Heteronormativity and gender norms: socialization across countries, at school, and within the family

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Chapter 1

General introduction

1.1 Societal norms about gender and sexual orientations

Discussions about people who do not conform to stereotypic gender roles and/or belong to sexual minorities have become more widespread in European societies (Huijnk, 2022). Whereas many Western industrialized countries promote gender equality and aim to increase the inclusion of sexual minorities (ILGA, 2022), gender norms (i.e., 'social norms defining acceptable and appropriate actions for women and men'; Cislaghi & Heise, 2020, p. 415) and norms about sexual orientations continue to limit how people live their lives according to their personal preferences, interests, and talents. For example, men who work in occupations that are traditionally perceived as feminine (e.g., nurse, babysitter) experience stigmatization and discrimination (Croft et al., 2015), and parental roles of gay and lesbian couples are still not accepted by the larger public (Sani Dotti & Quaranta, 2020). As a consequence, not adhering to gender stereotypic roles and/or belonging to a sexual minority often comes with a disadvantaged position in society (Heilman, 2012; Huijnk, 2022; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). Recent reports draw a worrying picture when it comes to violence and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities. In 2022, there seems to be a strong increase in not only numbers but also severity across many countries (ILGA, 2023). How people think about gender roles and sexual minority groups differs considerably across individuals and is related to personal and environmental factors (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Meeusen et al., 2015). Examining how adults and children are socialized with such norms is crucial to understand how individuals' acceptable social roles are limited by their gender and how people from sexual minorities are still marginalized in our society (Croft et al., 2015; Martin, 2009). In the current climate, this may hold in particular for the socialization of attitudes toward men in roles that are traditionally perceived as feminine (Meeussen et al., 2020), and the expression of gay and lesbian orientations and relationships in public (Blair et al., 2022). In this dissertation, I (with co-authors for Chapters 2 to 5) aim to fill some of these research gaps through four studies that focus on different levels of socialization; national circumstances (Chapter 2), secondary education (Chapter 3), and the family (Chapters 4 and 5). In Chapter 6, I will provide a general discussion of these topics.

In this first chapter, I will first untangle the relevant concepts and discuss theories and constructs central to this dissertation. Second, based on queer and feminist literature, I will discuss how gender roles, gender-stereotypic attitudes, and attitudes toward sexual minorities are interrelated. Third, I will describe current theories and evidence on how socializing circumstances and agents at different levels in society can affect individuals' attitudes toward gender roles and sexual minorities. Fourth, I will introduce the focus on the Netherlands for Chapters 3 to 5 regarding the heteronormative socialization of children in this particular context. Lastly, I will provide an outline of this dissertation and reflect on my position as a researcher in discussions around these topics.

1.2 Key concepts and constructs

This dissertation focuses on the socialization of attitudes toward gender roles and gay and lesbian individuals. Gender roles refer to what an individual should do with their life based on their gender, including personality traits, mannerisms, obligations, and cultural expectations (Bornstein, 1998; Nagoshi & Terrell, 2012). In the social sciences, some scholars use the concepts of sex and gender interchangeably, whereas others argue for strictly separating these concepts (Lindqvist et al., 2021). I will first untangle the two and argue how these concepts and the concept of sexual orientation are used in this dissertation. Second, I will discuss theories on heteronormativity and explain how attitudes toward sexual minorities are related to gender (roles) and gender stereotypes (i.e. 'culturally shared assumptions and expectations about sex differences in abilities, personality traits, activities, and roles'; Weinraub et al., 1984, p. 1493).

