

‘Minority consciousness gone mad?’

Exclusion, inclusion and self-organisation of disabled LGBTI people in the Dutch and British LGBT+ and disability movements, in the late twentieth century



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Research Master History Track:
Political Culture and National
Identities

MA Thesis, 30 ECTS

Submitted: 7 November 2019

Wordcount: 30,968

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my supervisor, Monika Baár, for her excellent supervision and guidance during the process of writing this thesis. Thanks also to Paul van Trigt, for connecting me with many interesting people for my research, and for providing me with useful archival material.

Thank you to the ERC Consolidator Grant Rethinking Disability for making the comparative approach of this research possible. Their generous funding has made it possible to conduct archival research in London during the month of May 2019.¹

Thanks to disability activist Jan Troost, who has helped me tremendously by allowing me to use his blog to call for interviewees, and by connecting me to many interesting people for the purposes of this research. Thanks as well to IHLIA LGBT Heritage for publishing my call for interviewees on their Facebook page and monthly newsletter. I also would like to express my gratitude to Jacqueline Kool, Sarah Cavar, Julia Bahner and Jessica Maes for thinking along and putting me in touch with some of my interviewees.

I am grateful to all my interviewees, for being willing to meet with me and participating in this research, and for connecting me with others and helping my research onwards. I am especially grateful to Petra Ybeles Smit, who has sadly passed away on the 6th of February, 2020. It was an honour chatting with her, and hearing her story, thoughts and insights.

Moreover, I am grateful to all Dutch and British archives that have accommodated my research. Unfortunately, due to issues of scope, this thesis has been unable to pay attention to all efforts and activities around non-normative sexuality, gender identity and disability that existed within the time span of the 1970s to the 1990s. Nor has this thesis been able to include all interesting topics discussed during the interviews. Therefore, I wish to acknowledge the importance of all which has not made it into the thesis. This is especially true for my interview with Sue Sanders, which has not made it into the thesis, but which has helped me tremendously in my writing process. I also wish to express my gratitude to Sue for putting me in touch with many people from her network. Similarly, the material consulted at the National Disability Arts Collection & Archive has unfortunately not made it into the thesis, however I am very grateful to Alex Cowen for assisting me in consulting the material there.

Finally, I wish to express my personal thanks to my friends Marike, Brooks, and Loes, and to my partner Lisette, for proofreading and advising me during my thesis process.

¹ The author acknowledges the support of the ERC Consolidator Grant Rethinking Disability under grant agreement number 648115.

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² Images on the title page: ‘Brothers and Sisters Club for Deaf Gays’, London School of Economics HCA/JOURNALS/282; Photo women dancing, G. Buurman, K. Spaink, *Aan hartstocht geen gebrek: handicap, erotiek en lichaamsbeleving* (Amsterdam 1991) IHLIA signature cat. (buurm/har) bb; ‘Gemma flyer’ London School of Economics HCA/EPHEMERA/184; ‘Doven horen er ook bij’, Institute for Social History (Henceforth IISH) Archive Roze Gebaar box 4, map 4; ‘Drawing’ Gemma, *National Disabled Gays Guide: An access guide for lesbians and gay men with disabilities outside London* (London 1985) Personal collections Kathryn Bell.

Abbreviations

AWGB: Algemene Wet Gelijke Behandeling (General Act Equal Treatment)

BCODP: British Council of Organisations of Disabled People

BDA: British Deaf Association

B&S: Brothers and Sisters Club for Deaf Gays

CHE: Committee for Homosexual Equality (Campaign for Homosexual Equality since 1971)

COC: Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum (Culture and Recreation Center). The group changed its name to Dutch Society for Homophiles COC in 1964, and Dutch Society for the Integration of Homosexuality COC in 1971

DA: Disability Alliance

DIG: Disablement Income Group

DPOs: Disabled People's Organisations

GLAD: Greater London Association of Disabled People

GLC: Greater London Council

GMDG: Gay Men's Disabled Group

FSWH: Federatie Studenten Werkgroepen Homoseksualiteit (Federation Student Workgroups Homosexuality)

HCA: Hall-Carpenter Archives

HLRS: Homosexual Law Reform Society

ILN: Independent Living Nederland

IISH: Institute for Social History

IYDP: International Year of Disabled People

LANGUID: Lesbians and Gays Unite In Disability

NVSH: Nederlandse Vereniging voor Seksuele Hervorming (Dutch Association for Sexual Reformation)

RADAR: Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation

SAD: Sisters Against Disablement

SOG: Workgroup Disability, Relationships and Sexuality of the 'Nederlandse Gehandicaptenraad' (Dutch Disability Council)

UPIAS: Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation

Introduction

In 1989, Black³ feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term ‘intersectionality,’ formulating an underarticulated theory for feminist analysis which asserts that all aspects of social and political identities, such as gender, sexuality, race, and disability, overlap and interconnect. This paradigm was developed by Black women to address the fact that their issues and interests were left out of feminist –predominantly white, upper-middle class, and workforce-centric– discourses.⁴ Intersectional theory promoted inclusion of the perspectives of those who are marginalised in multiple ways and therefore experience oppression along multiple axes. For example, women of colour are subjected not only to sexism, but also racism. This is not merely an addition of different oppressions; one’s position on multiple axes means facing particular oppressions related to that specific position. Multiple institutions overlap in their determination of inequalities, which produce complex configurations of oppression.⁵ Intersectional theory became a guiding principle in the development of feminist analysis, taking seriously the experiences of those who were multiply-identified.

From the 1970s onwards, multiply-identified people also began calling for consideration of their particular issues within, for instance, the LGBT⁶ and disability

³ I have chosen to capitalise ‘Black’ in this opening paragraph, as this paragraph indicates Black scholars. However, in any further instances in this thesis, ‘black’ will not be capitalised. This thesis recognises that a compelling argument has been made to capitalise ‘Black’ to indicate Black people as an ethnic group, making a distinction between colour (black) and race/ethnicity (Black). However, as the primary source material used for this thesis has not capitalised ‘Black’, I have chosen to follow their language and use ‘black.’ For more information on capitalising ‘Black’ and ‘White’, see: V. Childers, ‘Conscious style guide: the case for capitalizing Black and White in context of racial identity’, *Consciouscompany* (3 April 2019) <https://consciouscompanymedia.com/workplace-culture/conscious-style-guide-the-case-for-capitalizing-black-and-white-in-context-of-racial-identity/> [last accessed 6 November 2019]; L.L. Tharps, ‘The Case for Black with a Capital B’, *The New York Times* (18 November 2014) <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/opinion/the-case-for-black-with-a-capital-b.html> [last accessed 6 November 2019]; M. Perlman, ‘Black and White: why capitalization matters’, *Columbia Journalism Review* (23 June 2015) https://www.cjr.org/analysis/language_corner_1.php [last accessed 6 November 2019].

⁴ For a comprehensive intellectual history of the concept ‘intersectionality’, see: A.M. Hancock, *Intersectionality: an intellectual history* (Oxford 2016).

⁵ Hancock, *Intersectionality* 19; L. McCall, ‘The Complexity of Intersectionality’, *Signs* 30:3 (2005) 1771.

⁶ While ‘LGBT’ was not yet used to indicate the movement in the second half of the twentieth century, and only became broader in use in the 1990s, the term ‘LGBT’ is used here as not to disregard the role trans women played in the emergence of a gay liberation movement, especially in the US. Nevertheless, the movement was mainly focused on gay men and lesbian women, and trans issues predominantly went underrepresented. For a

movements. Both the Dutch and British LGBT and disability movements predominantly reflected the interests of a male, cisgender⁷ and white normative identity.⁸ Sociologist Jan-Willem Duyvendak discusses how Dutch lesbian and gay subcultures developed a singular identity and an enforced internal homogeneity, which tended to erase and exclude varying or combined perspectives surrounding, for instance, race, class, gender, age and ethnicity.⁹ The same has been noted by historian Sebastian Buckle, who explained that the development of a gay identity within the British commercial gay scene excluded a great many people with multiple identities, amongst them those with disabilities.¹⁰ This led to the development of specific groups, such as the Lesbian and Gay Black Group, or the Long Yang Club, for South-East Asians. According to Buckle, this ‘proved crucial in building an alternative gay identity’ for those often not recognised by this more mainstream community of the 1980s.¹¹

Calls for attention to the existence of disabled lesbians and gays began to emerge during the 1970s, challenging the normative gay identity: these calls increased in amount and urgency throughout the following two decades. For instance, a cheerful yet confrontational pamphlet was published in 1994 by the disability and homosexuality workgroup of the Nederlandse Gehandicaptenraad (Dutch Council of Disabled People):

Within the gay and lesbian movement, we’re all here: stuttering queers, deaf dykes, Jewish spastics, visually impaired immigrants, fat wheelchair users, crippled practitioners of SM, and many others. From blind disco-goers to little theatre lovers, from crooked

more comprehensive history of trans activism, see: C. Burns ed. *Trans Britain: Our Journey from the Shadows* (London 2018) 119-246.

⁷ Cisgender entails that one’s gender identity corresponds with the gender they were assigned at birth, as opposed to transgender people, whose gender identity does not correspond with the gender they were assigned at birth.

⁸ C.J. O’Toole, ‘The Sexist Inheritance of the Disability Movement’ in: B.G. Smith, B. Hutchison, *Gendering Disability* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London 2014); C. Burgers, J. Fransen, ‘Tussen verlangen en belangen. De homo- en lesbische beweging’ in: J.W. Duyvendak, H.A. van der Heijden, R. Koopmans, L. Wijmans, *Tussen verbeelding en macht: 25 jaar nieuwe sociale bewegingen in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1992) 181-197; V. van de Loo, *De vrouw beslist: De tweede feministische golf in Nederland* (Wormer 2005) 189-195; E. Bresnahan, ‘Feminist/Lesbian Separatism Movement’ in: F.F. Piven, S.E. Bronner, I. Ness eds. *Encyclopedia of American Social Movements*, (London 2015).

⁹ Duyvendak eds. *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* (Amsterdam 1994) 7-9, 20-22.

¹⁰ S. Buckle, *The Way Out: A History of Homosexuality in Modern Britain* (London, New York 2015) 150-155.

¹¹ Idem 155.

sun-worshippers to deaf speed walkers. We make up about ten percent of the total group of lesbians and gays [...]: lesbian women and homosexual men with a physical disability or chronic illness. We are also a part of the many gays and lesbians and therefore want to participate in the gay movement. We fight the same battle against prejudice and for our own lifestyle. As long as we continue to be excluded from parts of the gay movement because of our disability, the gay movement will have ten percent less input of ideas and creativity.¹²

The problems disabled¹³ LGBTI people¹⁴ identified were two-sided: homophobia in the existing disability organisations and communities; and ableism¹⁵ and inaccessibility within existing lesbian and gay organisations and communities. Thus, disabled lesbian and gay groups were set up to combat these exclusions. These groups were meant to create a space of their own, to meet, share experiences and educate each other. Their experiences of exclusion, and their subsequent self-organisation, is the main focus of this thesis. This thesis seeks to answer how disabled LGBTI people navigated both LGBTI and disabled spheres, and how and why they created or used disabled LGBTI spheres or content, in the United Kingdom and in the Netherlands throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s.

¹² Author's translation from the original Dutch: 'Binnen de homo- en lesbobeweging zijn wij er allemaal: stotterende flikkers, dove potten, joodse spasten, slechtziende alloctonen, dikke rolstoelrijders, manke SM-ers en vele anderen. Van blinde discogangers tot kleine toneelliefhebbers, van scheefgegroeide zoonanbidders tot dove snelwandelaars. Wij vormen ongeveer 10% van de totale groep lesbiennes en homo's [...]: lesbische vrouwen en homoseksuele mannen met een lichamelijke handicap of chronische ziekte. Wij horen ook bij de vele homo's en lesbo's en willen daarom participeren binnen de homobeweging. We voeren dezelfde strijd tégen vooroordelen en voor een eigen leefstijl. Zolang wij door delen van de homobeweging buitengesloten worden vanwege onze handicap, is er 10% minder inbreng van ideeën en creativiteit.' In: Gehandicaptenraad, *Pils met een rietje: met een handicap in de homobeweging* (Utrecht, Amsterdam 1994) IHLIA LGBT Heritage (henceforth IHLIA), signature cat. (pils/rie) g.

¹³ In this thesis, I speak of 'disabled people' rather than 'people with disabilities' when generalising, to subscribe to the social model of disability belief that it is not the body which disables a person, but rather that the discrimination, inaccessibility and oppression in society disables someone. In specific situations, I shall follow the language used in the archival sources and interviews.

¹⁴ I use the acronym 'LGBTI', which stands for 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex', even though this acronym was not widely in use in the time period of this thesis yet. The majority of sources used for this thesis, moreover, were aimed at gay men and lesbians, and sometimes bisexual people. Trans and intersex people are rarely mentioned in the source material. However, as I have also interviewed trans women and an intersex woman for this research, I have decided to speak of 'LGBTI' when generalising, in order to call attention to their existence within the category 'disabled LGBTI people', even if they existed within the margins of that group. In addition, I will speak of 'lesbian and gay organisations', 'groups' and 'movements', in order to signify that these organisations were aimed often only at lesbian women and gay men. For specific groups I will use the name that the group is proclaimed to be aimed at.

¹⁵ 'Ableism' refers to discrimination and social prejudice against disabled people.

Until quite recently, disability and (non-normative) sexuality has been a largely neglected topic. This was because, for a long time, disabled people were presumed to have no sexual feelings. Disability scholars and activists have written about how, due to harmful representations, pity, neglect and medicalisation, disabled people are forced into a state of perpetual childhood, and consequently treated as genderless, asexual beings.¹⁶ According to disability scholar Eli Clare, asexuality was institutionalised, as disabled people were forced into an asexual existence through sheltered employment, protective paternalism, restrictive legislation and lack of sexual policy.¹⁷

Following this, it was assumed that disabled people and LGBTI people were distinct groups: asexual stigmatisation denied disabled people the possibility to identify with non-normative sexual orientations or gender identities as well. Queer crip¹⁸ theorist Robert McRuer argues that an analysis of queerness and disability helps to undermine the assumption that ‘the queer’ and ‘the disabled’ are distinct groups, without any overlap. As such, analyses of disabled queer narratives can help undermine the dichotomies and hierarchies between and within LGBT and disabled communities.¹⁹ Similarly, Clare argues that assumptions of asexuality can be renegotiated by creating more positive representations of disabled people:

Within disability communities and in mainstream culture, we need images, honest, solid, shimmering powerful, joyful images, of crip bodies and sexuality in the same way we need crip humor, crip pride, and crip culture. These images will help people to refigure their bodies as something other than broken, neglected, medicalized objects of pity.²⁰

¹⁶ R. McRuer, ‘Disabling Sex: Notes for a Crip Theory of Sexuality’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17:1 (2011) 107-117; McRuer, A.L. Wilkerson, ‘Introduction’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 9:1-2 (2003); R. Garland-Thompson, ‘Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory’, in: L.J. Davis ed., *The disability studies reader* (New York 2017) 371-373; E. Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Durham 2015) 2-9, 83, 104-119.

¹⁷ Clare, *Exile and Pride* 119-122.

¹⁸ ‘Crip’, like ‘queer’ is reclaimed by some LGBTI activists, is a word reclaimed by some disability activists to give it a positive and proud meaning.

¹⁹ McRuer, Wilkerson, ‘Introduction’ 1-23.

²⁰ Clare, *Exile and Pride* 118.

In this thesis, I intend to unearth the history of organising around disability and non-normative sexuality and gender identity, adding to the volume of positive, complex and realistic representations of disabled people. Focusing on disabled LGBTI people offers a counterweight to the dominant narrative conventions that envision disabled people and LGBTI people as distinct groups, and shows the complexity, fullness and diversity of disabled queer history. This will be an intersectional analysis, as it focuses on the experiences of those who are multiply-identified, and on the isolating impact being multiply-identified can have on people who are part of groups organised around one singular identity.

There have scarcely been any historical inquiries into the existence and experiences of disabled LGBTI people. The subject had been briefly broached, in British LGBT historiography; historians Matt Cook and Sebastian Buckle both briefly mention how the ideal of bodily perfection in the gay subculture of the late 1970s and 1980s was exclusionary to disabled people.²¹ In Dutch LGBT historiography, there have been no analyses of disabled LGBTI people themselves, but research has been carried out comparing the lesbian and gay movement and the burgeoning Dutch disability movement. Duyvendak compared them to see whether there were similar notions of identity and identity politics within the disability movement as there have been within the lesbian and gay movement.²² Likewise, political scientist Nicole Franssen compared the movements to explore whether the Dutch disability movement could use the example of lesbian and gay identity politics.²³

While disability history increasingly integrates critical decolonial, queer and feminist perspectives,²⁴ comprehensive histories of disability have, in the British context, generally

²¹ M. Cook, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages* (Oxford 2007) 184-185; Buckle, *The Way Out* 150-155.

²² Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 95-96.

²³ Published as J. Franssen, 'Gehandicaptenbeweging en identiteitspolitiek' in: A. van Wijnen, Y. Koster-Dreese, A. Oderwald eds., *Trots en treurnis: Gehandicapt in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1996) 181-192.

²⁴ S. Barsch, A. Klein, P. Verstraete, eds., *The Imperfect Historian: Disability Histories in Europe* (Frankfurt am Main 2013); S. Burch, M.A. Rembis, *Disability Histories* (Urbana 2014); M. Rembis, C. Kudlich, K.E. Nielsen, *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (New York 2018).

followed the disability movement's focus on policies around employment, healthcare, and living.²⁵ Dutch disability historiography in general is still in its early days, and has not deeply broached the topic of sexuality. Beyond historical accounts, however, mainly in the 1990s there have been sociological interview-based analyses of the experiences of disabled LGBTI people. In the Dutch context, such research is limited to one book, namely *Homo's met een handicap bestaan niet* ('Gay people with a disability do not exist').²⁶ Published in 1990, this offers preliminary research about the position of disabled lesbians and gays, conducted by Agnes van Wijnen, Annemieke van Brandenburg and Rob Tielman. The book concluded that more expansive research on the subject was needed, but further research has not followed.²⁷

In the UK, there have been multiple sociological analyses of disability and homosexuality. One such important work is *The Sexual Politics of Disability* (1996) written by disability scholars Tom Shakespeare, Dominic Davies and Kath Gillespie-Sells.²⁸ This book emerged from an initiative to compile a collection of accounts by lesbian and gay disabled people, but was steered by the commissioning editor towards a more general book about the sexual politics of disability as a whole, in order to fill the gap within disability studies literature that dealt with sexuality.²⁹ The initial emphasis on disabled gay men and lesbians does mean they were represented well in the book; the majority of interviewees were gay, lesbian or bisexual.³⁰ There were also other books focused on sexuality and disability in general which paid sufficient attention to disabled LGBTI people. An example is *She Dances to Different Drums: Research into Disabled Women's Sexuality* (1998) by Kath Gillespie-

²⁵ G. Millward, *Invalid Definitions, Invalid Responses: Disability and the Welfare State, 1965-1995* (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine 2014) diss.; A. Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain since 1750: A History of Exclusion* (New York 2005).

²⁶ A. van Wijnen, A. van Brandenburg, R. Tielman, *Homo's met een handicap bestaan niet* (Utrecht 1990).

²⁷ Van Wijnen, Van Brandenburg, Tielman, *Homos met handicap bestaan niet* 7-8.

²⁸ T. Shakespeare, K. Gillespie-Sells, D. Davies, *The Sexual Politics of Disability: Untold Desires* (London 1996).

²⁹ Shakespeare, 'Researching Disabled Sexuality' in: C. Barnes, G. Mercer eds., *Doing Disability Research* (Leeds 1997) 177-189.

³⁰ *Idem* 181.

sells, Mildrette Hill and Bree Robbins. This was the first major research on disabled women's sexuality in the UK, and focused on three target groups: black women, lesbian and bisexual women, and heterosexual women.³¹ Furthermore, while most of the research on sexuality and disability has focused mainly on physical disability, Michelle McCarthy, Mildrette Hill and Bree Robbins published a book in 1999, titled *Sexuality and women with learning disabilities*.³² There were also articles focusing on disabled LGBTI people in particular.³³ For instance, Yvon Appleby wrote an article on disabled lesbians in Great Britain³⁴, and Jenny Corbett wrote on the parallels between disability politics and the gay pride movement.³⁵

Two things stand out in the works mentioned above. Firstly, these accounts have mainly been cis-normative, meaning that the perspectives of transgender and intersex people have not been taken into account. This reflects the lack of representation of these particular groups within the organisations for lesbian and gay people with disabilities that existed in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. In this thesis, I will address the exclusion of trans people from these groups, and will draw upon the material from an interview conducted with a trans woman, and an intersex trans woman. Nevertheless, it must be noted that while one of these women was intersex, this thesis does not discuss intersexuality, mainly due to issues of scope. Further research is needed to fill this gap.

Secondly, the above works all focus on the exclusion faced by disabled LGBTI people, and on their double identification. McRuer argues that 'until very recently few attempts had been made to bridge queer and disabled communities, or modes of analysis and

³¹ Gillespie-Sells, M. Hill, B. Robbins, *She Dances to Different Drums: Research into disabled women's sexuality* (London 1998).

³² M. McCarthy, *Sexuality and Women with Learning Disabilities* (London 1999).

³³ Shakespeare, 'Coming out and coming home', *Journal of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identity* 4:1 (1999) 39-52; Shakespeare, 'Out on the edge: the exclusion of disable people from the British gay and lesbian community' (Unpublished draft article 1997) <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/Shakespeare-Out-on-the-Edge.pdf>, last accessed 25 October 2019.

³⁴ Y. Appleby, 'Out in the Margins', *Disability and Society* 9:1 (1994) 19-32.

³⁵ J. Corbett, 'A proud label: exploring the relationship between disability politics and gay pride', *Disability and Society* 9:3 (1994) 343-357.

activism, apart from occasional laments concerning the homophobia of disability communities or the ableism of queer communities.³⁶ While this thesis will still pay attention to issues of exclusion encountered by disabled LGBTI people –as this is the ground upon which they built their own efforts and organisations– this thesis will also go beyond a description of the problems faced by disabled LGBTI people by focusing on how they organised their demands for inclusivity.

This thesis focuses especially on lesbian and gay and/or disability organisations and groups, more so than on governmental or institutional policies, taking on a social movement approach. The period of the 1970s to 1990s was chosen because since the 1970s, attention began being paid to disabled lesbian and gay people. As most activity around this subject took place in the 1980s and 1990s, this is the period that will feature most prominently in this thesis. This thesis ends with the 1990s, both for the sake of scope and because it seems that within the Netherlands, attention to the subject lessened within both disability and LGBTI organising during the 2000s, as the Relations and Sexuality expert group of the largest disability organisation was cut due to austerity.³⁷ In the UK, it seems that LGBT disability groups persevered better, as the group for disabled lesbians Gemma (established in 1976), and the national organisation of LGBTQ people, Regard (established in 1989) still exist today, even if Gemma has gotten much smaller and less active.

This thesis takes on a comparative analysis focusing on both the Netherlands and the UK, because in these countries a similar phenomenon of disabled LGBTI organising can be observed. However, there were also substantial legislative, political and cultural differences in the UK and the Netherlands concerning both disability and LGBTI rights. These, amongst other factors, have led to differences in both LGBTI and disability advocacy. Widely varying,

³⁶ McRuer, Wilkerson, 'Introduction' 11-12.

³⁷ J. Bahner, 'Chapter 5: Netherlands', *Sexual Citizenship and Disability: Understanding Sexual Support in Policy, Practice and Theory* (Routledge, forthcoming).

for instance, were the British and Dutch frameworks of disability self-advocacy. In the British context the disability movement thrived, while, according to historian Paul van Trigt, in the Netherlands, the disability movement was not very strong and did not receive much media attention.³⁸ Moreover, the UK developed a flourishing field of disability studies, intertwined with and powered by disability activism. Conversely, several attempts to establish disability studies as a field in the Netherlands during the 1980s and 1990s failed. These different contexts have in turn led to different conceptualisations of disability.³⁹ While this makes for an interesting comparison, this thesis follows Van Trigt in his contention that the British case should not be seen as a model that the Dutch case deviates from. The Anglo-Saxon perspective on disability activism has become a dominant one in historiography, creating an image of the UK as a forerunner and the Netherlands as ‘lagging behind’. Van Trigt argues for the need of an alternative approach, which studies both countries as following their own trajectories, within their own contexts.⁴⁰

A comparative method was chosen to analyse the effects of varying broader contexts on the national developments of disabled lesbian and gay groups. Disability scholar Eliza Chandler stresses the need to take broader political and cultural contexts into account when studying identity and representations, since culture is central for crafting political identities and social subjects.⁴¹ A group or organisation never exists within a vacuum, and the national, transnational, political and cultural contexts will influence what frame of reference was available to them. A comparative approach helps to make this evident, as the influence of

³⁸ L. Brants, Van Trigt, A. Schippers, ‘A short history of approaches to disability in the Netherlands’ in: Brants, Van Trigt, Schippers eds. *The Routledge History of Disability* (London 2018) 151.

³⁹ Brants, Van Trigt, Schippers, ‘A short history of approaches to disability in the Netherlands’ 158-159.

⁴⁰ Van Trigt, ‘Historicizing the social model: Some preliminary thoughts about the history of disability, science, and politics in postwar Britain and the Netherlands’, *Studien des Aachener Kompetenzzentrums für Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 17 (2017) 93-103; Van Trigt, ‘A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country? Human Rights and Dutch Disability Groups Since 1981’, *Moving the social* 53 (2015) 87-88.

⁴¹ E. Chandler, ‘Crippling community; new meanings of disability and community’, nomorepotlucks.org (2012) <<http://nomorepotlucks.org/site/cripping-community-new-meanings-of-disability-and-community/>> [last accessed: 5 September 2018].

context is easily neglected and taken for granted within a national framework. Yet, comparative history has also been critiqued for treating national cases as if they were isolated from one another, and for failing to take into account mutual dependencies and relations. Historians Henk te Velde, Eric Storm and Stefan Berger stress the importance of taking into account processes of transfer: the movement of ideas, organisation forms, concepts, and so on, across borders.⁴² This thesis therefore also pays some attention to moments of contact between Dutch and British lesbian and gay disability groups— however, significant transfer between these groups did not occur to any great extent.

There were instances of transfer between the disability and lesbian and gay movement within the British and Dutch national contexts, however. Multiply-identified people were in an excellent position to function as agents of transfer between movements, as they tended to move between the movements they belonged to. Aside from this, disabled LGBTI people formed their own groups as well, being able to take tactics from both movements and combining them, and using them within their own groups. In the absence of combinations of tactics or rhetoric, it is interesting to see which rhetoric was preferred, or whether historical subjects distinguished between their multiple identities and applied different rhetoric to different parts of their identity. This provides a useful addition to existing historiography, as it gives further insight into how and why different rhetoric –of rights, anti-discrimination, or identity– was used.

In this thesis, I will focus specifically on the development and proliferation of emancipatory rhetoric around disability and LGBTI-identifications. This may take the form of statements of pride, but also in social model-like arguments. In the social model of disability,

⁴² H. te Velde, 'Political Transfer: An Introduction', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire* 12.2 (2005) 205-212, 217; E. Storm, 'The Spatial Turn and the History of Nationalism: Nationalism between Regionalism and Transnational Approaches', in: S. Berger, E. Storm eds., *Writing the History of Nationalism* (London 2018) 5-18. S. Berger, 'Comparative history', in: S. Berger, H. Feldner, K. Passmore, *Writing History: Theory & Practice* (London 2003) 165-171.

which was developed in the UK in 1975, disability is approached as a form of exclusion and social oppression imposed by society on those with physical or mental impairments. This model was developed as a way of distancing from ‘the medical model’, a term disability scholars and activists coined to describe the view within modern medicine and society that disability is a direct result of biological impairment, and is therefore located in the body. Disability, in this sense, is an individual problem to be treated through medical intervention and rehabilitation, rather than a societal problem to be changed by social reform. The social constructionist understanding of disability of the social model, instead, enabled emancipatory and identity-based politics for disabled people.⁴³ In contrast with the UK, in the Dutch context, a variation of the medical model proliferated until the 1990s, when more emancipatory language began to emerge in disability organisations.⁴⁴ Yet, emancipatory rhetoric positioning society as the cause of oppression developed in British, but also in Dutch disabled lesbian and gay groups from the 1970s on. Therefore, in this thesis I will review the presence or absence of emancipatory rhetoric in disabled lesbian and gay groups in relation to their national contexts.

In order to understand the national contexts, the first chapter of this thesis gives a short overview of the historical background of the Dutch and British disability and gay and lesbian movement, to provide the contextual backdrop against which the disabled lesbian and gay groups emerged. This is not intended as an all-encompassing comparison, but rather as a way to provide a sufficient background and context needed for a thorough comparison of British and Dutch LGBTI disability organising. The second chapter describes the problems of

⁴³ B. Mul, ‘The social model of disability and framing disease I – The social model of disability’ *Rethinkingdisability.net* (2018) <http://rethinkingdisability.net/the-social-model-of-disability-and-framing-disease-i-the-social-model-of-disability/> [last accessed 25 October 2019]; Van Trigt, ‘Historicizing the social model’ 100.

⁴⁴ Van Trigt, ‘Historicizing the social model’ 99-102; Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking: Over de Algemene Wet Gelijke Behandeling (1994) en de constructie van handicap in politieke instituties’, *Low Countries Historical Review* 134-1 (2019) 5, 18-26.

exclusion disabled LGBTI people faced in both the lesbian and gay movement, and the disability movement. In the third chapter, I discuss how disabled LGBTI people turned problems around exclusion into efforts to ensure inclusion, by giving a historical account of the disabled lesbian and gay groups and efforts that were set up. Finally, in the fourth chapter I examine the ways in which disabled lesbian and gay groups created their own normative identities. I do so by describing how –either explicitly or implicitly, intentionally or unintentionally– groups excluded or included nondisabled people, straight people, women, transsexual people, ethnic minorities, and people with intellectual disabilities.

The exclusion of disabled people from lesbian and gay circles and vice versa are partly caused by what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have called ‘methodological distancing’; members of marginalised communities tend to identify an even more marginalised group to redirect the stigma imposed by the dominant culture to.⁴⁵ An example given by McRuer is that:

gay men and lesbians insist that homosexuality is not “really” a mental disorder, feminists insist that female bodies are not “really” biologically inferior, and so forth. As Mitchell and Snyder make clear, disability of some sort is invariably identified as the “real” aberrancy.⁴⁶

According to McRuer, the opposite also occurs, as disabled people can also distance themselves from ‘real’ perversion, namely queerness.⁴⁷ Rejecting other groups could help in the formation of one’s own collective identity. According to Berger, collective identities have no essence of themselves, since they can only be defined against other identities.⁴⁸ While Berger writes this in relation mainly to constructed national identities, the same could be

⁴⁵ McRuer, ‘Critical Investments: AIDS, Christopher Reeve, and Queer/Disability Studies’, *Journal of Medical Humanities* 23-3/4 (2002) 224-225. See also; D. Mitchell, S. Snyder, *Narrative prosthesis: Disability and the dependencies of discourse* (Ann Arbor 2000).

⁴⁶ McRuer, ‘Critical Investments’ 224-225.

⁴⁷ *Idem* 224-225.

⁴⁸ S. Berger, C. Conrad, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe* (London 2014) 8.

argued for the collective identities within social movements. Eli Clare identifies this phenomenon as well, calling it ‘horizontal hostility,’ where marginalised people from many communities create their own internal tensions and hostilities. For example, people with physical disabilities tend to distance themselves from those with cognitive disabilities, or lesbians and gay men from bisexual people.⁴⁹ The fourth chapter of this thesis shows that this ‘horizontal hostility’ persisted within lesbian and gay disability groups as well.

An intersectional approach renegotiates horizontal hostility, as the existence of those who are multiply-identified automatically contradicts created distinctions between certain groups. A multiple-identity analysis fits within broader critiques of the use of the social model by historians. Historian Anne Borsay argues that social model histories tended to be grant histories with a materialist, politicised focus, describing how the discrimination of disability grew alongside industrialisation. According to Borsay, these histories did not take into account other individual characteristics, such as gender, sexuality, class and race.⁵⁰ Moreover, the social model –focusing on disability as solely caused by society’s discrimination– was criticised by postmodern disability scholars for neglecting personal experiences of impairment. One of the possible alternatives, according to historian Gareth John Millward, is a perspective of disability as an interaction between multiple identity groups.⁵¹ In this thesis, I opt for using a multiple identity, or intersectional, approach to disability.⁵²

I use no overarching definition of disability, and will instead rely on personal experiences of those individuals or organisations self-identified as disabled, focusing on the

⁴⁹ McRuer, ‘Critical Investments’ 224-225; Clare, *Exile and pride* 92.

⁵⁰ Millward, *Invalid Definitions* 15-16; Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain* 10-13.

⁵¹ Millward, *Invalid Definitions* 15-16.

