[13]

Since the early modern period, then, there have been competing ideas about queer practices and identities. How are we to reconcile them? In short: can we document same-sex sexual behavior, and other deviations from established cultural gender roles, as part of 'queer history,' even before the 1800s? There is no doubt that the intense attention to sexual 'perversions' among European medical professionals in the late 1800s changed not only the way the general public perceived of homosexuality, but also the way many homosexuals understood their own orientations. Importantly, these medical professionals did not merely assign arbitrary ideas of homosexuality from the 'top-down' onto individuals; they worked with, observed, and listened to their patients, and – through this collaborative process – helped illuminate (and co-create) the homosexual and transgender individuals who became more

[10] Laura Gowing, 'Lesbians and Their Like in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800', in: Robert Aldrich eds., *Gay Life and Culture: A World History* (New York, NY 2006) 132.
[11] This is a key question raised in Leila Rupp, 'Toward a Global History of Same-Sex Sexuality', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10:2 (2001) 287-302.
[12] Leila Rupp, *Sapphistries: A Global History of Love Between Women* (New York, NY 2009).
[13] Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (New York, NY 2017); Alex Bakker, *Transgender in Nederland: een buitengewone geschiedenis* (Amsterdam 2018).

visible in twentieth-century Europe.[14] Within this context, pioneering activists began to speak openly about queer identities – first in the 1910s-20s[15], then more widely in the 1950s-60s[16] – and eventually formed organizations to socialize and advocate for fair laws. By the 1970s – and in tandem with second-wave feminists, civil rights activists, and other members of the 'New Left' – lesbian, gay, bi, and trans activists became increasingly visible in a new fight against mainstream society for the acceptance of queer people as equals.[17] As queer identities and terminologies have continued to change, today's LGBT movement should continue to query genealogical connections to non-conforming figures of the past.

Any good historian reading the previous historiography must have had a buzzing question on their mind: what sources are we relying on? How do we understand 'homosexuality' when there are so few documents that – explicitly and unambiguously – address sensitive topics like same-sex desires, fantasies, and experiences? In the absence of ego documents (e.g. personal letters, travel diaries), where do we find admissions of 'deviant' sexual and gender behaviors? This ties also to a larger question in history: who speaks for whom? Can we understand homosexuals' lives from the writings of the psychiatrists who diagnosed them as sick and perverted? Can we understand lesbian desires by looking at the literary fantasies written by heterosexual men? How should the historian gather sources creatively while still remaining critical in her analysis?

Van der Meer's research on sodomitical subcultures in the Netherlands – which built from a pioneering 1969 dissertation by L.J. Boon, published

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[14] Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago 2000).

[15] Theo van der Meer, *Jonkheer mr. Jacob Anton Schorer (1866 – 1957): Een biografie van homoseksualiteit* (Amsterdam 2007); Florence Tamagne, *A History of Homosexuality in Europe, Vol. I & II: Berlin, London, Paris 1919-1939* (Algora 2007); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York, NY 2008).

[16] Julian Jackson, 'The Homophile Movement', in: David Paternotte and Manon Tremblay eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism* (London 2015); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago 2006); Leila Rupp, 'The Persistence of Transnational Organizing: The Case of the Homophile Movement', *American Historical Review* (2011).

[17] See many of the essays in: David Paternotte and Manon Tremblay eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Lesbian and Gay Activism* (London 2015).

posthumously in 1997 – centered on court records, which could provide insight into two areas.[18] Firstly, the records tell something about the prosecuted, including details of their sexual activities and names of those in their sodomitical network, and secondly, they shed light on the 'perceptions of sodomy as well as official and popular attitudes toward same-sex behavior' in the general public.[19] That being said, Van der Meer also admits that some of the details of these records might be 'distorted' due to, for example, torture.[20] Nevertheless, it is amazing how frankly many of the men spoke about insertive and receptive anal sex between men. Indeed, arrest records provide a plethora of sources on sexual activity between men: even after homosexuality was effectively legalized in the Netherlands (the Napoleonic Code adopted in 1811 had nothing to say about sodomy) men continued to be arrested for sex in public spaces, which has allowed historians to map late-nineteenth-century 'cruising areas' in Amsterdam.[21]

The sources produced by late-1800s sexologists contain numerous case studies with explicit details about (anonymous) patients' sexual histories and desires.[22] However, historians of psychiatry are aware that these case narratives could be embellished, or might even be projected fictions based on the psychiatrist's own life.[23] Many of these medical professionals had a clear motive of presenting homosexuals (and other queer subjects) as psychopathic, in order to bolster their own theories of sexuality and human development. Thus the historian can use these case studies to see glimpses into the sexual practices within certain societies at particular times, but not to give facts about specific individuals' sexual histories.