Untangling sex, gender, and sexual orientation

The overarching term for sexual and gender minorities is LGBTQI+. This acronym stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and other variations of sexual attraction and gender (for a full explanation of all included subgroups of this term, we refer to Bamberger & Farrow, 2021). To understand the difference between diversity in gender and sexual orientation, it is important to discuss the meaning of the concepts of sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. The terms sex, gender, and sexual orientation differ in meaning and one does not imply the other (Bamberger & Farrow, 2021; Lindqvist et al., 2021). In Figure 1.1, the genderbread person visualizes these concepts. The term sex often refers to physiological or bodily aspects (e.g., genitalia, chromosomes), whereas gender refers to social aspects (gender identity and gender expression; Connell, 2005; Lindqvist et al., 2021). Gender identity generally refers to the internal perception of a person's gender, which can be a man, woman, another gender, or no gender (Lindqvist et al., 2021). The term cisgender refers to people whose gender identity matches the one that is culturally expected of them based on their assigned sex at birth. Whereas many people today are not (yet) aware of diversity in gender identity, it is important to note that people who do not identify as cisgender (e.g., non-binary, transgender) have existed throughout history (Day, 2020). People's gender expression refers to the external representations of a person's gender through social cues (e.g., clothing, hairstyles, way of speaking, and behavior), and/or bodily features such as those resulting from surgery, or hormone therapy. As the gender expression of an individual may or may not match their gender identification, gender identity should not be assumed from individuals' gender expression and, instead, based on a person's self-report (Lindqvist et al., 2021). As the studies in this dissertation are focused on the social aspects of people's gender and attitudes toward gender roles, we use the terms gender and gender differences in this dissertation, and not sex or sex differences. In our family studies (Chapters 4 and 5) we focus on families

consisting of a father and a mother and two children. During recruiting and data collection, we asked participants to identify with binary gender categories (e.g., 'Are you a boy or a girl?'). We did not ask participants whether they were cis-gendered. In the discussion (Chapter 6) I will discuss the practical reasons for these choices and reflect on the limitations of this selection.

People's sexual orientation is a different personal aspect than their gender identity and can be defined as an individual's description of their own emotional and sexual attraction to others. People's sexual orientation can be gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or heterosexual (Bamberger & Farrow, 2021). Queer and feminist scholars emphasize that sexual orientation should never be assumed from someone's sexual behavior or relationship partners; it should always be determined by asking individuals to prevent misclassification based on stereotypes and exclusion (Bamberger & Farrow, 2021).

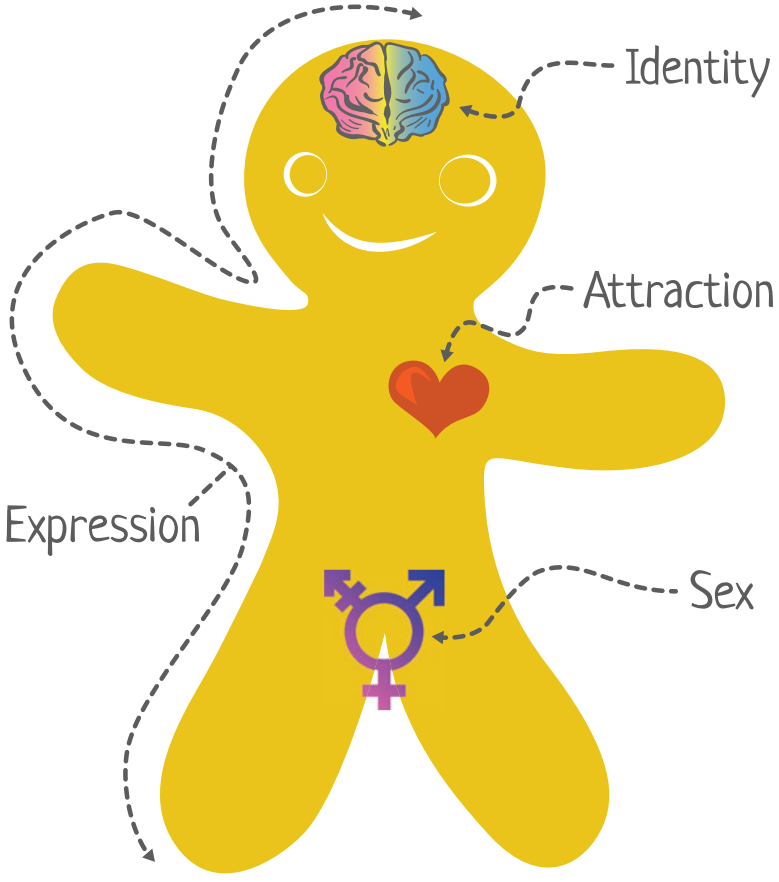

Figure 1.1: The genderbread person by Sam Killerman.