⁵² Moreover, in this thesis I speak of ‘multiple identities’ rather than of ‘dual oppression’, as Corbett does when speaking of disabled LGBTI people. Jenny Corbett’s use of ‘dual oppression’ indicates that the nature of one’s multiple identities makes that they, while belonging to multiple categories, fit in neither. An example is that disabled people’s sexual orientation will be socially ignored because disability stigmatises someone as asexual. While Corbett does include in her notion of ‘dual oppression’ those that are, for instance, black, disabled and gay, the notion of ‘dual oppression’ itself leaves little space for disabled LGBTI people who are of colour, or trans, or identified in any other way. See: Corbett, ‘A proud label: exploring the relationship between disability politics and gay pride’ 350-351.

individual implementations of the notion. A complicated field to consider when discussing disabled LGBTI people is the field of HIV/AIDS. Those with HIV/AIDS have, at times, distanced themselves from those with disabilities or chronic illness, and vice versa. Historian Pieter Verstrate argues that disability historians have until now not paid attention to HIV/AIDS history because it is situated in the realm of diseases and viruses; on the biological level rather than the social-constructionist level.⁵³ Nevertheless, McRuer⁵⁴ and Verstraete have argued for recognition of points of convergence between AIDS, queer and disability theory.⁵⁵ While this thesis does underwrite their statements, HIV/AIDS will not be integrated as a separate subject of analysis in this thesis. Within LGBTI history the subject of HIV/AIDS is a massive field with a large historiography, while non-AIDS related chronic illnesses and disabilities have not gained much historiographic attention. Therefore, including HIV/AIDS as a separate topic would overshadow the analysis of disability. Nevertheless, the topic will be discussed in relation to its effects on otherwise disabled LGBTI people.

This thesis is based on archival research. For the Dutch case, material has been used from IHLIA LGBT Heritage, the International Institute for Social History (IISH), the archive of the Nederlandse Gehandicaptenraad (Dutch Disability Council) from the archives of the cross-disability organisation ‘Ieder(in)’⁵⁶, the archival material of disability activist Agnes van

⁵³ P. Verstrate, ‘HIV/AIDS and disability history’, in: Barsch, Klein, Verstraete eds., *The Imperfect Historian*, 246, 247.

⁵⁴ McRuer, ‘Critical Investments’ 221-237; McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York 2006) 56-57, 85, 90, 108, 116.

⁵⁵ Verstraete argues the topic is relevant because, firstly, there are tangible intersections of AIDS and disability. HIV/AIDS can transform a physically able-bodied person into someone who has to learn how to live with a physical or mental disability. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that people with disabilities are considered to be a group at higher risk of contracting the virus. Secondly, HIV/AIDS offers the disability historian opportunity to make the history of disability ‘a bit more, well, sexy.’ The focus on HIV/AIDS renegotiates the asexual stigma of people with disability. Thirdly, the inclusion of HIV/AIDS can inspire the disability historian to examine the unexplored historical links between HIV/AIDS, homosexuality, and disability. This allows an understanding of how disability is constructed in the West, how people cope with living on the margins of divergent cross-cultural intersections, and the consequences for someone who not only has an ‘abnormal’ body but also does not fit in the normal frame of heterosexuality. Finally, the history of HIV/AIDS may invite the historical scholar in particular, as well as the disability scholar in general, to reconsider some of the standard methodological tools and conceptual frameworks. See: Verstrate, ‘HIV/AIDS and disability history’ 248.

⁵⁶ This archival material was provided by dr. Paul van Trigt, who shared his selection of photographs of the material with me, for which I owe him my thanks.

Wijnen⁵⁷, and archival material which several of my interviewees provided. For the British case, I consulted the Hall-Carpenter Archives (HCA) at the London School of Economics Library, the Bishopsgate archive, the London Metropolitan Archives, the British Library and the National Disability Arts Collection & Archive. It must be noted that due to the fact that I have used archives based in London, there is a London-centric bias within the source material. Nevertheless, the British LHBTI disabled groups mentioned in this thesis were national groups, with membership across the country.

Additionally, I conducted interviews to collect oral histories.⁵⁸ In the Netherlands, I interviewed four women with physical disabilities; Lydia Zijdel, Mariska de Swart, Petra Ybeles Smit, and Nicole Franssen. Nicole Franssen is a trans woman, and Petra Ybeles Smit was an intersex trans woman. Moreover, I interviewed a deaf⁵⁹ woman, Annemieke van Brandenburg, and a woman with a chronic illness, Agnes van Wijnen. I also interviewed a man with a learning disability, Arnold Boekhoff. All interviewees were identified along the LGBTI spectrum, and Lydia, Nicole, Agnes, Annemieke and Arnold were especially active in

⁵⁷ The archival material of Agnes van Wijnen is stored in dr. Paul van Trigt's office, at Leiden University.

⁵⁸ Each interview was preceded by online communication on what my thesis subject was and why I was interested in talking to the person in question. Most of the interviews were conducted at the home of the interviewee, except for the interview with Sue Sanders, which was conducted over the phone, the interview with Nicole Franssen, which was conducted at her work place, and the interview with Maloush Köhler, which was conducted in a café. Most interviews were recorded only for my own use, except for the ones with Petra Ybeles Smit and Nicole Franssen, during which I only kept detailed notes. The interviews were semi-structured, as I used a sheet of questions but also allowed the conversation to go where it did naturally. All interviews were between 1 and 3 hours long. Every respondent had the opportunity to ask questions before the interview started, and signed a consent form in which they could choose how the information of the interview could be made available. All interviewees agreed to the use of their full names, except for Lila, who preferred only the use of her first name. Readers can access the signed consent forms on request. Information about each individual interviewee, such as their age, how they identified and how they related to my thesis subject (i.e. in which groups they were active) shall be mentioned in a footnote when they are mentioned for the first time in the thesis, starting from chapter 1 onwards. As some interviewees gave more background information than others, the length of these footnotes varies.

⁵⁹ A distinction can be made between Deaf and deaf. Deaf with a capital D is used by those within the Deaf community to signify that they identify with their Deafness, their Deaf culture and shared language of sign language. When spelled as 'deaf', it is used to refer to people who are deaf or have a severe hearing problem, but do not identify with or partake in Deaf culture, sign language, or identities. Sometimes, the indicator 'D/deaf' or 'd/Deaf' is used, to refer to both sides of the equation together, or when one is not sure how a particular person prefers to identify themselves. Most of the sources used in this thesis, in the Dutch situation particularly but also within the British source material, use 'deaf'. Therefore, this thesis also uses 'deaf'. For more information, see: A. Khalifa, 'What's the difference between deaf with capital 'D' and deaf with small 'd'?' *Hearmeoutcc.com* (29 December 2018) <https://hearmeoutcc.com/capital-d-small-d-deaf/> [last accessed 25 October 2019].

organising for disabled LGBTI people. Additionally, I interviewed Maloush Köhler, who had been involved in making the Dutch Gay Games in 1998 accessible to people with disabilities and deaf people. I came into contact with the interviewees by posting calls for interviewees in related media, and through personal contacts. Finding interviewees in the UK was harder, due to a lack of personal network and sparse responses to posted calls for interviewees. In the UK, I interviewed two women who were active in Gemma, Kathryn Bell and Lila. Moreover, I interviewed Sue Sanders, who was involved in many disability and LGBT initiatives.⁶⁰

There are some imbalances to be addressed with regards to the respondents. Firstly, there is an imbalance between the amount of people interviewed in the Netherlands, and those in the UK. The scarcity of British interviews is partly corrected by using interviews conducted by others.⁶¹ Secondly, only one man has been interviewed, who, thirdly, was also the only interviewee with an intellectual disability. Most of the respondents are cisgender women, and no trans man has been interviewed. Moreover, all respondents are white. Thus, this sample could never provide a representative picture, and is not meant as such. Rather, this oral history approach is meant as an additional source of information, to supplement the existing archival material. Hence, these interviews give more coherence to the story, clear up gaps within archival material, and show us how disabled LGBTI people look back on and remember the

⁶⁰ While Sue Sanders' contributions were useful for my own knowledge in the area and her disability and LGBT initiatives were relevant and interesting within the limits of this project, I was unfortunately unable to use her interview for the purposes of this thesis. Sue Sanders, born in 1947 in London, is a British LGBT rights activist. She is a lesbian, and related personally to disability through her alcoholism, which she described as a mental illness. Over the years, she has been involved in many LGBT projects, but also other projects around diversity and inclusivity. In every project, she has been focused on inserting an intersectional approach, taking into account issues of racism, sexism, and ableism. – Interview with Sue Sanders, conducted on 8 May 2019.

⁶¹ Appleby, 'Out in the Margins'; Shakespeare, 'Out on the edge'; Shakespeare, 'Researching Disabled Sexuality'; Shakespeare, 'Coming Out and Coming Home', *Journal of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity* 4:1 (1999); Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She Dances to Different Drums*; S. Cavar, '(Dis)locations: Dutch Disabled LGBTQ+ Subjects and Queer Social Space' *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 2801. https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/2801; 'Elsa Beckett interviewed by Jacqueline Faith' (26 October 1985) British Library: Hall-Carpenter Oral History Archive ^A230640, C456/20; 'Glen McKee interviewed by Margot Farnham' (January 1988) British Library: Hall-Carpenter Oral History Archive ^A230640, C456/58; Hall Carpenter Archives, *Lesbian Oral History Group, Inventing ourselves: Lesbian life stories* (London 1989) 59-68.

organisations in which they were involved. Moreover, as two of the interviewees are trans women, these interviews do provide an important addition to the existing Dutch source material, which does not mention trans people at all.

Archival and oral sources have been used to allow disabled LGBTI people to speak back in their own voices. Historically, within scientific and scholarly fields, disabled people have been talked about by nondisabled scholars, reproducing a stigmatising and paternalistic tradition. Within disability studies, there has been a rejection of this tradition, and a focus on producing a space wherein disabled people speak in their own voices about their own subjectivities.⁶² The same can be said for LGBTI people, who for a long time have been subjugated to the same dismissive scrutiny by heterosexual, cisgender scholars. Here, some reflections must be made on my own subjectivity as a queer, but nondisabled scholar. Similarly to my position, Appleby describes her dilemma of being a nondisabled lesbian scholar writing about disabled lesbians, feeling an ‘uncomfortable and difficult tension between accepting the responsibility of questioning my own and the lesbian community’s ablebodied assumptions, and in not simultaneously objectifying, ignoring, or appropriating the experiences of disabled lesbian women themselves.’⁶³

Appleby argued that it is important to acknowledge that the work has been carried out from an able-bodied perspective, as such work ‘still carries many unresolved tensions in trying to find a way of not ‘colonizing’ the subjugated experiences of others [...], whilst questioning the social construction of oppression.’⁶⁴ However, it is also important to develop an integrative feminist analysis that goes beyond a monolithic identity based on gender. Challenging normative ablebodiedness in feminist theory should also be tackled by nondisabled scholars, she argues, as ‘by not accepting the challenge to question both

⁶² McRuer, *Crip theory* 161.

⁶³ Appleby, ‘Out in the Margins’ 28.

⁶⁴ *Idem* 30.

disableism and compulsory heterosexuality disabled lesbian women will be left out in the margins.’⁶⁵ Similarly, in this thesis I aim to take up the challenge of breaking the continuing historiographical tradition of silence on the subject of disabled LGBTI people. The body of sources used— archival material, memoirs, interviews – and the method of allowing these sources to speak for themselves, are chosen with the intention of representing disabled LGBTI people and letting their voices be heard.

All in all, this thesis is an important addition to historiography, not only because it generates new knowledge about the very specific group of disabled LGBTI people, but also because it sheds new light on the broader LGBTI and disability movements in general. This thesis aims to show the extent, limits and inherent implications of the supposed shared identity of the lesbian and gay movement, from the vantage point of disabled LGBTI people. Such a perspective may show some shared ideals upon which the mainstream gay and lesbian identities are based— such as ideals of strength and attractiveness— that would not usually be noted if analysed from within the mainstream perspective. Moreover, this thesis aims to further a broader understanding of a more fluid and flexible sense of identity, and to shed light on the inner complexities and diversity of the movement. This challenges historical accounts of both the lesbian and gay movement and the disability movement which have neglected the internal diversity of these movements, and thereby write singular identities and internal homogeneity into history. I follow McRuer’s argument that ‘we were never identified’. There was never a simple, agreed-on, clearly demarcated identity within either the lesbian and gay movement or the disability movement, as such an identity had always been subject to contention.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Appleby, ‘Out in the Margins’ 30.

⁶⁶ McRuer, ‘We Were Never Identified: Feminism, Queer Theory, and a Disabled World’, *Radical History Review* 94 (2006) 148-154.

Chapter 1: Comparing movements

In *De verzuiling van de homobeweging*, Duyvendak makes the case that while lesbian and gay subcultures within the Netherlands and the United Kingdom were similar, their social movements followed a very different trajectory.⁶⁷ The same was true for disability organising in both countries. This chapter gives an overview of differences and similarities in these areas.

1.1: The lesbian and gay movement

After the Second World War, Dutch and British gay organisations began lobbying authorities for better treatment. In the Netherlands, the major lesbian and gay organisation, the COC⁶⁸, lobbied the government and influential individuals such as clergymen and psychiatrists for the acceptance of homosexuality.⁶⁹ The COC also functioned as a meeting point for gay people and lesbians, and as a place of refuge.⁷⁰ The COC and the Federatie Studenten Werkgroepen Homoseksualiteit (FSWH) fought to have the only existing criminal law targeting homosexuals, art. 248bis, dissolved. This law put the age of consent for same-sex sexual activity at 21, while for heterosexuals this was 16. After the first Dutch homosexual demonstration on 21 January 1969, a government committee concluded there were no medical or psychosocial reasons to maintain the law, which was annulled in 1971.⁷¹

In the UK, homosexuality was criminalised until 1967. In 1957, the Wolfenden Report claimed that consensual homosexual sex between adults over 21 should be decriminalised.

⁶⁷ Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 78.

⁶⁸ COC stands for Cultuur en Ontspanningscentrum (Culture and Recreation Center). The group changed its name to Dutch Society for Homophiles COC in 1964, and Dutch Society for the Integration of Homosexuality COC in 1971.

⁶⁹ G. Hekma, J.W. Duyvendak, 'Gay men and lesbians in the Netherlands', in: S. Seidman, N. Fischer, C. Meeks eds., *Introducing the New Sexuality Studies* (New York 2011) 413-414; Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 32-33.

⁷⁰ E. van Alphen, *Alles werd politiek: De verhouding tussen het politieke en het persoonlijke in de humanistische en de homobisebische beweging in Nederland, 1945-1980* (Utrecht 2016) diss. 266.

⁷¹ Hekma, Duyvendak, 'Gay men and lesbians in the Netherlands' 413-414; Hekma, *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland van 1730 tot de moderne tijd* (Amsterdam 2004) 118; J. Schuyf, A. Krouwel, 'The Dutch Lesbian and Gay Movement: the Politics of Accommodation' in: B.D. Adam, Duyvendak, Krouwel eds., *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics* (Philadelphia 1999) 161-162.

The Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS) lobbied for decriminalisation when it became clear the government had no intention of acting on Wolfenden's recommendations on homosexuality. Unlike the COC, the HLRS focused narrowly on legal reform, was not overtly homosexual in membership, and strove for a respectable and conservative image as a means of persuading the government and a broader audience. The Committee for Homosexual Equality (Campaign for Homosexual Equality since 1971), the CHE, was more like the COC. This group was largely composed of homosexual men seeking not only political reform, but also an alternative social network.⁷²

Both in the UK and in the Netherlands, campaigns for law reform generally touted an image of homosexuality which revolved around middle-class respectability and discretion. This led to the formation of more radical gay groups that demanded both rights and respect for their sexual and subcultural differences in the 1970s, through light-hearted provocative forms of protest.⁷³ Aside from this, gay and lesbian groups in the Netherlands also emerged in political parties, trade unions, universities and in professions such as the police, over the 1980s. Non-political groups, for instance lesbian and gay sports or book clubs, also flourished.⁷⁴ In spite of the many groups, the COC maintained a 'Holy Mother Church' position, which, according to historian Judith Schuyf, remained practically unchallenged until the late 1980s.⁷⁵ Similarly, in the UK, despite increasing pluralism, CHE remained the largest lesbian and gay organisation, and only in the late 1980s lost primacy to the Organisation for

⁷² Cook, *A Gay History of Britain* 166-174; Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 78.