Arrest records, court testimony, and medical histories are written and archived by mainstream institutions – and thus provide a 'top-down' look at queer subjects. Nevertheless, they *do* provide glimpses into the lives of

[18] L.J. Boon (I Schöffer), *'Dien godlosen hoop van menschen': Vervolging van Homosexuelen in de Republiek in de jaren dertig van de achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 1994)
[19] Van der Meer, *Jonkheer mr. Jacob Anton Schorer (1866-1957),* 139.
[20] Ibidem, 147. Thanks to BA student Jasper van Heycop ten Ham for raising this question in class, and in his final paper, 'Tortured Confessions: A historiographical discussion on the use of torture trials to reconstruct LGBT history'.
[21] *Spiegel Historiael* 17:10 (1982), cited in: Gert Hekma, 'Amsterdam', in: David Higgs eds., *Queer Sites: Gay Urban Histories Since 1600* (London 1999) Figure 3.3.
[22] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: with Special Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct: a Medico-Forensic Study* (1886).
[23] Gail Reed and Howard Levine, *On Freud's 'Screen Memories'* (London 2018).

everyday people; in this regard, they provide some use for those conducting 'Alltagsgeschichte' or 'history from below.' Better yet are ego documents, including diaries, private correspondences, and oral histories.

As noted above, men and women have left an uneven mark when it comes to sources related to queer Europe. There are various reasons for this: at all class levels, men tended to possess more economic independence, which allowed for behaviors like going to pubs after work, or wandering the streets after dark – activities that could allow the possibility for sexual encounters, and that could also bring them into the net of disciplinary (and thus documentary) authority. Given literacy patterns, men were also more likely to write about their own experiences – and it was more likely that their writings would survive intact. Testimony from women themselves is very rare until the modern period; for the previous centuries, we often rely upon art, literature, medical reports, legal documents, and pornography produced by men. And where women's ego documents do begin to appear – as with the famous diaries of the English gentrywoman, Anne Lister (1806-1840) – they tend to represent individuals that were wealthier, better educated, and more articulate than most.[24]

Locating source material becomes easier for the twentieth century. Oral history has proven crucial for the recovery of memories and narratives that might otherwise have been lost, particularly for actors whom historians lovingly refer to as 'ordinary people'. For the United States, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis's *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community,* offers a rich reconstruction of a lesbian subculture in Buffalo, New York, from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s.[25] For the Netherlands, Judith Schuyf's *Een Stilzwijgende Samenzwering: Lesbische Vrouwen in Nederland, 1920-1970* covers much of the same period, also relying on a substantial base of oral history sources.[26]

Of course, when looking for sources from the 1970s onwards, things get even easier. Indeed, we can speak of an explosion of documentary

[24] Rupp, *Sapphistries,* 4-5; Judith M. Bennett, "Lesbian-Like' and the Social History of Lesbianisms", *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9:1/2 (2000) 2-3.

[25] Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (London 1993).

[26] Judith Schuyf, *Een Stilzwijgende Samenzwering: Lesbische Vrouwen in Nederland* (Dissertatie Leiden 1994; Stichting beheer IISG 1994). For more on the relationship between oral history and the queer past, see Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, eds., *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (Oxford 2012).

material, much of it associated with newly founded (or newly reenergized) organizations that agitated ever more stridently for gay liberation across Europe, North America, and, increasingly, all across the world. Organizational papers, letters, diaries, memoirs, art, film, fiction: in all of these domains, nonconforming sexualities and gender identities become much easier to find. Mainstream news media, popular culture, and government agencies also began to devote increased attention to queer experiences (though not always in a positive way). This wealth of material has informed a wide and growing literature – as well as a recent Leiden University blog entry which marked International Coming Out Day by examining the work of Leiden's early activists fifty years prior.[27] Those who participated in these events are not only willing to be interviewed, but also are sometimes motivated to write their own histories.[28]