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity refers to the mundane, everyday way in which heterosexuality is privileged, taken for granted, and perceived as normal, and natural (Martin, 2009). It defines the boundaries of socially acceptable relationships and identities and is the source of the underlying pressure for people to conform to socially accepted gender roles and sexual behavior (Habarth, 2014). In feminist and queer literature, heteronormativity is posited as the underlying construct and key contributor to homophobic attitudes and behavior toward people from the LGBTQI+ community (Habarth, 2014; Mereish & Poteat, 2015), and gender stereotypes (Habarth, 2014). Homophobia is the 'fear, hatred, or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same assigned sex or gender' (Bamberger and Farrow, 2021, p. 255). Homophobic and affirmative behavior toward sexual minorities (e.g., voicing support, engaging in advocacy, and countering homophobia; Huic, 2018) can be predicted by individuals' attitudes toward these groups (Mereish & Poteat, 2015; Poteat et al., 2013). An attitude is 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor' (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, p. 597). Negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals are complex and multidimensional (Adolfsen et al., 2010). Heteronormativity is also theorized to be the underlying construct of beliefs about gender and gender stereotypes. Heteronormative beliefs do not only assume that there are only two genders but also that men and women are associated with natural roles (masculine or feminine; van Toorn et al., 2020). Gender stereotypes are theorized to be used by individuals to categorize and simplify what they see and predict what other people will do (Hentschel et al., 2019). In doing so, gender stereotypes can lead to inaccurate judgments and expectations from other people or oneself, that do not reflect reality (Hentschel et al., 2019). Gender stereotypes can be explicit or implicit. While explicit stereotypes are conscious, deliberatively articulated opinions about men and women, implicit stereotypes usually function outside of conscious awareness (Endendijk et al., 2013; Rudman, 2004). Most stereotypes are subtle and implicit (Nosek et al., 2002). Gender stereotypes can affect a person's interests, self-views, and behaviors. Further, stereotypes can influence people's beliefs about and behavior toward other people (Bem, 1981). As such, gender stereotypes can form barriers for people who want to fulfill counter-stereotypic occupations and roles in society. This holds for all genders (Budge et al., 2010; Croft et al., 2015; Sinclair & Carlson, 2013).

Over the last decades, there has been a focus on studying the general acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals and equal rights for these groups (Adolfsen et al., 2010; Takács & Szalma, 2016), and on gender stereotypic attitudes toward women in traditionally masculine roles (Croft et al., 2015). Research on the socialization of individuals' attitudes towards sexual minorities and gender roles is more limited when it comes to attitudes that go beyond merely accepting gay or lesbian identities and the general equality of men and women. Compared to these general attitudes, there is, for instance, less research on attitudes about the expression of same-sex relationships

in the public social sphere, attitudes toward gay or lesbian family members (Takács & Szalma, 2016; Ying et al., 2022), and on gender-stereotypic attitudes toward men fulfilling roles that are traditionally perceived as feminine (Croft et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2022). As people's attitudes towards these groups are visible and tangible to the individuals who belong to them (Blair et al., 2022; Feinstein et al., 2014; Kalokerinos et al., 2017), examining what socializing factors contribute to these attitudes can add to our understanding of the persistent marginalization of these groups.