⁷³ Cook, *A Gay History of Britain* 177, 181-188; Adam, Duyvendak, Krouwel, *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics* 1; Schuyf, A. Krouwel, 'The Dutch Lesbian and Gay Movement' 161-163; Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 33-45, 79; Hekma, Duyvendak, 'Gay men and lesbians in the Netherlands' 414-415; Hekma, *Homoseksualiteit in Nederland van 1730 tot de moderne tijd* 118-226; C. Burgers, J. Franssen, 'Tussen verlangen en belangen. De homo- en lesbische beweging' in: Duyvendak, *Tussen verbeelding en macht* 183, 192-193; M. Meijer, 'Paarse September— een lesbische guerrilla, 1971- 1974' in: M. van der Klein, S. Wieringa eds. *Alles kon anders: protestrepertoires in Nederland 1965-2005* (Amsterdam 2006) 127-139.

⁷⁴ Hekma, Duyvendak, 'Gay men and lesbians in the Netherlands' 415; Schuyf, Krouwel, 'The Dutch Lesbian and Gay Movement' 164-165.

⁷⁵ Schuyf, Krouwel, 'The Dutch Lesbian and Gay Movement' 164.

Lesbian and Gay Action.⁷⁶

Dutch gay and lesbian people slowly became integrated within the government, the agenda of gay rights emerged on the agenda of the state, and the Dutch government started to facilitate the lesbian and gay movement financially.⁷⁷ After homophobic violence of bystanders during ‘Roze Zaterdag’ (‘Pink Saturday’) in Amersfoort in 1982⁷⁸, there was an uproar in Dutch media and politics. This led to the enactment of gay and lesbian anti-discrimination policies on a local and national level, culminating in the Equal Rights Law of 1993.⁷⁹

In contrast, the British movement was characterised by internal divisions and low membership. While it was strong at the local level, national successes were limited in comparison to the Netherlands. Duyvendak explains that this was partly because British political centralisation limited outsiders’ possibilities to access the political area. Heavy class divisions stood in the way of the formation of a strong movement. Strict divisions between Labour and the Conservative party meant the gay movement had no choice but to turn to the Labour movement, and not prioritise its own interests over the overarching class politics. Still, this did not lead to automatic support for the gay movement, as Labour needed to appease its more traditional followers.⁸⁰ Thus, until the mid-1980s, there was no agenda for lesbians and gay men in government, education, or business. Nevertheless, in the mid-1980s local councils began to link grants to equal opportunities policies and provided support for gay and lesbian initiatives.⁸¹ An example of this was the Greater London Council (GLC), which invited gay organisations to ask for municipal financial support.⁸²

⁷⁶ Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 79.

⁷⁷ Schuyf, Krouwel, ‘The Dutch Lesbian and Gay Movement’ 164.

⁷⁸ For more information on the homophobic violence during the Roze Zaterdag, see: Andere Tijden, ‘Flikker op’, *NTR/VPRO* (Television documentary 27 May 2017) <https://www.anderetijden.nl/afl levering/709/Flikker-op> [last accessed 26 October 2019].

⁷⁹ Burgers, Franssen, ‘Tussen verlangen en belangen’ 190.

⁸⁰ Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 80-83.

⁸¹ Cook, *A Gay History of Britain* 192-195.

⁸² Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 80-83.

Much British support was eroded with the AIDS-crisis, however. While the lesbian and gay movement responded swiftly with the Terrence Higgins Trust, the government response was late, and steadfastly refused to fund targeted safer sex campaigns. The crisis led to highly conservative attitudes. In a period of recession and unemployment, gay and lesbian threats to the family and morality were strategically deployed to justify the dissolution of the GLC in 1986, with the result that many lesbian and gay initiatives lost their funding. This was followed up by the insertion of the infamous Clause 28 in 1988, which decreed that local authorities and schools were not allowed to intentionally promote homosexuality or teach the acceptability of homosexuality.⁸³

Conversely, in the Netherlands, the AIDS-crisis intensified collaboration between the gay and lesbian movement and the government. Medical authorities and representatives of the gay movement set up a committee that prepared medical care, prevention and counselling.⁸⁴ Gays and lesbians were appointed to take political decisions regarding AIDS and gay and lesbian rights.⁸⁵ Through AIDS and the urgent medical problems it created, gay men learned the importance of legal recognition for issues such as housing, social security, hospital visits, pensions and inheritances. This lent weight to the social and political pressure for registered partnerships, which were established for both same-sex and other-sex couples in 1997, and gay marriage, which was established in 2001.⁸⁶ Such legal victories led to a normalisation of certain gay and lesbian identities, and subsequently political lesbian and gay manifestations relatively lessened.

In contrast, British organising was boosted by the lack of legislative progress. In 1990,

⁸³ Cook, *A Gay History of Britain* 195-206; Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 79-81; Burgers, Franssen, 'Tussen verlangen en belangen' 195.

⁸⁴ Not everyone was content with this intense collaboration and dependency on the government, which led to a countercultural organization, Act Up! Amsterdam.

⁸⁵ Burgers, Franssen, 'Tussen verlangen en belangen' 190

⁸⁶ Hekma, Duyvendak, 'Gay men and lesbians in the Netherlands' 415 ; Schuyf, Krouwel, 'The Dutch Lesbian and Gay Movement' 157-179, Burgers, Franssen, 'Tussen verlangen en belangen' 187-190.

OutRage!, a direct action queer group, was formed. Another group was Stonewall, founded specifically to lobby the government on clause 28 and other legislative issues. Outrage and Stonewall often clashed on tactics. Duyvendak argues that clashes within the UK movement were more intense, due to the stricter demand of adhering to politically correct values. This demand fit within a political discourse created by the importance of class and an electoral system which enforced a rigid left/right division.⁸⁷ The late 1990s saw the beginning of a cultural shift in the UK. For instance, in 1993 the age of consent was lowered to 18, and equalised in 2001. In 2003, clause 28 was repealed, and in 2005, civil partnerships became law.⁸⁸

This section has shown the differences and similarities between the British and Dutch lesbian and gay movements. While differences were significant, there were more points of convergence between the two movements than there were between the Dutch and British disability movements.

1.2: Disability movements

As seen, according to Duyvendak, stricter notions of dichotomous political positions and identities led to more divisive conflicts between groups within the British lesbian and gay movement than there were in the Netherlands. Strikingly, similar dichotomies led to more divisive tensions in the British disability movement than there were in the Dutch context.

Since the 1970s, sharp distinctions had been drawn by social modelists between groups *for* and groups *of* disabled people, in the UK. Organisations not led by disabled people, referred to as ‘charities’, were considered a threat to disabled people’s autonomy. They were criticised for maintaining a culture which saw disabled people as dependent upon

⁸⁷ Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 83.

⁸⁸ Cook, *A Gay History of Britain* 206-214.

the benevolence of nondisabled people, and for supporting the medical model which individualised disability rather than focusing on reforming society.⁸⁹ Since the 1960s there had been pan-impairment⁹⁰ disability advocacy groups, such as the Disablement Income Group (DIG) and the Disability Alliance (DA). These negotiated with the central government on social security and disability benefits. Largely due to their campaigning, the government began investing in disability benefits. However, when the financial crisis of 1976 brought an end to the ‘classic welfare state’ in the UK, DIG’s insider approach in the government came under attack by new voluntary organisations which were frustrated by the slow progress of reform.⁹¹

The 1980s saw a growth of Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs); groups led by disabled people themselves. One of these was the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). This group advocated a new approach to disability, which focused on oppression rather than on incomes and benefits of disabled people. They did not use ‘insider’ tactics of lobbying government, but drew on left-wing campaigning traditions, particularly those of the women’s and civil rights movements in America. UPIAS developed the social model of disability in 1975, introducing a distinction between ‘impairment’ and ‘disability’ which drew inspiration from arguments over the relationship between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ in feminist literature. As the disability movement was strongly tied to disability studies, the social model was further developed there. It remained fundamental for the movement throughout the 1990s.⁹²

The blueprint of the UPIAS proliferated, leading to the creation of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) in 1981. This group concentrated on issues

⁸⁹ Millward, *Invalid Definitions* 32, 103-109.

⁹⁰ Pan-impairment meant that these groups did not focus on one group or medical conditions such as ‘the blind’, ‘the deaf’, or ‘the mentally ill’, but instead used ‘disability’ as an overarching category.

⁹¹ Millward, *Invalid Definitions* 29-36, 100-109.

⁹² Van Trigt, ‘Historicizing the social model’ 98-102; Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 24; Millward, *Invalid Definitions* 14-15.

such as information dissemination and independent living, rights-based discourse and anti-discrimination legislation. Their radical approach caused tensions with more established groups, such as the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR). RADAR was formed with encouragement of the Labour government in 1977; was not run by disabled people but worked alongside them; and pursued an insider campaign to effect policy change. BCODP often actively campaigned against RADAR for being undemocratic and taking valuable sources away from other groups which genuinely represented disabled people and their interests.⁹³

With the election of Thatcher, a policy of reducing government expenditure was initiated. However, according to Millward, conservatives refrained from large-scale reform because disabled people were considered ‘deserving’ and because being seen attacking disabled people would have been electorally damaging. The government did attempt to cut social security budgets by using medical professionals as ‘gatekeepers’ in an attempt to regulate who received benefits. The British system functioned on the basis of assumed need, rather than in relation to the individual’s earning loss, which is common in continental European countries (such as the Netherlands). This led to a fundamental tension between medical, bureaucratic and social conceptions of disability.⁹⁴

By the 1990s, the financial costs of disability benefits outweighed any political gains to be made by leaving disability and disabled people alone. While the disability lobby focused its efforts on securing wider legislative reform against disability discrimination, the Conservative governments between 1988 and 1995 reshaped disability benefits. Legislators strategically used disability rights rhetoric for benefits restrictions. Firstly, they used the DPO claim that disabled people should not be segregated from society to justify beginning an accelerated deinstitutionalisation. Rather than emancipating disabled people and

⁹³ Millward, *Invalid Definitions* 32, 235-136.

⁹⁴ *Idem*, 21-29, 164, 169-179, 227.

acknowledging structural explanations of poverty and discrimination, however, this further individualised disability. Secondly, they used arguments of disability emancipation to restrict access to benefits and compel those on the margins of disability to work, regardless of the difficulties they faced in the open labour market. This allowed neo-liberal governments to continue their moral commitment towards ‘the deserving poor,’⁹⁵ whilst simultaneously reducing expenditure on disability-related benefits.⁹⁶ Over the late 1980s and 1990s, several different disability groups worked together to defend against the threat of austerity. Alliances between them were never strong, however, and there were tensions based on the question of whether it was better to gain limited reforms and push for gradual policy change, or to continue to reject flawed policies in the hope of more radical reform in the future. In the 1990s, rhetoric of DPO’s shifted from one focusing on independent living and direct payments, to one focused more on ‘rights’ as a key battleground.⁹⁷

While Tom Shakespeare has criticised the categorisation of the British disability movement as a ‘new social movement’, it is clear British disability organising formed a ‘movement.’⁹⁸ In the Netherlands, this was not as self-evident. According to Van Trigt, due to the fragmentation of the Dutch disability groups and the major role of the state, it is difficult to speak of a disability movement in a comparable way to other new social movements in the Netherlands.⁹⁹ In her co-edited book on being disabled in the Netherlands, Yolan Koster-Dreese wrote ‘I think there is [a disability movement], but it certainly does not always move in the same rhythm or in the same direction.’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ ‘The deserving poor’ refers to the notion of those who deserved government aid as they were unable to work due to illness, old age or disability.

⁹⁶ Millward, *Invalid Definitions* 259-276.

⁹⁷ Idem 30-31, 229-260.

⁹⁸ Shakespeare, ‘Disabled People’s Self-organisation: a new social movement?’ *Disability, Handicap & Society* 8:3 (1993).

⁹⁹ Van Trigt, ‘A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country?’ 93; L. Brants, Van Trigt, A. Schippers, ‘A short history of approaches to disability in the Netherlands’ in: G. van Hove et al eds., *Disability Studies in de Lage Landen* (Antwerpen, Apeldoorn 2016) 158.

¹⁰⁰ Y. Koster-Dreese, ‘Mensen zijn niet autonoom. Verschillen en overeenkomsten binnen de gehandicaptenbeweging’ in: Van Wijnen, Koster-Dreese, Oderwalds, *Trots en treurnis* 57.

The development of the Dutch ‘movement’ was influenced largely by its institutional context, according to Van Trigt.¹⁰¹ The welfare state developed differently in the Netherlands than in the UK. Dutch disability care had been defined by the private organisations of different ‘pillars’, within a broader state general policy framework until de-pillarisation in the 1960s. The Dutch welfare state was built up during the ‘Long Sixties’ (1958-1973); relatively late compared to other western countries. Even so, within 15 years, a fully state-financed social security system was realised. ‘Pillarised’ organisations remained important players, at least up until the 1970s. The Dutch welfare state offered a social safety net which made activism and protest less urgent than in other countries. Moreover, self-advocacy was limited because disabled people became dependent on an anonymous government. Additionally, distant care facilities in the form of neighbourhoods and villages furthered the segregation of disabled people, making organising harder.¹⁰²

Self-advocacy groups were fragmented along the lines of distinct diseases, syndromes, and impairments, lacking a national platform through which to operate.¹⁰³ According to Koster-Dreese, the main principle within disability organisations in the Netherlands was peer contact, getting together without needing to explain or defend themselves to others. The movement was ‘illness-based’, as recovery and medical care played a big role.¹⁰⁴ In the 1970s, disability protests took place, centred around budget cuts in the welfare state and accountability issues. However, there was rarely any cooperation with different interest groups, and it took government pressure to establish a national cross-disability group. Since the 1970s, the government stimulated collaboration between organisations of disabled people to gain a common voice in the political arena. This led to the foundation of the

¹⁰¹ Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 3, 6-7, 27.

¹⁰² Brants, Van Trigt, Schippers, ‘A short history of approaches to disability in the Netherlands’ 152-153; Van Trigt, ‘Historicizing the social model’ 101; Van Trigt, ‘A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country?’ 97, 100-101; Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 25.

¹⁰³ Brants, Van Trigt, Schippers, ‘A short history of approaches to disability in the Netherlands’ 158-159.

¹⁰⁴ Koster-Dreese, ‘Mensen zijn niet autonoom’ 58.

Gehandicaptenraad (Disability Council) in 1978, funded by the government and healthcare experts.¹⁰⁵

Self-advocacy groups did not focus on civil rights to a great extent, but directed their attention to the improvement of social and care services, the problems of which were difficult to address because of the dominance of large service providers.¹⁰⁶ Disability was mainly seen as an issue within the framework of the welfare state, and not as an issue of discrimination and equal treatment.¹⁰⁷ According to Van Trigt, the Dutch medical model was not as negative as British medical framing, and had less social consequences. Rehabilitation and reintegration in the Netherlands were characterised by a strong emphasis on social engineering and the reintegration of disabled people into society, rather than into the labour market. This meant disabled people had more to do with social scientists, who were often called ‘the interior designers of the welfare state’. They developed specific approaches for specific groups of disabled people, which led to individual self-realisation. Moreover, they already contested the medical model in the 1970s, arguing that a radical change of society towards disability was required.¹⁰⁸

Still, the government saw disability as an issue of healthcare that needed to be taken care of by the government, societal organisations, and professionals. This construction of disability left little room to treat disability as a ground for discrimination, nor for the voice of disabled people themselves.¹⁰⁹ Existing self-advocacy associations tended to go along with the framework set up by the government. They served much more as a discussion partner of the government –and as a care provider– than as a pressure or advocacy group. They did so because they wanted to maintain their influence on legal arrangements, concepts and

¹⁰⁵ Van Trigt, ‘A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country?’ 92-93; Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 19.

¹⁰⁶ Brants, Van Trigt, Schippers, ‘A short history of approaches to disability in the Netherlands’ 159.

¹⁰⁷ Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 23; Van Trigt, ‘A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country?’ 90-94.

¹⁰⁸ Van Trigt, ‘Historicizing the social model’ 100-102.

¹⁰⁹ Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 21-27.

enforcements of rehabilitation. Thus, Dutch self-advocacy did not become as critical of the government and healthcare institutes as the British groups did.¹¹⁰ Another reason for this was that it was hard to start a new discourse in the face of the dominating image of disabled people as receivers of care, which was supported by a plethora of organisations offering disability services. Moreover, while government funding offered new possibilities to, for instance, gay groups, funding for disability went not only to advocacy groups, but also to healthcare providers with different interests.¹¹¹

Working with the government also fit within a broader political culture which stressed the importance of consensus.¹¹² Several of my interviewees felt that the Dutch disability movement was part of the ‘polder model’, a consensus-based economic and social policymaking system often felt by people to be a particularly Dutch phenomenon, though this has been nuanced academically.¹¹³ The Dutch International Year of Disabled People (IYDP) in 1981 was also organised with the idea of working together in mind. However, during the IYDP it became clear that collaboration was not always enough. Activist group ‘Gehandicaptenstrijd’ (‘Disability Struggle’) argued that working together with nondisabled people was only possible if both sides had equal fundamental rights and chances to gain equality. Activists pointed to government cuts and stressed social economic aspects of disability policy, which the IYDP committee ignored. Other groups were also critical of the IYDP, and the group ‘De Elfde van de Elfde’ (‘The Eleventh of the Eleventh’) organised a meeting which demonstratively ended the IYDP prematurely.¹¹⁴

The emergence of more critical voices continued throughout the 1990s. The social

¹¹⁰ Brants, Van Trigt, Schippers, ‘A short history of approaches to disability in the Netherlands’ 159; Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 13-17; Van Trigt, ‘A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country?’ 93.