Yet despite this new wealth of information, historians must attune themselves to the silences and absences that continue to mark the historical record. Many of the LGBT archives and heritage organizations we make use of in order to access material – like IHLIA in Amsterdam or the GLBT Historical Society Museum & Archives in San Francisco – were founded by activists whose political outlooks and social networks shaped the way they collected material and passed it down to later generations. By limiting ourselves to any single 'gay and lesbian' archive, we risk missing out on (or misrepresenting) experiences that may not have fit as neatly within that particular frame – most often those belonging to women, people of color, migrants, transgender people, and other marginalized communities (see concluding thoughts this introduction).[29]

History from above, or history from below? Who is missing from the archives? Who has been actively silenced? Keeping these questions in mind

[27] 'How students launched the Leiden LGBT movement 50 years ago', https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/news/2018/01/how-students-launched-the-leiden-lgbt-movement-fifty-years-ago, consulted 6 february 2018.
[28] Werner Zonderop, 'Vijftig jaar homo-emancipatiebeweging in Leiden', *Leidse Jaarboek* (2018).
[29] For a recent discussion of the politics of queer archiving and memory, see the interview that Looi van Kessel and Fleur van Leeuwen conducted with Wigbertson Julian Isenia and Naomie Pieter, "In the end, we always have to call institutions to account," *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 22:3 (September 2019): 285-297, as well as Michiel Odijk, "Leerzaam maar beperkt: IHLIA-expositie 'With Pride'," idem, 281-284.

– in tandem with the prior historiographic debate about queer figures in history – we turn to the four articles of this special issue.

In this Issue

Four talented young historians contributed to this special issue with new research on queer history. Each author focuses on a different geography: we see studies of 'southern Netherlands' (Flanders), Italy, the Netherlands, and the United States. There are two general time periods that receive attention: first, the late medieval and early modern period (roughly 1400-1700); and second, the twentieth-century with a focus on the radical transformations of the 1960s-70s. There are themes that recur in the texts. To some extent, all four address some aspect of the question 'what makes a queer figure in history?' In examining the nuances and semantics of queer behaviors and identities, the authors also acknowledge that *discourses* – such as religious, legal, medical communications – have had the power to shape general understandings of queer sexuality and gender. The two articles on the early-modern era comment on the 'unspeakability' of male and female homosexuality – even though, as the authors point out, discourses about homosexuality abounded. The two studies on the post-WWII era benefit from the intense discussion of homosexuality 'from above' in tandem with homo-emancipation activism 'from below'. The four articles also provide insight into methodological (source) debates, as the authors look creatively to write histories on sexual desire, a topic that is often both private and abstract.

The first article, by Jonas Roelens, is entitled 'Om dese sonde es God gram. Sodomie en lekendevotie in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden'. Roelens explores the paradox of sodomy as both an unspeakable crime, and as the subject of intense attention and discussion. On the one hand, sodomy 'should not be named', as there was a belief that the act provoked divine punishment: 'every written or spoken word about it posed a potential threat.' On the other hand, religious leaders condemned it in devotional texts, and thus Sodom and Gomorrah became a *leitmotif* for teaching sexual morals. Roelens' article shows how religious discourse (written and spoken) influenced the widespread persecution (and executions) of men who had sex with men in the late-medieval and early-modern Southern Netherlands.

The second article, by Marlisa den Hartog, is entitled 'Amor impossibilis? Lesbische relaties in de literatuur van vijftiende- en zestiende-

eeuws Italië'. In it, she asks: How is lesbian love imagined in Italian literature; and why does it receive so much less attention – also in religious and medical texts – than male homosexuality? Looking at several comedic plays, Den Hartog analyzes plot lines where women fall for other women (sometimes because one woman is cross-dressing, which is the source of a 'comic misunderstanding'). Different authors were presenting these relationships in different ways: some could not imagine two women feeling satisfaction from sex, while others were more creative with their descriptions of sexual pleasure. The article thus shows a breadth of perspectives about orientation and desire.