Although I previously discussed why gender identity and sexual orientation are two different personal aspects, normative ideas about gender and sexuality do not exist separately from each other, as these ideas are intertwined (Marchia & Sommer, 2019). Normative ideas about heterosexual behavior and relationships always consist of fixed expectations of the gender binary: man or woman (Habarth, 2014). Further, negative attitudes and behaviors toward sexual minorities are theorized to be related to gender roles. For example, homophobic attitudes are theorized to be part of toxic masculinity (i.e., cultural norms about masculinity that can harm men themselves, women, and society). Other classic examples of toxic masculinity are notions that men should have a strong need to dominate others, readiness to use violence, and are incapable of nurturing (Kupers, 2005). In line with this theory, a recent meta-analysis showed that compared to heterosexual women, heterosexual men generally hold more negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals (especially gay men) and civil gay rights (Kite et al., 2021). In addition, they were, compared to heterosexual women, more likely to engage in anti-gay behavior, endorse gay stereotypes, and want to avoid gay men. Heterosexual women, on the other hand, reported a stronger desire to avoid lesbian women than heterosexual men did. Gender differences in anti-gay prejudice were partly mediated by gender differences in beliefs about gender roles, revealing that indeed, attitudes about sexual minorities and gender roles are closely linked (Kite et al., 2021). Further, especially for men, not adhering to rigid gender norms can lead to one's sexual orientation being questioned and/or being stigmatized as effeminate (Kalokerinos et al., 2017). When this happens, the masculine identity and the advantaged position that comes with it can be threatened (Croft et al., 2015). Consequently, many men and boys shy away from activities and roles that are traditionally perceived as feminine and can threaten the masculine identity (Kalokerinos et al., 2017; Sinclair & Carlson, 2013).

This dissertation takes the interrelated nature of gender (roles) and attitudes toward sexual minorities into account by examining to what extent national circumstances are related differently to attitudes of men and women toward equal adoption rights for same-sex couples (Chapter 2), examining attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women separately (Chapter 5), and examining the role of gender in parent-child similarities in attitudes and talks about gay and lesbian issues (Chapter 5).

1.3 Socializing influences at different levels of society

Heteronormativity is present at multiple levels in society (e.g., within institutions, families, and individuals (Herz & Johansson, 2015). To gain a full understanding of how heteronormativity is constructed and heteronormative attitudes are perpetuated, it is crucial to examine socialization across these different levels. According to the socializing agents' theory, individuals' attitudes are influenced by exposure to socializing agents (Durkheim 1897; Ultee et al., 2003). Socializing agents are institutions, groups, or people in which individuals are incorporated that influence individuals' norms, attitudes, and behaviors (Sani Dotti & Quaranta, 2020; Scheepers et al., 2002). Classical examples of these agents demonstrated to be related to gender stereotypes and attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals are the family, religious institutions, and the educational system (Jaspers et al., 2008; Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018; Scheepers et al., 2002; van der Linden et al., 2015). The social integration theory by Durkheim (1897; Ultee et al., 2003) states that the attitudes of individuals are not only affected by socializing agents to which individuals are exposed (yes or no) but also to what extent they are exposed to these socializing agents. When individuals are exposed more often or for a longer period to certain socializing agents, they are more likely to be influenced and to form attitudes according to these socializing agents (Ultee et al., 2003). According to the cohort theory of Inglehart (1977; 1990) and social learning theories, individuals are especially prone to the social and cultural context during their formative years (i.e., during adolescence and young adulthood, Inglehart 1977; 1990), in particular by people who are similar to them in terms of gender (Endendijk et al., 2018).

Social learning theories can shed light on how children process and internalize norms about gender and sexual orientation. According to these theories, children can be perceived as gender detectives (Martin, 2004). They actively search for cues about gender to make sense of the world around them (e.g., who should or should not do particular activities, why boys and girls are different, and who falls in love with whom (Martin & Ruble, 2004; Martin 2009). Children observe and hear these gender cues at different places and from different socializing agents (e.g., within the family, at school, from peers, and the media (Calzo & Ward, 2009). Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981, 1983) sheds light on how gender stereotypes are processed by children in gender schemas, i.e., cognitive structures containing gender-related information based on cultural norms that influence children's attitudes, behavior, and identities (Bem, 1981, 1983). When children repeatedly receive the message that a certain trait, interest, behavior, activity, or profession is often ascribed to women, they will categorize it in their gender schemas as feminine (Bem, 1981, 1983). Subsequently, these gender schemas influence children's perceptions of the world and their attitudes, identity, and eventually behavior and future possible selves (Bem, 1981, 1983; Ramaci et al., 2017).