¹¹¹ Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 7-8, 23

¹¹² Van Trigt, ‘A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country?’ 101.

¹¹³ Interview with Petra Ybeles Smit, conducted on 22 April 2019; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019; Interview with Mariska de Swart, conducted on 14 June 2019.

¹¹⁴ Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 17-19.

model was first presented as a new and important perspective by disabled people themselves in the book *Trots en treurnis: Gehandicapt in Nederland* (Pride and Sadness: Disabled in the Netherlands), published in 1996. It was no coincidence Dutch disabled people put the social model forward themselves in the 1990s, as by then the welfare state and social security were radically restructured.¹¹⁵ According to Aart Hendriks, the Dutch social security system was ‘an example for the rest of the world’, but due to a severe financial crisis and economic recession, austerity brought the whole system down.¹¹⁶ In the restructuring, medical doctors became more important, but did not become so powerful that the social model could function as a common ground for a stronger disability movement.¹¹⁷ Up until this point Dutch disability groups had felt like they were forerunners in the implementation of social disability policy, a feeling which changed to one of ‘lagging behind’ other countries in the 1990s. Due to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the US became a guiding country. The foundation of Independent Living Nederland (ILN) in 1990, following the first European Independent Living meeting in 1989, was illustrative of changing ideas. While ILN had a different focus and rhetoric than the Gehandicaptentraad, as they both spoke of anti-discrimination and equal civil rights, the groups did work together.¹¹⁸

What additionally engendered the feeling of ‘lagging behind’ was the 1994 ‘Algemene Wet Gelijke Behandeling’ (‘General Act Equal Treatment’, AWGB). This law forbade discrimination on the grounds of religion, ideals, political conviction, race, or gender. Disability was not named in this law, as it was not seen as a grounds for emancipation or discussed within a framework of civil rights.¹¹⁹ Another reason for the exclusion of disability

¹¹⁵ Van Trigt, ‘Historicizing the social model’ 99-102.

¹¹⁶ A. Hendriks, ‘Heeft de sociale zekerheid nog toekomst?’ in: Van Wijnen, Koster-Dreese, Oderwald, *Trots en treurnis* 91-102.

¹¹⁷ Van Trigt, ‘Historicizing the social model’ 101-102.

¹¹⁸ Van Trigt, ‘A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country?’ 94-95.

¹¹⁹ Van Trigt, ‘Gelijkheid zonder beperking’ 3-27.

is given by Agnes van Wijnen, a prominent Dutch disability advocate.¹²⁰ She argued that the COC and other organisations had been negotiating the AWGB for years already, and were not keen on adding something else, worried that adding another category would prolong the already long-lasting drafting process. The lobbying of the Gehandicaptentraad and ILN to add disability was therefore unsuccessful.¹²¹ Due to the exclusion of disability from the law, disabled people felt as though they were also lagging behind women, lesbian and gay people, and people of ethnic minorities. Thus, the 1990s saw an increase of attempts to change the dominant opinions about disability. A rhetoric of human and civil rights became stronger in the Netherlands.¹²² Rather than adding disability to the AWGB, the Dutch government created the separate law on the Equal Treatment of Disabled People and the Chronically Ill, in 2003, following international precedent.¹²³

This section has shown that conceptions of and the organisation around disability varied considerably in the Dutch and British contexts. Taken together with the more similar but also diverging lesbian and gay movements in both countries, and the considerable differences in legislative contexts, these historical contexts influenced the position of disabled LGBTI people in the Netherlands and the UK.

¹²⁰ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019. I reached out to Agnes after dr. Paul van Trigt recommended speaking to her. Agnes is a white lesbian woman with a chronic illness, aged 62. She identified as a lesbian before she was diagnosed with a chronic illness when she was 30, after having experienced pain for two years previous. She was married but divorced when she came out as a lesbian, and became active in the women's movement. She has a background in political science. She was active in the national board of the COC, and started working in the Gehandicaptentraad before she had been diagnosed with a chronic illness. She was active in the SOG and the SOG-homogroep. Moreover, she is an important figure in Dutch disability activism, also around topics of sexual abuse of disabled people, and disability emancipation in general.

¹²¹ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019; Van Trigt, 'A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country?' 97-89.

¹²² Van Trigt, 'A Blind Spot of a Guiding Country?' 87-88, 94, 97-98.

¹²³ Bahner, 'Chapter 5: Netherlands'; Gelijkheid zonder beperking 24.

Chapter 2: ‘Am I disabled today, or am I gay?’

Most gay people with a disability are still ‘invisible’. [...] Other people with a disability make an effort to prove that despite their disability, they are ‘normal’ men and women. And then you need to tell them you have lesbian or homosexual feelings? No way! So, perhaps then to the gay movement? There are different issues there. With a visible disability, you stand out, and maybe in the eyes of a gay man you don’t meet the standard of young, fast and wild. When going out, it becomes clear the disco is not accessible. So there you are. In the organisation of people with a disability you don’t feel at home with your feelings. In the gay movement, you can’t come in because of your disability.¹²⁴

- Gehandicaptentraad, *Gefeliciteerd: homoseksualiteit en handicap* (Utrecht 1992).

This quote, published in a Dutch brochure on disability and homosexuality, sums up the issues faced by disabled LGBTI people navigating both the ‘disabled world’ and the gay and lesbian movement. A lesbian interviewee in the book *Lesbisch zijn in Nederland* (1994) argued, ‘giving another group space within your own discriminated group... for some reason people find that very, very difficult.’¹²⁵ Mariska de Swart¹²⁶ described how disabled people’s requests for access were often met with the response: ‘You have special places [discos, bars, etc.] for handicapped people, so go to that place.’¹²⁷ In turn, within these spaces LGBTI

¹²⁴ Author’s translation from the original Dutch: ‘De meeste homo’s met een handicap zijn echter nog ‘onzichtbaar’.[...] Andere mensen met een handicap doen juist moeite om te bewijzen dat ze ondanks hun handicap ‘normale’ mannen en vrouwen zijn. En dan moet jij vertellen dat je lesbische of homoseksuele gevoelens hebt? Mooi niet dus! Dan maar naar de homobeweging? Daar heb je weer andere problemen. Met een zichtbare lichamelijke handicap val je op en misschien voldoe je in de ogen van een homoman niet aan de norm van jong, snel en wild. Wil je uitgaan dan blijkt de discotheek niet toegankelijk. Daar zit je dan. Bij de organisatie van mensen met een handicap voel je je niet thuis met je gevoelens. Bij de homobeweging kom je niet binnen door je handicap.’ – Gehandicaptentraad, *Gefeliciteerd: homoseksualiteit en handicap* (Utrecht 1992) IHLIA signature cat. (gefel/hom) 2de dr g.

¹²⁵ C. Jonker, T. Sandfort, D. Schyns, *Lesbisch zijn in Nederland* (Utrecht 1994) 94.

¹²⁶ Interview with Mariska de Swart, conducted on 14 June 2019. I was brought in touch with Mariska by Sarah Cavar, who had interviewed her for their own thesis on disabled LGBTI spaces. In this thesis, I shall quote Mariska both from the interview that I conducted, and from the quotes provided by Cavar in their thesis. Mariska stressed she identifies as a perfectionist, who is amongst other things goal oriented, social and creative. She argued that she sees being a lesbian, a woman and disabled as small parts of who she is. Mariska is in her forties has a background in communication, coaching, psychology and pedagogy. When she was 25, she became disabled due to an accident, during new year’s eve in 1995/1996. She has been active in a patient association, and in the national youth board of the Werkverband Organisaties Chronisch Zieken (Working union of Organisations for Chronic Illness). She was also active in the COC, and set up a project for disabled gays and lesbians there.

¹²⁷ Cavar, ‘(Dis)locations: Dutch Disabled LGBTQ+ Subjects and Queer Social Space’ 21.

people were referred to back to lesbian and gay spaces. Sarah Cavar argues in their thesis that therefore entrance into either scene required a degree of identity erasure: ‘Am I disabled today, or am I gay?’¹²⁸ Disabled LGBTI people felt ‘doubly excluded’, which led to feelings of isolation.¹²⁹

2.1: Heteronormativity in a ‘small world’

In the Netherlands, Agnes van Wijnen, Annemieke van Brandenburg and Rob Tielman made an inventory of the problems of lesbian and gay disabled people in *Homo’s met een handicap bestaan niet* (Gay people with a disability do not exist), in 1990. In this research, they interviewed 16 people, about half of whom indicated that being disabled made discovering their homosexuality more difficult.¹³⁰ A rough distinction can be made between four areas which could provide hurdles for LGBTI people in the disabled world: lack of information; intolerant attitudes of healthcare professionals and a lack of sexuality policy within institutions and care facilities; difficulty coming out in the ‘small world’ of the disability community and due to dependency on family or healthcare professionals; and exclusion in the disability movement.¹³¹

Firstly, there was a distinct lack of information about sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. Most respondents of *Homo’s met een handicap bestaan niet* were partly raised at home and partly in an institution, where most did not receive any information about the effects of disability on (homo)sexuality from their parents or caregivers. At school,

¹²⁸ Cavar, ‘(Dis)locations: Dutch Disabled LGBTQ+ Subjects and Queer Social Space’ 21.

¹²⁹ S. Verhaag, ‘Homoseksuele gehandicapten: een onzichtbare minderheid’, *Handicap en beleid* 11 (2004) IHLIA signature: knipsel gehandicapten; A. van Wijnen, *Een ontluikende liefde...: Het SOG en homoseksualiteit* (Utrecht 1989) IHLIA signature: cat. (wijnen/ont) g; ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’ IHLIA signature cat. (europes/con/hom) g; A. van ’t Sant, B. Visser, ‘Doven: wat hoort nou wel en wat niet?’ *Sek* 15 (1985) IHLIA signature ts. dgb periodieken; Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 48; Shakespeare, ‘Out on the edge: the exclusion of disable people from the British gay and lesbian community’; Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019.

¹³⁰ Van Wijnen, Van Brandenburg, Tielman, *Homo’s met een handicap bestaan niet* 27, 32.

¹³¹ This distinction is not strict, as each of these categories influenced one another, and some categories were more relevant to some people than they were to others.

none of the respondents had homosexuality addressed, neither in their primary education nor in high school. For those that did find out about homosexuality in high school, this was mostly due to derogatory comments made outside of class.¹³² A similar account is given in *She dances to different drums*, as most respondents indicate having received either no sexual education, or very limited education centred around heterosexuality and reproduction.¹³³ Gillespie-Sells argues that the lack of information eroded disabled women's self-esteem, as they had no role models with whom they could identify to validate their experience. One respondent said 'I thought I was the only blind lesbian in the world.'¹³⁴ In a Dutch play about the position of deaf lesbians and gays in the deaf world, it was also stressed how young deaf people often were taught nothing about homosexuality.¹³⁵ A severe consequence of lack of sexual education and the dearth of information on sexual health was that disabled people became an at-risk group for HIV/AIDS.¹³⁶

Finding information by oneself could be challenging too. Ineke Glorie, a blind lesbian, accounted that '[a]t the library for the blind, they manage to interfere in your reading habits.' Upon requesting a book about lesbian women, the librarian asked her why she wanted to read that. 'If a beginning lesbian gets these sorts of questions, she's not happy.'¹³⁷ According to Van Wijnen et al., finding information or experimenting without anyone's notice was impossible for many who had physical disabilities and were dependent on others. Because of this, Van Wijnen et al. argued that those with physical disabilities would benefit the most

¹³² Van Wijnen, Van Brandenburg, Tielman, *Homo's met een handicap bestaan niet* 37.

¹³³ Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 41.

¹³⁴ Idem 40.

¹³⁵ M. Julien, 'OOGgetuigen: Verslag van de vierde 'rechtzitting' met als thema 'Homo's en lesbo's in de dovenwereld', *Handtheater* (Amsterdam 1998). This report was given to me by Annemieke van Brandenburg, and came from her personal collection.

¹³⁶ Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 41-43.

¹³⁷ Author's translation from the original Dutch: 'En bij de blindenbibliotheek presteren ze het om zich te bemoeien met je leesgedrag. Ik zocht vorig jaar het boek Strikt van Minke Douwes, een boek over twee vrouwen en hun lesbische relatie. Zegt die mevrouw van de blindenbibliotheek "waarom wilt u het eigenlijk lezen?" Als een beginnende lesbo dat soort vragen krijgt, is ze echt niet blij.' – Verhaag, 'Homoseksuele gehandicapten: een onzichtbare minderheid'.

from a change in mentality in the disabled world with regards to homosexuality.¹³⁸

Secondly, attitudes of healthcare professionals or caretakers could be harmful for disabled LGBTI people. Regard, a British organisation for disabled lesbians and gays, reported that disabled LGBTI people could be vulnerable in depending on others, as they would often be dropped by their carers upon coming out.¹³⁹ In a Dutch report on homosexuality and disability, an example is given of a woman who after coming out would only be helped by male staff, as they argued she had developed her lesbian feelings by being helped by women for so long.¹⁴⁰ Van Wijnen et al. give accounts of some negative experiences: rape and other forms of sexual abuse by a caregiver or family member; fear of contracting AIDS by a caretaker; and the expressed opinion that homosexuality is repulsive, or a phase. A comment was made to a lesbian woman: ‘If you sleep with me, you will be healed. I’m a nice man, right? You won’t go to the COC anymore!’¹⁴¹ A striking amount of respondents had experiences with sexual harassment and abuse, by family or caregivers.¹⁴²

Healthcare professionals could have negative attitudes with regards to assisting disabled people with doing something with their (homo)sexuality. This was also particularly the case when it came to learning or intellectual disabilities.¹⁴³ Arnold Boekhoff, a gay man with a learning disability¹⁴⁴ described that his mentor responded so badly to his coming out that he had to switch to someone else. Other supervisors initially did not allow him to become a member of the COC or the ‘Roze Vakbond’ (Pink Union), as they thought it was

¹³⁸ Van Wijnen, Van Brandenburg, Tielman, *Homo’s met een handicap bestaan niet* 48.

¹³⁹ Newsletter ‘Regard Writes Update’ (September-October 1996) London School of Economics (Henceforth LSE) Hall-Carpenter Archives (Henceforth HCA) signature: HCA/EPHEMERA/1078.

¹⁴⁰ SOG-homogroep, *Handicap en Homoseksualiteit: nota tbv COC Congres 12/13 dec. 1987* (Utrecht 1987) IHLIA signature: cat. (handi/hom) dgb grijs.

¹⁴¹ Van Wijnen, Van Brandenburg, Tielman, *Homo’s met een handicap bestaan niet* 41.

¹⁴² Ibidem.

¹⁴³ Verhaag, ‘Homoseksuele gehandicapten: een onzichtbare minderheid’.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Arnold Boekhoff, conducted on 17 June 2019. I was put in touch with Arnold by Jessica Maes, a member of the group for LGBTI people with an intellectual disability, ‘Zonder Stempel’. Arnold is a gay man with an intellectual disability (‘licht verstandelijke beperking’). He was born in 1965, and came out as homosexual when he was 23. He was active within the COC and the Roze Vakbond (‘Pink Union’). Moreover, he was active within the gay leather scene. In the late 1990s, he was active in setting up meeting cafés for LGBTI people with intellectual disabilities.

unnecessary. He was even disallowed to visit the funeral of a good gay friend of his, who had committed suicide. In addition, his supervisors and family had thrown out his first leather outfit, because they disagreed with it. Only in 1996, when he got individual guidance and was allowed to manage his own finances, he was able to join the COC and the Vakbond.¹⁴⁵

Appleby similarly shows that British people with learning difficulties¹⁴⁶ felt like any sexuality was denied to them due to the lack of information and privacy to have a relationship in.¹⁴⁷

Refusal to accommodate sexuality by healthcare professionals and institutions was often due to the lack of sexuality policy, leading to institutionalised asexuality.¹⁴⁸ When there was a sexual policy, it was heteronormative.¹⁴⁹ Karin Spaink, a bisexual woman who was famed in the Netherlands for writing openly about her multiple sclerosis, gave an example of a care home where staff was willing to help men and women spend the night together, but discontinued such practices altogether when two women asked the staff for the same services.¹⁵⁰ Lack of central policy meant it differed per institute how staff would respond.¹⁵¹

In addition to dealing with the caretakers in their own accommodated living forms, some disabled people also had to deal with healthcare professionals elsewhere, such as in the hospital. In Gemma newspapers, editor Sally often shared what nurses had filled in on her form about her sexuality. Once, they wrote ‘divorced’ as entry for her sexuality: ‘So I was Single, but my ‘Sexuality’- what? Nobody EVER asked me THAT! ‘Sexuality’- Divorced!’ Mind-blowing stuff, this. So instead of a lapsed catholic lesbian, I am now a divorced from

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Arnold Boekhoff, conducted on 17 June 2019.