Third, we have Tess Dudink's article 'Curing Queerness: A parallel socio-medical history' which explores 'why and when the medical community stopped their search for a cure for homosexuality'. The article is set within the context of article 241bis, perhaps the most important law in the history of homosexuality in twentieth-century Netherlands. While the age of consent for heterosexual sex was 16, article 241bis set the age of consent for homosexual sex at 21 (under the belief that people under 21 were still easily 'seduced' to live a homosexual life). Dudink's analysis centers on medical texts about homosexuality, including the Speijer report of 1969, which ultimately argued against 241bis (similar to the Wolfenden report in England) and was thus 'one of the major turning points in the debate about homosexuality as a disease, because it successfully challenged the seduction theory'. In tracing the medical field's changes in attitudes toward homosexuality, Dudink astutely argues that the historian must consider 'the people who were actively trying to influence public opinion' at the time, namely gay and lesbian activists.[30]

Fourth, Looi van Kessel contributed with 'Cruising the seventies: homoseksualiteit en promiscuïteit in de Amerikaanse literatuur van en over de jaren zeventig'. The article centers on the topic of public and anonymous sex between men (also known as 'cruising') and how this became political within, even central to, the 'gay' identity and rights movement in the 1970s. Van Kessel analyzes sexual content in the novels of the *new narrative* group from San Francisco, and argues that promiscuity was increasingly tied 'to a collective gay sexual identity'. Bringing his analysis to the present, van Kessel reflects on current debates that underscore the limitations to the idea that sexual promiscuity is always liberatory.

[30] Dudink's essay complements new work by Joke Swiebel (a participant in, as well as historian of, these crucial events). Joke Swiebel, 'Het einde van artikel 248bis', *Tijdschift voor Genderstudies* 22:3 (2019) 231-48.

Final thoughts

There are numerous areas for future research in queer history. Looi van Kessel's article hints at difficult questions concerning ethnic diversity's role in the making of modern gay subcultures: with the loosening of sexual mores, sex 'between men of all different backgrounds or ethnicities' could be liberating; yet the possibility for 'sexual discrimination' (also called 'sexual racism') also increased. Indeed, racial tensions and discrimination has long existed in LGBT communities. In the Netherlands, Gloria Wekker has been examining sexual cultures from a cross-cultural perspective for decades.[31] Fatima El-Tayeb and Chandra Frank, among others, have historicized 1980s Dutch organizations for queer people of color, such as Strange Fruit and Sister Outsider.[32] And a new work by Wigbertsen Julian Isenia explores sexual subcultures in Curaçao, including their connections to the Netherlands.[33] It is important for historians to consider the inequalities that have structured LGBT communities, and to look for those voices who are marginalized from the current archives.

Today, attitudes toward LGBTQ rights structure Dutch and wider European public discussions about a variety of topics, from asylum rights, to naturalization exams, to requirements for EU membership.[34] More than ever,

[31] Gloria Wekker, 'What's Identity Got to Do with It? Rethinking Identity in Light of the Mati Work in Suriname', in: Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E. Wieringa eds., *Female Desires* (New York, NY 1999).

[32] Fatima El-Tayeb, 'Gays Who Cannot Properly Be Gay: Queer Muslims in the Neoliberal European City', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19:1 (2012) 79–95; Chandra Frank, 'Sister Outsider and Audre Lorde in the Netherlands: On Transnational Queer Feminisms and Archival Methodological Practices', *Feminist Review* 121:1 (2019). See also: Andrew Shield, *Immigrants in the Sexual Revolution: Perceptions and Participation in Northwest Europe* (Cham 2017) especially chapters 1, 7, 8 and the first pages of chapter 6.

[33] Wigbertson Julian Isenia, 'Looking for Kambrada: Sexuality and Social Anxieties in the Dutch Colonial Archive, 1882-1923', *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 22:2 (2019). Note: this paper received an Honourable Mention for the 2019 Gregory Sprague Prize by the Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender History.

[34] Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (University of Minnesota, 2005); Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (New York, NY 2006); Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (London and Durham, NC 2007); Paul Mepschen, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Evelien H. Tonkens. 'Sexual

there is a need for a history of the present: a way for people to understand that the 'LGBT' that exists today is continuously shaped 'bottom up' and that variation within the community is something to embrace. As this special issue shows, queer history can take place anywhere, at any time; it is up to the eager historian to find creative sources from which to ask intelligent questions.

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