In this dissertation, we examine socializing influences on attitudes toward gender roles and lesbian and gay individuals across three levels of society: national

circumstances (Chapter 2), secondary education (Chapter 3), and the family (Chapters 4 and 5). In the second chapter (national circumstances), we focus on socializing circumstances for adults. In Chapters 3 to 5, we focus on the socialization of adolescents.

National circumstances

According to Mannheim (1936, 1972; Scheepers et al., 2002), in addition to socializing agents in which individuals are incorporated, the larger context (e.g., national political systems, religious characteristics of a nation) can set socializing circumstances that affect individuals' beliefs (Scheepers et al., 2002). For example, laws and policies function as socializing agents affecting people's attitudes because they state what is legally right and what is wrong in society (Abou-Chadi & Finnigan 2019; Van den Akker et al., 2013). These socializing contexts are culture-specific and change over time within countries. Whereas some contexts are expected to change relatively slowly over time (e.g., the religiosity of countries) others are regarded to change more rapidly (e.g., legislation on same-sex relationships; Van den Akker et al., 2013).

Socializing circumstances at the national level can affect groups of people to different extents and at different paces (Scheepers et al., 2002; Sani Dotti, & Quaranta, 2020). Non-traditional attitudes are theorized to be firstly accepted by forerunners, and then gradually by the larger population (Sani Dotti & Quaranta, 2020). Indeed, the socializing influences of progressive laws do not affect attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals of the larger public all at one time, but instead affect a group of forerunners (e.g., highly educated and non-religious people first; Sani Dotti & Quaranta, 2020)

Whereas numerous studies have examined the influence of socializing agents (education, religion) and national circumstances (religiosity, legislation on same-sex relationships) on the general acceptance of gay men and women (Takács & Szalma 2020; Van den Akker et al., 2013), research on the attitudes toward same-sex couples forming a family is still scarce, especially from an international perspective (Sani Dotti & Quaranta 2020; Takács, et al., 2016). Despite being legalized in many Western countries, this family composition is not (fully) accepted by the larger public and therefore remains a sensitive issue (Sani Dotti & Quaranta 2020). Same-sex couples and their children still face discrimination in their everyday lives, harming their economic, emotional, and relational well-being (Levitt et al., 2020; Messina & D'Amore 2018). To decrease discrimination, it is crucial to identify the socialization factors that contribute to the denial of equal adoption rights despite the formal legalization of this type of family in so many countries. Therefore, in Chapter 2 we examined the extent to which stable national circumstances (persistent influence from former regimes in the past) and variable circumstances (legalization of same-sex relationships) are related to rejecting same-sex couples from forming a family. In addition, we examined to what extent progressive laws on same-sex relationships can be a 'buffer' for rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples among two groups that have repeatedly been shown to

hold more negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals and equal adoption rights in Western Industrialized countries: men and older birth cohorts (Bettinsoli et al., 2020; Sani Dotti & Quaranta, 2020).

Socializing influences at school

At school, children learn and develop their intellectual abilities and skills. The theory of the hidden curriculum offers an understanding of the different types of knowledge that children learn at school (Lee, 2014). According to this theory, the curriculum consists of the formal and the hidden curriculum. The formal curriculum recognizes and openly specifies what learners are intended to learn. In contrast, the hidden curriculum contains knowledge that is not (officially) openly intended. Especially the latter part of the curriculum is normative and reinforces dominant beliefs, values, and norms (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Lee, & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2020). This informal knowledge is obtained throughout the environment of the school (e.g., through cultural messages provided by teachers, and peers, and through educational materials; Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018; Lee, 2014). The hidden curriculum conveys cultural norms, including heteronormative messages and gender stereotypes (Lee, 2008). Being exposed to gender stereotypic messages at school can be a barrier to the development of counter-gender stereotypic personalities, skills, and abilities (Heyder & Kessels, 2013; Riley, 2014; Smith & Sarkas, 2022). In addition, heteronormative messages at school can induce the belief that heterosexual relationships are the only acceptable relationships and that children from LGBTQI+ communities are not part of our society (Pearson & Wilkinson, 2018).