¹⁴⁶ Michelle McCarthy has conducted a more extensive research on the sexuality of women with learning disabilities in the UK, briefly paying attention as well to same-sex relationships. See: McCarthy, *Sexuality and Women with Learning Disabilities*.

¹⁴⁷ Appleby, ‘Out in the Margins’ 25.

¹⁴⁸ Clare, *Exile and Pride* 119-122.

¹⁴⁹ Verhaag, ‘Homoseksuele gehandicapten: een onzichtbare minderheid’; W. Neal, ‘Disabled group gives a lifeline to Gays’, *Newham Recorder* (July 24 1980). This newspaper clipping was given to me by Kathryn Bell, and came from her personal collection.

¹⁵⁰ K. Spaink, ‘Seks en handicap: ooit gevallen op een roze kneus?’ *Sek* 20 (1990) IHLIA signature ts. dgb periodieken.

¹⁵¹ Van Wijnen, Van Brandenburg, Tielman, *Homo’s met een handicap bestaan niet* 42-42.

sexuality Protestant.’¹⁵² On another occasion:

Without consulting me, someone (though no-one would admit to it) had written “would like to maintain privacy and dignity at all times.” Unless they were telling me that a spot of nooky in the ward was unacceptable, I can’t imagine what they meant.¹⁵³

Thirdly, coming out for one’s homosexuality in the ‘small disability world’ could also be difficult. Because disabled people tended to move in limited social circles, there was fear of not being accepted and becoming an outsider.¹⁵⁴ The concept of a ‘small world’ was particularly often invoked by deaf lesbian and gay people when they spoke of the problems of coming out.¹⁵⁵ Deaf lesbian Marjan Stuifzand explained, during a symposium of the Dutch deaf lesbian and gay organisation:

You have heard and used this saying hundreds of times already. Not only deaf homosexuals use this phrase, but also straight people, hearing people like social workers, other healthcare professions, and all deaf organisations. ‘The deaf world is small’. If you tell someone you are gay or a lesbian, it is not nice to have the feeling that every deaf person knows. You get the feeling you are very vulnerable and exposed and you are afraid people will be talking about you.... there is so much gossiping and there are so many conflicts, we need to be careful not to say too much.’¹⁵⁶

Stuifzand was critical of this paradigm, arguing: ‘if we start thinking like that, then we will never emancipate’, as such negative thinking about one’s own community disrupts the unity needed to fight for interests and rights. Instead, she encouraged the promotion of proudly coming out and being open with another.¹⁵⁷

Fourthly, aside from the restrictive upbringing and atmosphere of the community,

¹⁵² *Gemma Newsletter for lesbians & bisexual women with/without disabilities, all ages* 67 (June 1994) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/306.

¹⁵³ *Gemma Newsletter* 77 (December 1996) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/306.

¹⁵⁴ Van Wijnen, *Een ontluikende liefde...*

¹⁵⁵ T. Van Meer, ‘Waar blijven de jongeren? Symposium Roze Gebaar “Toen en nu”’, *Woord en Gebaar* 10 (2005) IHLIA signature: knipsel gehandicapt.

¹⁵⁶ “Zit Roze Gebaar nog in de kast!?!”: Symposium op 26 januari 1996 in het DOC te Amsterdam (Amsterdam 1996) IHLIA signature: cat. (zit/roz) g.

¹⁵⁷ “Zit Roze Gebaar nog in de kast!?!”

homophobic attitudes also existed in the disability movement.¹⁵⁸ According to Petra Ybeles Smit, who was active in the Dutch disability movement from 1986 onward, ‘LGBT’ was not a theme; there was no attention for it, and no one asked attention for it.¹⁵⁹ Interviewees in *Lesbisch zijn in Nederland* identified the taboo on homosexuality in disability organisations.¹⁶⁰ The disability and homosexuality workgroup of the Gehandicaptenraad (henceforth SOG-homogroep) explains this as the ‘*doe-maar-gewoon, dan-doe-je-al-gek-genoe*’ norm (A Dutch saying which literally translates to ‘just act normal, that’s crazy enough’). People already felt deviant due to their disability, and wanted to stand out as little as possible otherwise.¹⁶¹ Lydia Zijdel¹⁶² also identified these assimilationist demands: to be straight; to hold down a job; and to fit in within the values of society.¹⁶³ Normativity also dominated organisations for people with intellectual disabilities, which were often parent-led

¹⁵⁸ Van Wijnen, Van Brandenburg, Tielman, *Homo’s met een handicap bestaan niet* 1.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Petra Ybeles Smit, conducted on 22 April 2019. Disability activist Jan Troost put me in contact with Petra. Petra was a white lesbian trans woman, aged 56. Moreover, during the interview she told me she is asexual with a romantic interest in women. Petra was also intersex. She had known she was a woman since she was nineteen, but due to lack of information and later fear of aggression, rejection and discrimination, it took until the 2000s until she came out of the closet. Petra is physically disabled, as she has spina bifida since birth, and asthma since puberty. From the age of 35, it became harder to stand and walk, and she began using a mobility scooter. Moreover, she dealt with mental illness, namely a depression and an anxiety disorder since she was twelve. Petra was theologian and public administration scholar, and has been very active in the boards of political, ecclesiastical, and social organisations, on local, provincial and national level. Amongst other things, she was secretary in the Werkgroep Integratie Gehandicapten (Workgroup Integration Disabled People, WIG) in Nijmegen. She also worked at for the Chronisch Zieken en Gehandicaptenraad (Chronically Ill and Disabled People’s Council) in Utrecht. Moreover, she had been active within the board of the local COC in Nijmegen. Petra passed away on the 6th of February, 2020.

¹⁶⁰ Jonker, Sandfort, Schyns, *Lesbisch zijn in Nederland* 93-94.

¹⁶¹ Van Wijnen, *Een onthullende liefde...*

¹⁶² Interview with Lydia Zijdel, conducted on 18 June 2019. Lydia approached me in reaction to one of my online published calls for interviews. Lydia is a white lesbian woman, born in 1951, who came out of a ‘red’ labour and Christian family. She has done developmental work in Tanzania. Lydia married a homosexual man, who during their married with her consent had relationships with men. They were both active as buddies for people with HIV/AIDS. Lydia became disabled due to an accident in 1982, and since then uses a wheelchair. In 1984, she fell in love with a woman, and therefore decided to end her marriage with her husband. They remained friends, and when he later contracted AIDS, she took care of him. Lydia is an active scholar and teacher, with a background in social and community studies, disability studies and gender studies. Moreover, Lydia has taught self-defence for women with disabilities. Additionally, Lydia has been active at the European Union, as president of the women’s lobby, and through this she was involved with the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). Lydia worked at training centre De Hunneschans, where the European Conference on Homosexuality and Disability was held in 1991. Moreover, Lydia was active in ensuring disability accessibility during the 1998 Gay Games.

¹⁶³ Interview with Lydia Zijdel, conducted on 18 June 2019.

organisations, completely unwilling to discuss sexuality.¹⁶⁴ Arnold Boekhoff remembered that when he reached out to organisations for people with learning disabilities about homosexuality, he received a response from one of them that ‘we do not have homosexuality here.’¹⁶⁵

The disability movement could be outright hostile. Gillespie-Sells cites an example of a ‘rights not charity’ demonstration, where a group of deaf disabled marchers refused to march alongside those carrying ‘lesbians and gays with disabilities’ banners, arguing they ‘didn’t want to be associated with perverts.’¹⁶⁶ Moreover, in *Basset*, the Brothers and Sisters Club for Deaf Gays (B&S) newsletter, it was reported that at a British Deaf Association (BDA) conference, two deaf clubs proposed two motions independent of each other to ask the BDA to disband the affiliation with deaf lesbian and gay clubs. They contended homosexuality was against Christian morals and principles, and gay rights were destroying family values and unity. The author adds: ‘One delegate objected to the wording of our club, “Brothers and Sisters”, because the Christian people call each other brothers and sisters. Ho, ho, that’s silly!’¹⁶⁷ The BDA did not go along with this, and instead proposed the motion that no deaf club could discriminate against any deaf person, ‘either black or lesbian and gay or handicapped or female’. This motion was accepted by all clubs except one, so the other two motions were dropped.¹⁶⁸

Disability activists were often so preoccupied with fighting ableism that they felt little need to pay attention to internal differences.¹⁶⁹ In a *Regard* newsletter, it was stated that all issues of concern and debate within the disability movement, from anti-discrimination legislation to accessible transport, would have particular consequences for disabled lesbians

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Arnold Boekhoff, conducted on 17 June 2019.

¹⁶⁶ Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 69.

¹⁶⁷ *The Basset* (August 1987) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/69.

¹⁶⁸ *The Basset* (August 1987).

¹⁶⁹ Van Wijnen, Van Brandenburg, Tielman, *Homo’s met een handicap bestaan niet* 19.

and gay men. As the British disabled people's movement had developed from a white, male, middle class and Eurocentric perspective, these particular needs had not been taken into account.¹⁷⁰ This was divisive of the movement, and Regard contended: 'We cannot afford to have such divisions within the disability movement. We need to be united working together for the liberation for all disabled people.'¹⁷¹

This section has shown that being on the LGBTI spectrum within the disability community and movement was far from easy. Turning to the lesbian and gay subculture and movement was not the solution some dreamt it would be, however.

2.2: Inaccessibility in lesbian and gay spaces

Why have you never had an affair with a disabled lady? Because you don't see them? That's very well possible, most buildings in the gay world are not really accessible. If I need to be at the COC, the fact that I will come in panting is guaranteed, but this unfortunately has more to do with the impossible amount of stairs than with arousal.¹⁷²
- K. Spaink, 'Seks en handicap: Ooit gevallen op een roze kneus?' in: *Sek* 20 (9 September 1990) 17-18.

One of the first obstacles disabled LGBTI people came across were inaccessible venues.¹⁷³

This could have severe consequences: A Gemma member argued she felt invisible and disregarded in the mainstream lesbian and gay community, ignored and marginalised, as 'so many meetings and social events seemed to be on upper floors or in basements and there was no thought of provision of lifts, ramps, transport and so on'.¹⁷⁴ Physical inaccessibility permeated Pride marches and festivals. A firm critique of the Dutch Pride march Roze

¹⁷⁰ Newsletter 'Regard Writes Update'.

¹⁷¹ Ibidem.

¹⁷² Author's translation from the original Dutch: 'Waarom heeft U nooit affaire gehad met gehandicapte dame? Omdat U ze niet ziet? Kan goed, in homowereld meeste gebouwen niet echt toegankelijk. Als ik bij COC moet zijn, kom ik gegarandeerd hijgend binnen, maar dat heeft jammer genoeg meer te maken met de onmogelijke hoeveelheid trappen dan met opwinding.'

¹⁷³ Shakespeare, 'Out on the edge'; Appleby, 'Out in the Margins'.

¹⁷⁴ Gemma, *Amethyst: The Fourth Anthology by the women of Gemma* (London 1998) 33. This anthology was given to me by Kathryn Bell, and came from her personal collection.

Zaterdag ('Pink Saturday') was published in COC's magazine *Sek*, in 1987, by 'rolpot' ('rolling dyke') Dagmar Wennink. She related how while the march itself went well, she had a lot of difficulty getting around during the festivities afterward, and was met with incredibly unhelpful responses from the organisation when she asked for help. Therefore, she stressed the importance of having a disabled person in the organisation.¹⁷⁵

Critique of the Gay Pride was more extensive in the UK.¹⁷⁶ In 1983, the Gay Men's Disabled Group (GMDG) encouraged members to be present during Gay Pride Week, as being seen to take an active part in gay liberation could raise people's awareness of the existence of disabled gays.¹⁷⁷ After the march, however, they were decidedly more negative. While in the previous year, the Gay Pride Committee had arranged a disability bus, because of the poor response they had taken the decision not to have one the next year. Co-founder of GMDG, Julian Salmon, reported: 'the stupid fools had made no other provisions for us because they only think in terms of wheelchairs.'¹⁷⁸ Co-founders Glenn McKee and Julian both attended, and both needed a wheelchair in order to do so, as it was too far to walk:

With great difficulty (because we did not have the necessary doctor's certificate), we persuaded an extremely patronising woman at the Red Cross to let us have one wheelchair. She certainly wouldn't have let us have it if she had known we were a couple of poof-power- we told her we were going on a picnic!¹⁷⁹

While the Pride organisation had promised them another wheelchair, they could not find it at the start of the march. Glenn, in the wheelchair, was 'whisked off' by a friend, 'who thought it was all a bit of a joke and therefore gave Glenn no choice but to be wherever he himself was on the march.'¹⁸⁰ As Glenn and the wheelchair had been taken away, Julian was forced to

¹⁷⁵ S. Claus, D. Wennink, 'Gehandicapt: trap op, trap af, of het COC is gewoon te ver' *Sek* 17 (1987) IHLIA signature ts. dgb periodieken.

¹⁷⁶ Shakespeare, 'Out on the edge' 5-6.

¹⁷⁷ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 2 (Spring 1983) LSE HCA/CHE/2/12/19.

¹⁷⁸ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 4 (Winter 1983) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/413.

¹⁷⁹ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 4.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

walk the march only with his walking stick, at the back of the rapidly moving march. A friend organised a rota of people to give him ‘donkey rides’ just to get to the tail of the march, but each time they got there they fell behind again. Eric Presland wrote an account of Julian’s struggles in the magazine *Capital Gay*:

When will the organisers of these things learn to put the slowest people at the front so they can set the pace? I look at him in his bright pink coat and his red hat with ostrich feather –like a camp pirate– on the top of his bandaged head and I’m filled with anger, if he can’t march with the effort he’s made, there really isn’t much hope for any of us. We’ll get him there if it kills us.¹⁸¹

While Presland argued for letting disabled people lead the march, this was not always successful. Kathryn Bell and Lila,¹⁸² members of Gemma, argued that in the back they could make their own pace, but in the front they had been hassled by the people behind them, who would never understand why they could not go faster.¹⁸³ In 1996, Regard also published a grim account of the annual Pride event. By then, it had become common practice for the disabled section of the march to be at the front, and to set the pace:

However, for some reason this year we were only allocated two very pleasant but very green stewards with no radios, we found ourselves being left behind unable to keep up with what appeared to be a marathon rather than a march, there was not a lot we could do about it.¹⁸⁴

This was not because Pride festivities were unable to do better about inclusivity. The North London Lesbian Strength and Gay Pride announced that their celebrations of 1989 would

¹⁸¹ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter* 4.

¹⁸² Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019. Kathryn responded to my email to Gemma asking whether there were Gemma members willing to speak about its history. She reached out to other Gemma members for me, and I conducted an interview together with her and Gemma member Lila, who preferred to only use her first name for this interview. Kathryn is a nondisabled gay woman, who was born in 1934 and was very active within Gemma. Lila is a gay woman, who was born in 1947. She has a minor disability, to do with mobility and poor sight.

¹⁸³ Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

¹⁸⁴ Newsletter ‘Regard Writes Update’.

include major events for black and ethnic minority lesbians and gays and for lesbians and gays with disabilities, all information would be available in Braille or on tape, and that sign language interpreters would be available at all their events.¹⁸⁵

Appleby, who in her research focuses only on lesbian women, argues the problems of access may be gender-divided, as lesbian women had less financial resources than men and their venues were therefore more often inaccessible.¹⁸⁶ There are some problems with this. Firstly, there is no consensus on whether the gay or lesbian scene was better about accessibility and mentality. Maloush Köhler, a nondisabled sign language interpreter, felt the lesbian and women's world was more accessible than the gay world. Due to the militancy of the women's and lesbian movement, it was made accessible sooner than the male gay movement which was mainly focused on the party scene.¹⁸⁷ In contrast, disabled lesbian Lydia Zijdel felt heavily excluded from the women's movement after she began using a wheelchair. She recalled going back to a popular women's gathering place, in the squatted 'Women's house' ('Vrouwenhuis') after she had become disabled, and finding it inaccessible in both a physical sense, and in mentality. Women warned her that 'we are not going to take care of you.'¹⁸⁸

This is tied to the second problem with Appleby's argument. While financial problems played a role in achieving accessibility, ableist attitudes and mentalities were often cited as the real problems in both the lesbian and gay scene. Disabled LGBTI people felt there was no real willingness to fix problems of accessibility. Gay Times journalist Tom Bishop wrote in an article that event organisers saw disabled access as a luxury or bonus facility which could

¹⁸⁵ 'Invite for the Camden Lesbian and Gay Unit Meeting'; 'North London Lesbian Strength and Gay Pride contact slip' LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/60.

¹⁸⁶ Appleby, 'Out in the Margins' 27.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019. I came into contact with Maloush because she was the sign language interpreter during my interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, where she told me she also had interesting things to say about the 1998 Gay Games. We scheduled a separate interview to speak about this. Maloush coordinated the Deaf Access group during the organisation of the 1998 Gay Games. As Maloush and I spoke specifically about the 1998 Gay Games, we did not discuss her own identity in much detail.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Lydia Zijdel, conducted on 18 June 2019.

be included if enough money remained.¹⁸⁹ Both disabled activist Taco van Welzenis and Mariska de Swart argued that if you asked venues about their inaccessibility, they would respond by saying that they did not have any members or guests with a disability to make the venue accessible for— without considering inaccessibility was the cause of that.¹⁹⁰ Van Welzenis himself did go to venues regardless of accessibility, for instance by crawling over stairs. Only then, people would suddenly realise that it was actually not an acceptable situation.¹⁹¹ According to Wennink, the COC was willing to acknowledge the problems of disabled people, but not to take the effort to change.¹⁹² Similarly, E., a black disabled lesbian quoted by Cavar, observed that in the COC; ‘there was that idea: [takes on sarcastic tone] “We are all equal! So there can’t be sexism...or racism...or exclusion of people with a disability!”’¹⁹³

Ableist attitudes also manifested in other ways. For instance, queer activist culture in itself could be exclusive, due to the expectation of putting all your energy into the cause, was impossible for those who were multiply-identified. E. cites the single-minded focus on ‘productivity’ and the lack of attention for mental self-care in particular as major issues within queer activist communities. Activist culture valued overwork and perseverance over taking time for ‘self-help and healing’.¹⁹⁴ Interestingly, Petra Ybeles Smit¹⁹⁵ marked this same expectation of overworking as the Achilles’ heel of the disability movement. Volunteers often were only active for a couple of years, after which they would have become too ill or disabled

¹⁸⁹ Draft feature *Gay Times* article T. Bishop, ‘Disabled and gay – welcome to the scene’ (2000) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/1356.

¹⁹⁰ ‘Mooi zo’ (1995) IHLIA DVD; Gehandicaptenraad, *Pils met een rietje: met een handicap in de homobeweging* (Utrecht 1994) IHLIA signature cat. (pils/rie) g; Interview with Mariska de Swart, conducted on 14 June 2019.

¹⁹¹ ‘Mooi zo’ (1995) IHLIA DVD.

¹⁹² Claus, Wennink, ‘Gehandicapten: trap op, trap af, of het COC is gewoon te ver’.

¹⁹³ Cavar, ‘(Dis)locations: Dutch Disabled LGBTQ+ Subjects and Queer Social Space’ 39.

¹⁹⁴ *Idem* 41.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Petra Ybeles Smit, conducted on 22 April 2019.

to continue.¹⁹⁶

Aside from physical inaccessibility, communication difficulties could also be in the way of integration.¹⁹⁷ One Dutch deaf lesbian woman argued:

In the pub I can't hold a conversation [...] because the music is too loud. You need to have perseverance, girl, if you want to talk with me. If you're in the pub you're not keen on that, are you? And rightly so. Rightly so.¹⁹⁸

This sentiment is common for deaf LGBTI people, which could complicate the possibility of making contacts. The Roze Gebaar even issued a brochure with the following comic¹⁹⁹:



Image 1. Roze Gebaar flyer Dove potten en flikkers uit de doofpot in Archief Roze Gebaar, Doos 3, Map 3, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis.

Similar troubles were reported by blind people, who noted that much of the initial contact in the gay scene goes through eye contact, which made things rather more difficult for them.²⁰⁰

Communication issues also had to do with ableist attitudes. During a Brothers and Sisters Club for Deaf Gays party, guest of honour Patrick Lethaby made a plea to hearing gays:

Deaf people are always left out on the commercial gay scene because most people won't talk to deaf people because they don't understand deaf people. [...] If you see some

¹⁹⁶ During her interview, Petra Ybeles Smit argued that another reason for burn out culture was that disabled people get mobility aid when they do paid jobs (such as a travel costs coverage, speech software or patient lifts) but not for voluntary work.

¹⁹⁷ Bishop, 'Disabled and gay – welcome to the scene'; *Brothers and Sisters Newsletter* 74 (December 17 1982) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/69.

¹⁹⁸ Author's translation of the original Dutch: 'Ik kan in de kroeg geen gesprek voeren [...] omdat de muziek hard staat. Je moet doorzettingsvermogen hebben, meisje [als je met mij praten wilt]. Als je in de kroeg zit dan heb je daar toch geen zin in? En terecht. En terecht.' – Jonker, Sandfort, Schyns, *Lesbisch zijn in Nederland* 94.

¹⁹⁹ This comic depicts two men who find another attractive, and begin a conversation. However, just as they start the conversation, the music starts as well. The deaf man attempts to get across that he is deaf, asking whether the other would be willing to talk more slowly. However, the other cannot hear him either, due to the loud music. The deaf man yells out that he is deaf just as the music stops. The other man startles and makes off quickly, thinking to himself 'he's crazy!' while the deaf man thinks that this is what always happens.

²⁰⁰ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 4.

people talking in sign language, go up and say hello. They may not be dumb as well as deaf.²⁰¹

In the Netherlands, Annemieke van Brandenburg remembered how, when she began exploring the women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s, communication could be difficult, as there was no system of sign language interpreters in place yet. When she had found the courage to join a women's talking group to explore her lesbian identity, she found she was an ill fit in the group, and communication issues made her feel like it would be better if she were to leave. The second group she joined, however, half a year later, was smaller and more accommodating with communication. Here, she could explore her lesbian identity. Likewise, when she joined women's documentation centre 'De Feeks' ('The Vixen'), she was able to attend meetings by reading the minutes as they were typed up.²⁰²

Something else that excluded disabled lesbians and gays from the subcultural scene was the expectation of 'the body beautiful'. Gerard Balthus argued in a *Sek* article; 'The male world mainly has room for active and attractive boys, that have enough energy to make many contacts. The female world has the ideal of the similarly young, independent and strong woman that does not need any care.'²⁰³ This could be disheartening, as disabled people often imagined the gay world as more tolerant and free. Bishop wrote:

²⁰¹ *Brothers and Sisters Newsletter* 74.

²⁰² Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019. Annemieke approached me in reaction to one of my published calls for interviews in the newsletter of IHLIA LGBT Heritage. Annemieke was born in 1948. She is a white lesbian woman who lost her hearing when she was around two or three. She grew up in the deaf institute St. Michels until she was twenty, when she followed a regular education in Nijmegen. Following, she studied economic and social history at the University, and graduated in 1989. Afterwards, she worked in a deaf high school, where she taught history, social studies, economics and religious studies ('levensbeschouwing'). She knew she was a lesbian since she was thirty, and was active in the women's movement from the 1970s onwards. She worked in the women's bookshop and documentation centre De Feeks ('The Vixen'). Moreover, she was active in Roze Gebaar and in the SOG-homogroep, and is also a volunteer at Stichting Welzijn Doven Amsterdam ('Association Deaf Welfare Amsterdam').

²⁰³ Author's translation from the original Dutch: 'Gehandicapte potten en flikkers die zich proberen te identificeren met de homo- en lesbicatuur stoten nogal eens hun kop. De mannenwereld heeft vooral plaats voor actieve en aantrekkelijke jongens, die genoeg energie hebben voor het aangaan van vele contacten. De vrouwenwereld ziet als ideaal de eveneens jonge, onafhankelijke en sterke vrouw die geen verzorging nodig heeft.' – G. Balthus, "Normalisme": Wat doen we met de kreupelen en blinden?' *Sek* 18 (1988) IHLIA signature ts. dgb periodieken.

To the outside world, the gay scene is sanctuary for people who have overcome adversity to come to terms with their sexuality, a colourful nonstop party thrown by an all-inclusive community which offers support and freedom to be yourself. [...] Unfortunately reality undermines the theory. The gay scene can be as cold and exclusive as any private members club. Physical perfection is needed to be a star of the scene, and if you don't look the part you might feel that you don't fit in. Gay men are famously critical and every night is a potential bitchfest of sharp put downs shouted across the dancefloor or whispered behind your back. As a result even the most confident people can find themselves doubting whether they measure up, feeling too self-conscious for comfort. If your average person can feel excluded, what appeal does the gay scene have for people with disabilities? Gay men and lesbians face prejudice every day, so in theory they should be slow to jump to conclusions about anyone else. However, it seems that disabled people are often ignored or dismissed en masse for failing to fit into the glamorous gay ideal.²⁰⁴

This could lead to explicit exclusion. Shakespeare argued that doormen of gay clubs could function as gatekeepers of lesbian and gay scenes, filtering out those not adhering to the ideal.

He gives the example of Nigel, who had a learning disability:

I have been to gay clubs wearing an obviously gay T-shirt, a pink triangle or some gay symbol like that, and the doorman has asked me if I know this is a gay club and do I want to go in still. The assumption is that because I am disabled I cannot be gay.²⁰⁵

If not met with rejection on the basis of their disability, disabled gay men faced fetishism. For instance, the GMDG received a letter from one man 'with a very specific request. He wanted to meet a one-legged transvestite with sling-back shoes. The group couldn't help him.'²⁰⁶

There were some discussions within the GMDG about fetishism, as some felt uncomfortable about being approached only because someone was into their disability. One member wrote that 'people with disabilities wish to be regarded and treated above all as 'people' with the same needs and desires as the able-bodied in society'.²⁰⁷ Another, however, argued he was

²⁰⁴ Bishop, 'Disabled and gay – welcome to the scene'.

²⁰⁵ Shakespeare, 'Out on the edge' 4.

²⁰⁶ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 4.

²⁰⁷ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 11 (Winter 1986) LSE HCA/Ephemera/745.

perfectly happy to allow others to be attracted to him precisely because of his disability.²⁰⁸

Petra Ybeles Smit also criticised fetishism. Before she had come out as a trans woman, she attended a gay and lesbian meeting in Nijmegen in the second half of the 1980s, organised by the COC. At this meeting, which she could only attend because at this point she was still able to take the stairs, she met a group of gay men who said they would find it a fun experience to have sex with a disabled person. She never visited this meeting place again, unwilling to be rendered a sex object.²⁰⁹

The lesbian scene was similarly dominated by exclusive ideals.²¹⁰ One of these was the ideal of strength. Appleby argued that language which was liberatory and empowering for some was exclusive and diminishing for others. Notions of ‘strength’ and ‘being powerful’ implicitly excluded disabled people. She quotes Lucy: ‘Basically disability issues aren't about strength.’²¹¹ Additionally, in the UK, a culture of prettiness and beauty also emerged in the lesbian scene in the late 1980s and 1990s. Gillespie-Sells quotes blind lesbian Kirsten Hearn, who wrote in 1988 that lesbian representation on Channel 4's Dyke TV mainly showed ‘glamorous, gorgeous ‘babes’, or ‘lipstick lesbians’ as younger, fashion-conscious lesbians are currently called. [...] It would appear that even the lesbian community has brought the ‘body beautiful’ youth culture of the 1990s.’²¹² This was not only evident on TV, but also in discos. Hearn argued these standards were hard to attain for most disabled lesbians.

This was not particular for the UK. Cavar, basing this on E.'s testimony, argued that even though lesbian beauty standards tended to be less rigid because of the influence of feminism, ‘these spaces are not immune from stereotypes and expectations about what ‘gay’ is and looks like. Nor were they immune from racism; [E.] described such spaces as ‘very white’ in which

²⁰⁸ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 11.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Petra Ybeles Smit, conducted on 22 April 2019.

²¹⁰ Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 57, 58

²¹¹ Appleby, ‘Out in the Margins’ 23.

²¹² Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 39.

she ‘doesn’t feel [psychosocially] safe.’²¹³

Beyond standards of strength and beauty, the ideal of independence excluded disabled lesbians. Dagmar Wennink observes this in the women’s movement in general: disabled women’s presence made nondisabled people feel like their freedom was threatened, because they felt like they had to start ‘taking care’ again.²¹⁴ This also made it difficult to find a partner. Appleby quotes Ann, who argued that ‘I think people are very frightened of getting involved with people with disabilities because they think that it will be so demanding. I think that they are worried about making an initial commitment.’²¹⁵ In a provocative article, Karin Spaink asks why nondisabled women have never dated a disabled woman. She gives a series of possible answers, all of which she rebukes:

Because you actually secretly find [them]²¹⁶ a little bit piteous? Well, you’re only piteous when you need help and are afraid to ask for it. And besides, not all women who show their disability on the outside that she has a disability need more help than you. You apparently also need to be helped over a hurdle sometimes, even if it is not a physical one.

Because you don’t find a disability attractive? Now I’ve caught you in a prejudice. You are truly not supposed to be attracted to the disability itself: most of the time there is an attractive lady hidden behind that disability. And if you think about it for a moment, you will realise even the fairest of people can fall ill or get into an accident. Us disabled even have an ex-Miss Holland in our ranks, and I myself am planning to wager a bet for the Miss Wheelchair pageant, if anyone would be so friendly to organise one.

Because you are afraid it is hard to be in a relationship with a disabled girlfriend? Most of the time we manage ourselves very decently, thank you very much, and many disabilities’ issues are hardly noticeable in the daily practice nowadays.²¹⁷

²¹³ Cavar, ‘(Dis)locations: Dutch Disabled LGBTQ+ Subjects and Queer Social Space’ 43.

²¹⁴ Claus, Wennink, ‘Gehandicapten: trap op, trap af, of het COC is gewoon te ver’.

²¹⁵ Appleby, ‘Out in the Margins’ 26.

²¹⁶ Spaink uses ‘roze kneuzen’. ‘Kneuzen’ is a self-reclaimed derogatory term for which no suitable translation could be found.

²¹⁷ Author’s translation of the original Dutch: ‘Omdat U roze kneuzen eigenlijk stiekem ergens toch ook wel een klein beetje zielig vindt? Ach, zielig ben je pas wanneer je hulp nodig hebt en bang bent die te vragen. En bovendien heeft niet elke vrouw bij wie je aan de buitenkant kunt zien dat ze een handicap heeft per definitie meer hulp nodig dan Uzelve. U moet kennelijk ook nog wel eens over een drempel geholpen worden, al is dat dan geen fysieke.’

Disabled gay men also spoke about these issues in finding a partner.²¹⁸ In his interview, Arnold Boekhoff recounted he had also faced rejection after he had been invited home by someone, as he first needed to contact his supervisor to ask whether he could come along. Gay men were not always open-minded about this requirement.²¹⁹ Finding a partner could also be difficult because disabled LGBTI people were often assumed to be asexual.²²⁰ This assumption, while applicable to both men and women, is more often mentioned by women in the source material.²²¹ Spaink also had a rebuttal to the assumption of asexuality, explaining in detail how disabled people are actually sexually ‘so inventive in discovering the other possibilities of the body, the complete arsenal of the sex shop pales by comparison.’²²²

Disabled gay and lesbian people were at times also avoided out of embarrassment. Julian Salmon describes how, ‘I realised other embarrassed eyes were looking away from me. For goodness’ sake, I thought, call yourself ‘liberated gays’, what rubbish!’²²³ Avoidance often came down to the fear of offending. A meeting of the GMDG explored the ‘fears and ignorance of the able-bodied, and how it can be easier to turn away than face a situation you don’t understand and don’t know how to respond to, how to do ‘the right thing’ without being condescending’.²²⁴ Spaink had a rebuttal for this as well, in her article on why nondisabled

Omdat U een handicap niet zo aantrekkelijk vindt? Nu betrap ik U toch op een vooroordeel. Het is werkelijk niet de bedoeling dat U op de handicap zelf valt: meestal verschuilt er achter die handig een aantrekkelijke dame. En als U er even bij stilstaat, realiseert U zich vast ook dat de schoonsten der mensheid ziek kunnen worden of een ongeluk kunnen krijgen. Wij invaliden tellen zelfs een ex Miss Holland in de gelederen, en zelf ben ik van plan een gokje te wagen voor de Miss Wheelchair verkiezingen, als iemand zo vriendelijk is die te organiseren. Omdat u bang bent dat het zo lastig verkeren is met een gehandicapte vriendin? Meestal redden wij onszelf heel behoorlijk, dank U, en van veel handicaps merkt U in het dagelijks gebruik niet zo veel meer.’ – Spaink, ‘Seks en handicap: ooit gevallen op een roze kneus?’.