Next to the gender messages of teachers and peers, characters in educational materials help shape children's gender schemas because these characters invite children to identify with them (Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018; Lee, 2014). Studies on gender bias in educational materials mainly focused on (English) language textbooks for primary education (Koster et al., 2020). Less is known about the extent to which these messages are incorporated into language textbooks (other than English) for secondary education with an adolescent population. Yet, early adolescence is a period of development during which children are particularly susceptible to stereotypic messages (Aronson & Good, 2002; Kågesten, 2016). In addition, as the gap in science interest emerges around early adolescence, examining gender stereotypes in early high school textbooks for math is especially relevant (Blue & Gann, 2016; Wonch Hill et al., 2017). Therefore, in Chapter 3, we examined to what extent gender and heteronormative messages are conveyed in Dutch textbooks for the first year of secondary education.

Socializing influences within the family

In addition to school, the family context is crucial for gender development because that is where children's first gender-related experiences are incorporated into their gender schemas (Bem, 1981; Endendijk et al., 2018). Gender schema theory suggests

that children internalize the gender-stereotypic messages their parents implicitly or explicitly communicate to them in various ways (i.e., through role model behavior, explicit and implicit gender talk, and gender-differentiated parenting behavior; Endendijk et al., 2018). Consequently, children with parents who hold more traditional gender-stereotypic attitudes, and are engaged in more traditional gender-stereotypic behavior, are more likely to incorporate similar attitudes and imitate these behaviors than children with parents who hold less traditional stereotypic attitudes and show less gender-stereotypic behavior (Croft et al., 2014). From a young age, children associate and classify certain professions with men and others with women in line with prevailing stereotypes in society (Solbes-Canales et al., 2020; Wilbourn & Knee, 2010). Studies on gender-stereotypic occupational interest and attitudes largely focused on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) occupations (Croft et al., 2015). Yet, studies on the reasons why men do not aspire to a career in HEED (Health Care, Early Education, and Domestic) occupations are scarce (Beutel et al., 2019; Meeussen et al., 2020; Olsen et al., 2022). This is unfortunate, as male representation in HEED domains can reduce labor shortage in this field, reduce negative stereotypes about men in these roles, increase flexibility in societal gender norms, and provide varied role models for younger generations (e.g., Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020). Therefore, in Chapter 4 we examined adolescents' stereotypic attitudes towards and interest in HEED occupations in relation to their parents' gender-stereotypic attitudes, role model behavior, and socialization values.

As gender stereotypes and attitudes toward sexual minorities are related, we applied Bem's gender theory to the underlying process of how parents socialize their children with heteronormativity and homophobic attitudes in Chapter 5. Whereas numerous studies on negative attitudes toward these groups have focused on individual characteristics of adolescents and the influence of peers (e.g., religiosity, educational level, and intergroup contact (Santona & Tognasso, 2018; Sevecke et al., 2015), few studies have examined the role of parents in children's development of these attitudes (van der Linden et al., 2015). Yet, the family context is also crucial for the development of attitudes toward minority groups, including sexual minorities (Vollebergh et al., 2001). This process takes place through various heteronormative socialization practices.

Studies on parent-child similarities in attitudes toward sexual minorities focused on general attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals (Jaspers et al., 2008; van der Linden et al., 2015; Meeusen & Dhont, 2015) rather than attitudes about gay or lesbian expressions in public or having gay or lesbian family members. The latter type of attitudes are known to be less positive and add to the disadvantaged position of sexual minorities (Blair et al., 2022; Feinstein et al., 2014; Huinck, 2022). For example, many people from sexual minorities do not feel free to express intimacy by holding hands in public, and parental acceptance of a child's sexual orientation can be a buffer against the negative health impacts of internalized homophobia (Blair et al., 2022; Feinstein et al., 2014). Parent-child similarities in these homophobic attitudes can show to what extent these

homophobic attitudes are being passed on across generations (Jaspers et al., 2008). In addition, it is important to study implicit heteronormative messages parents provide to their children about gay issues (Martin, 2009). These implicit messages contain important information to children about how parents perceive these issues as normal (Shibley Hyde & Jaffee, 2000; Martin, 2009). For example, when parents repeatedly ask their daughter whether she already has a crush on a boy, this could signal to the child that heterosexual attractions are the only normal and acceptable ones (Martin, 2009). Therefore, in Chapter 5 we examined to what extent the homophobic attitudes of parents are related to their children, and we examined observed parental discomfort with gay or lesbian issues.

1.4 The Dutch context

The Netherlands provides an interesting context for examining gender processes and heteronormativity. This country scores generally high on the Gender Equality Index (third in 2022; EIGE, 2022). Yet, gender segregation in education in the Netherlands is among the highest in Western Europe and the most room for improvement for the Netherlands lies in this domain (EIGE, 2022). Further, gender segregation in occupational domains is clearly visible (EIGE, 2022; Salanauskaite, 2017). In 2019, 81 percent of the care and welfare professions, and 72 percent of pedagogic professions in the Netherlands were fulfilled by women (Van den Brakel et al., 2020). Also, the Netherlands has the highest proportion of women working part-time across the world, there is a relatively large gap in salary between men and women, and the share of female managers is among the very lowest in Europe (CBS, 2022). Therefore, insight into gender role socialization remains relevant in this national context.

In addition, the Netherlands is often referred to as a gay-friendly country and praised for its high acceptance of sexual minorities (Huijnk, 2022). This country was the first in the world to legalize gay marriage in 2000 and was a pioneer when it came to adoption by same-sex couples (Sani Dotti & Quaranta, 2020). Concerning general attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals the vast majority of Dutch people (i.e., 93%), indeed, hold accepting attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women. However, it is important to note that in the Netherlands even anti-gay violence offenders in the Netherlands insist that they have nothing against gay or lesbian identities and that they are proud of the Dutch tolerance for sexual minorities (Buijs et al., 2021). However, when faced with expressions of it that conflict with what they perceive to be standard gendered and sexual norms, they can engage in all forms of violence (Buijs et al.; 2021). Also among the general population, the acceptance of sexual minorities is more limited than the tolerant Dutch narrative would suggest, especially when it comes to public expressions of same-sex attraction. For example, one in four adults (25%) finds it offensive to see two men kissing in public, and around one in six adults

report finding it offensive to see two women kissing in public. These percentages are clearly higher than when it concerns a man and a woman kissing in public (9%; Huijnk, 2022). Negative attitudes towards sexual minorities also continue to exist in the family domain. One in eight Dutch people (12%) argues that same-sex couples should not have equal adoption rights. Further, almost one in ten people (9%) reports finding it unacceptable if their (adult) child would cohabit with a steady partner of the same sex (Huijnk, 2022). The consequences of this limited acceptance of sexual minorities are visible in society. For example, gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals are still more likely to experience discrimination and become a victim of verbal and physical violence compared to heterosexual individuals (Huijnk, 2022).

Consequences of this limited acceptance are also prevalent among adolescents from sexual minorities. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents (aged 11-16), feel unhappy more than three times as often as heterosexual adolescents (Huijnk & van Beusekom, 2021). Although many schools in the Netherlands have adopted policies to ensure equal treatment of sexual minorities, gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents are almost twice as likely to be bullied than their heterosexual counterparts. Further, compared to heterosexual adolescents, they feel less accepted by their teachers and are less likely to report that teachers care about them (Huijnk & van Beusekom, 2021). Taking this into account, it should not come as a surprise that adolescents from sexual minorities feel less positive about going to school and skip class more often than heterosexual adolescents (Huijnk & van Beusekom, 2021). Additionally, support from the family in general and specific family members is perceived as lower among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents (Huijnk & van Beusekom, 2021). These findings show that also in the Netherlands, negative attitudes toward sexual minorities are persistent and a lot remains to be accomplished to gain equality and inclusion for these groups.

1.5 Outline of Dissertation

In this dissertation, I examine how individuals are socialized with heteronormativity and gender norms through four studies that focus on national circumstances (Chapter 2), Dutch textbooks (Chapter 3), and Dutch families (Chapters 4 and 5). First, Chapter 2 describes a study on the influence of national circumstances on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples. We examined stable country characteristics (e.g., the persistent influence of former regimes), more variable country characteristics (legislation on same-sex relationships), and cross-level interactions with gender and cohort. Secondly, Chapter 3 examines gender stereotypes and heteronormativity in Dutch first-year secondary school textbooks from two core subjects: math and language. This chapter specifically examines the underrepresentation of women and LGBTQ+ characters in these books, and to what extent men and women are portrayed in gender-stereotypic social roles, occupations, and socio-emotional behaviors. Thirdly, Chapter 4

focuses on Dutch adolescents' gender stereotypic attitudes and interest in occupations that are stereotypically perceived as feminine. Specifically, we examined the association between adolescents' gender-stereotypic attitudes toward HEED occupations and their stereotypic interest in HEED careers. Further, we examine adolescents' stereotypic attitudes towards and interest in HEED occupations in relation to their parents' gender-stereotypic attitudes, role model behavior, and socialization values. Fourthly, Chapter 5 focuses on heteronormative socialization in Dutch families. This study analyses to what extent homophobic attitudes about same-sex kissing and having a gay son/lesbian daughter of parents and their children are similar, and to what extent parents show discomfort with coming out stories in interaction with their children. In addition, we examined the role of the gender of the parent, the child, and the target in these parent-child similarities and observed parental discomfort. Lastly, Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings of these studies and discusses future directions for research.

1.6 Positionality

Research on social issues and education is rarely value-free (Holmes, 2020). I want to acknowledge that this dissertation is not separated from my values and beliefs. Taking this into account, I would like to discuss my personal view and aspects of my background that are relevant to this dissertation. These studies were partially motivated by my ambition to contribute to the inclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals and people who do not (want to) conform to rigid gender norms in society. This motivation is based on my personal experiences and upbringing.

Growing up in a family with progressive perspectives on gender roles and diversity in sexual orientation, I noticed from a young age that the messages about these topics and groups I received at school (a Christian primary school in a religious area of the Netherlands) were different than the ones at home. For example, at school, my teacher argued that according to Christian beliefs, women should not be pastors because they are less rational by nature. I remember my mother was furious to hear this and explained to me why in her eyes this was nonsense. Further, sexual and gender minorities were silenced by all teachers at my primary school. These groups and issues like coming-outs were never discussed in the classroom and, consequently, became taboo at school. Even today, signs of limited acceptance in my hometown are visible. For example, a crosswalk in rainbow colors representing the LGBTQI+ community (a long-debated initiative) was recently destroyed (RTVUtrecht, 2022). Moreover, one of my friends who lives in this town still does not feel free to walk hand in hand with her girlfriend.

During my studies at the Central European University in Budapest, I made contact with students from LGBTQI+ communities across the world. Their personal stories of marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion in their home countries had a deep

impact on me and made me aware of my privileged position as a Dutch cisgender White woman. At the same time, the theoretical courses on subtle forms of sexism and heteronormativity opened my eyes to the marginalization of sexual minorities and rigid gender roles that were also persistent in my home country. My interest in (the more subtle forms of) heteronormativity that go beyond merely accepting gender equality and acceptance of the orientations of sexual minorities was induced by these courses. In addition, my studies at this University in Budapest made me more aware of the value of qualitative empirical studies on these specific issues. Therefore, I aimed to integrate qualitative studies into the theoretical frameworks throughout this dissertation. Finally, I learned that as a cisgender woman who has only been in heterosexual relationships, I can not fully understand the disadvantaged position of being in a same-sex relationship. Listening to the experiences of my friends, colleagues, and family members from the lesbian, gay, queer, and bisexual communities taught me how heteronormative messages and homophobia have a persistent influence on their daily lives. This motivated me to contribute to the inclusion of these groups in society.