²¹⁸ Bishop, ‘Disabled and gay – welcome to the scene’.

²¹⁹ Interview with Arnold Boekhoff, conducted on 17 June 2019.

²²⁰ Clare, *Exile and Pride* 104-119.

²²¹ Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 1, 11-12, 39; Gehandicaptenraad, *Je moet er wel wat voor doen: handicap en seksualiteit* (Utrecht 1993) Archive Ieder(in); Jonker, Sandfort, Schyns, *Lesbisch zijn in Nederland* 94; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019; Interview with Lydia Zijdel, conducted on 18 June 2019.

²²² Author’s translation of the original Dutch: ‘[...] zo inventief geworden in het ontdekken van de andere mogelijkheden van het lichaam dat het volledige arsenaal van de sekswinkel erbij verbleekt.’ – Spaink, ‘Seks en handicap: ooit gevallen op een roze kneus?’

²²³ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter* 2.

²²⁴ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter* 4.

lesbians never dated disabled lesbians:

Because you don't know what to say? What a pity that your entire repertoire of opening lines and stimulating conversations vanishes into thin air the very moment you are in front of a lady who physically does not entirely meet the national average. And how odd, that you who have tons of experience with mixing with those outside of the norm, you who even are proud not to belong to an average group, in this case end up tongue-tied. Because you don't know where to look? Afraid you will too obviously stare at the spastic arm, the prosthesis, the scar? What a pity, that your fixation on her disability turns your eye away from her other charms.

Because you're afraid you will make a comment that may be painful for her? Rest assured, [most of us] are used to worse, and are therefore pretty skilled in apt responses and self-deprecation. At most, you risk being put on the spot, but apparently you needed that. Besides, that is always a risk when you seek to approach someone.²²⁵

Beyond embarrassment, however, ableist attitudes could also get downright hostile. Arnold Boekhoff spoke about how when he was active in the gay leather scene, he often heard the phrase 'we don't associate ourselves with crazy people' ('we gaan niet met gekken om').²²⁶ The most extreme examples of hostility come from the UK. According to GMDG, they were used to being ignored, to have doors slammed into their faces, and to be confronted with the fear of some nondisabled people that they would 'catch' a disability.²²⁷ Shakespeare gives an example:

²²⁵ Author's translation of the original Dutch: 'Omdat U niet weet wat u zeggen moet? Wat sneu nu toch, dat Uw ganse repertoire aan openingszinnen als sneeuw voor de zon verdwijnt op het moment dat de dame tegenover U fysiek niet geheel en al beantwoord aan het landelijk gemiddelde. En wat vreemd toch, dat U die zelf op een ruime ervaring kan bogen in het omspringen met mensen en groepen die buiten de norm vallen, U die er zelf trots op bent niet tot een doorsneegroep te behoren, in dit ene geval opeens met de bek vol tanden staat. Omdat U niet weet waar U kijken moet? Bang dat U al te nadrukkelijk naar die spastische arm staart, naar die prothese, naar dat litteken? Wat jammer toch dat Uw fixatie op haar handicap U het zicht beheerst op de rest van haar bekoorlijkheden.

Omdat U bang bent een voor haar pijnlijke opmerking te maken? Wees gerust, de meeste roze kneuzen zijn erger gewend, en zijn van lieverlee behoorlijk bedreven geworden in rake antwoorden en zelfspot. U loopt hooguit het risico op Uw nummer gezet te worden, maar kennelijk was dat nodig. Bovendien loopt U dat gevaar altijd wanneer U toenadering zoekt.' – Spaink, 'Seks en handicap: ooit gevallen op een roze kneus?'

²²⁶ Interview with Arnold Boekhoff, conducted on 17 June 2019.

²²⁷ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 4.

[...]In the process of trying to move through the club, this guy is trying to get around me, instead of waiting for me to pass, he climbs on me, literally, puts one foot on my knee, puts another foot on the handle, and climbs right over me, thinking that's nothing, I'm just a piece of furniture. But I have to say one good thing happened, one friend of mine who's quite sussed, a drag queen, hastily followed and decked him, she's 6'2" in heels, that was good.²²⁸

Bishop's accounts are equally horrifying. He describes the 1999 Mardi Grass, where disabled people were unable to use the large toilets set up for them, because they could not prevent people from having sex inside. The next year, barricades were put around the accessible toilets to try and prevent this, but they were soon pulled down.²²⁹

Bishop ascribes ableist attitudes of nondisabled people to the fact that people with severe disabilities force nondisabled people to face their own vulnerability and mortality, 'and the sight of physically disabled person enjoying a night out with friends reminds us that appearance is just one aspect of personality— something that anyone who spends a fortune on gym memberships and moisturiser might find hard to stomach.'²³⁰ The reminder of mortality may also have been the reason that attitudes towards disabled LGBTI people worsened with the HIV/AIDS crisis. Both Shakespeare and Gillespie-Sells argued unaffected gays preferred not to be reminded of their mortality or vulnerability and the illness, by seeing people with obvious disabilities.²³¹ However, Gillespie-Sells argued there were also lesbians and gay men who, because of their experience with HIV/AIDS, tended to be more receptive towards the needs of disabled lesbians and gays.²³² This is also noted by Spaink, who had written she felt at home in the gay world for several reasons, unfortunately including AIDS:

²²⁸ Shakespeare, 'Out on the edge' 3.

²²⁹ Bishop, 'Disabled and gay – welcome to the scene'.

²³⁰ Ibidem.

²³¹ Shakespeare, 'Out on the edge' 5.

²³² Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 58.

Since the beginning of [the AIDS crisis ...] people within the gay scene are used to people not being physically healthy anymore. For most people, illness exclusively takes place at home or in the hospital, but especially in the gay subculture that's no longer the case.²³³

Simon Watney claimed that 'the AIDS epidemic had drawn together groups of lesbians and gay men, people in the black community and disabled people in a way that could not have been anticipated before the AIDS crisis'.²³⁴ Yet, Corbett and Shakespeare refute this, arguing that those with HIV/AIDS faced the same prejudices as people with disability.²³⁵ Conversely, Kathryn Bell and Lila argued that in the lesbian and gay scene everything revolved around AIDS. No interest was expressed in any other disability, and for disabled people nothing changed.²³⁶

Despite the harsher response to HIV/AIDS in general in the UK, there were similar accounts in the Netherlands. Lydia Zijdel argued that for her, the AIDS crisis showed how horribly the Dutch gay movement treated ill people.²³⁷ Moreover, a SOG-homogroep member reported that a disabled person had applied to be a buddy for those with HIV/AIDS, but was rejected, with the reason that disabled people would only bring their own 'limitations' to the calls for help, and would not be capable of offering good guidance.²³⁸

Over the years, disabled people started making themselves heard, as shall be seen in chapter 3. However, when they were able to attend lesbian and gay events, they were expected to only speak about matters of access. Kirsten Hearn attended the International Lesbian Information Service conference in 1986, and, 'fed up with the mating rituals of the

²³³ Author's translation of the original Dutch: 'Ik bedoel dat cynisch... natuurlijk heb ik ook andere en veel meer redenen. Maar als ik in m'n stoel een homodisco binnen kom, is het niet zo abnormaal. Niet iedereen kijkt ervan op. Sinds de intrede van aids, hoe triest en misschien voor jou wrang dat ook klinkt, is men er vooral binnen de homowereld aan gewend dat mensen niet volledig fysiek gezond zijn.' – B. Delver, K. Spaink, 'Karin Spaink – een rollende diva' *Expreszo* 6:4 (1993) IHLIA signature ts.

²³⁴ Corbett, 'A proud label' 344.

²³⁵ Shakespeare, 'Out on the edge' 5; Corbett, 'A proud label' 344-345.

²³⁶ Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

²³⁷ Interview with Lydia Zijdel, conducted on 18 June 2019.

²³⁸ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot* 4:3 (13 oktober 1994) IHLIA Archive 'Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot: Nieuwsbrief over homoseksualiteit en handicap', signature ts.

severely able-bodied', she wrote an article afterwards to say what she was unable to say at the conference. She criticised that the overwhelming majority of the attendants were 'white, European, gentile, middle class, employed, educationally privileged, aged 25-35, childless, symmetrical, slim and severely able-bodied.'²³⁹ She wrote: 'We wanted to talk to you about body image, about symmetry, about the way in which we relate to each other, about sex, about many other things. You have forced us to talk about access.'²⁴⁰ Hearn made a case for inclusivity:

Until the lesbian movement recognises that all lesbians with disabilities have a right to full participation and starts organising differently, none of us, even the most out activists such as myself, are welcome in the movement. Not just pity or embarrassment, or just plain access, but an acceptance that we are visible, loveable and totally worthy members of the lesbian sisterhood. [...] Now I want you to hear that we are proud to be disabled. We enjoy our lives. You and your ideologies about us being lesser are lies, hatred, fear, fascistic. We will not accept such fascism, we demand to be heard, to be allowed to live, enjoy ourselves with our lesbian sisters. You have to move over and let us.²⁴¹

Feeling caught between the disability and lesbian and gay community due to their 'double exclusion' described in this chapter, many disabled lesbian and gay people felt 'the importance of creating a space in which we could share our experiences and gather strength to deal with the rest of the world.'²⁴² Chapter 3 shall focus on this effort to create their own spaces.

²³⁹ K. Hearn, 'A woman's right to cruise', *Trouble and Strife* 9 (1986) 24.

²⁴⁰ Hearn, 'A woman's right to cruise' 28.

²⁴¹ *Idem* 28.

²⁴² Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

Chapter 3: ‘Minority consciousness gone mad?’

In June 1978, an article in *The Guardian* reported on the foundation of Gaycare, an organisation for the interests of elderly and disabled gay people. The article opened with the line ‘Do disabled lesbians and deaf homosexuals really need their own separate associations and pressure groups, or is this the minority consciousness gone mad?’²⁴³ This was a question also often posed to Dutch disabled lesbian and gay groups.²⁴⁴ Elsa Beckett, founder of the group Gemma, illustrated why disabled lesbians and gays created their own spaces:

Most of us feel the need to belong somewhere, to have ‘our own people’, a secure base of sharing and understanding from which we can gain strength and confidence to be our true selves in a wider context. This solidarity with others in a smaller group does not mean a restricting uncreative separateness, rather it can be a rich place of exploration and affirmation, where at last we share our fears, pain and difficulties, and enrich each other by working together to resolve problems or to experiment with the means of resolving them, and to enjoy our successes. [...] How much greater is the power to deal with such events when you have a whole community of women with you, some of whom you know personally, some whom you never meet but all of whom you know share your experiences, and, more than that, share with you in wanting to redress the situation, to create a different world in which women like you are not abused, mocked or discriminated against. Such a community does not, I think, come into being by our simply being thrown together– if this were so the day centres and institutions would have been hotbeds of revolution long ago. We needed to create our own positive support group to achieve anything further.²⁴⁵

Several groups for disabled lesbian and gay people emerged in the Netherlands and the UK. In the Netherlands, the first group that emerged –founded in 1974 and disbanding in the late 1970s²⁴⁶– was the ‘werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen’ (‘workgroup disabled

²⁴³ ‘Gay support’, Extract from *The Guardian* (26 juni 1978) Bishopsgate Institute Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive (Henceforth LAGNA) signature sc.

²⁴⁴ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot: V/h NOHEH, nieuwsbrief over handicap en homoseksualiteit* 12 (August 1976); N. Santé, E. Feenstra, ‘Twintig jaar Roze Gebaar: ‘Moet dat nou, een aparte werkgroep?’’ *XI* 11:2 (2002).

²⁴⁵ Gemma, *Amethyst* 31-33.

²⁴⁶ The archival material of the werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen at IHLIA LGBT Heritage was incomplete, and the group was mentioned nowhere else in my source material. Therefore, it is unknown when the group was

homophiles’).²⁴⁷ This group was founded to help disabled homophiles form relationships, and for the ‘national integration of disabled and able-bodied homophiles.’²⁴⁸ In 1982, ‘Roze Gebaar’ (‘Pink Sign’), a group for deaf lesbians and gays, was founded. While this group was initially founded independently, in 1986 it became a workgroup of the main Dutch lesbian and gay organisation, the COC.²⁴⁹ This fit within the broader Dutch trend of disabled lesbian and gay groups emerging within existing organisations. The ‘Nederlandse Gehandicaptenraad’ (Dutch Disability Council) had a workgroup Disability, Relationships and Sexuality, which they called the SOG. In 1985, the heteronormativity of their activities was addressed during a symposium, and a gay and lesbian subgroup was founded: the ‘SOG-homogroep’. This group consisted of about ten gay and lesbian disabled people.²⁵⁰ Later, the group renamed itself ‘Van Doofpot tot Mankepot’.²⁵¹ The name, consisting of a series of Dutch puns based on reclaimed words, was chosen to give the group a more approachable and emancipatory character.²⁵² One of the accomplishments of the SOG-homogroep was pushing the COC to set up a workgroup around the subject as well, in 1987.²⁵³

British groups tended to organise separately from existing organisations. The first British group to emerge was Gemma²⁵⁴, a group for lesbians and bisexual women with

ended. In 1979, the regional division of Amsterdam was abolished by its leaders. According to the national newsletter, this was a shock for the other members, and a group of 10 to 12 people felt abandoned. The newsletter proclaims it would look into whether there was any interest to set up a new division. However, this was the last newsletter in IHLIA’s archive.

²⁴⁷ IHLIA Archive Van Doofpot tot Mankepot.

²⁴⁸ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* 3 (November 1997).

²⁴⁹ IISH Archive Roze Gebaar 10622/ARCH04511.

²⁵⁰ A. van Wijnen, *Een ontluikende liefde...*

²⁵¹ The name ‘Van Doofpot tot Mankepot’ consists of a series of Dutch puns, meaning literally ‘from deaf dyke to crippled fag/queer’. ‘Doofpot’ is a Dutch word that is used in the Dutch saying ‘iets in de doofpot stoppen’, which figuratively means ‘to cover something up’. Literally, the ‘Doofpot’ means ‘extinguishing pot’, which was a pot in living rooms where people used to put not yet extinguished firewood, to extinguish it. However, if one splits up the word it consists of the Dutch word ‘Doof’, which also means ‘deaf’, and ‘pot’, which is the reclaimed slur for lesbian in Dutch, and might be similar to the word ‘dyke’. ‘Mankepot’ is a slur used to indicate someone that has a mobility impairment, and might be similar to the word ‘cripple’. However, the word ‘poot’ is also a reclaimed slur used to indicate gay men in the Netherlands, which might be similar to the English ‘fag’ or ‘queer’.

²⁵² Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019.

²⁵³ IISH Archive COC Landelijke Werkgroep Homoseksualiteit en Handicap, 10622/ARCH03373.

²⁵⁴ The name Gemma was chosen by founder Elsa Beckett. In her interview, Kathryn Bell explained that ‘Elsa was looking up saint’s names, to see if there was a disabled saint, and there was a saint Gemma who had some

disabilities, founded by Elsa Beckett and Frances Bernard in 1976.²⁵⁵ In 1982, Elsa encouraged Julian Salmon and Glenn McKee to set up a male counterpart, Gay Men's Disabled Group (GMDG)²⁵⁶ in 1982.²⁵⁷ In 1979, Brothers and Sisters Club for Deaf Gays was founded.²⁵⁸ These three groups were more social than they were political groups.²⁵⁹ More political was the group Sisters Against Disablement (SAD); set up by Sue Faircloth and Kirsten Hearn to be a radical force in women's politics in Britain.²⁶⁰ After SAD's activities diminished, Kirsten Hearn, a blind lesbian, was involved in setting up the group Lesbians and Gays Unite In Disability (LANGUID) in 1986. LANGUID was mainly set up to organise a conference in Manchester on homosexuality and disability in 1988, the direct cause of this being that a group of lesbians and gays with disabilities were discriminated against during a Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights Conference.²⁶¹ Out of LANGUID likely grew Regard, the National Organisation for Disabled Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals, as they similarly cited the inaccessibility of a 'huge conference about legal rights' as the reason to found

sort of disability, and there was a saint Germaine, and we thought we don't want to call ourselves that, in case people get us mixed up with Germaine Greer. Later, Elsa found that the word meant something like a plant shoot, sprout, so [...] it would seem appropriate because we wanted the group to be a kind of sprout that would grow. It didn't actually, it dwindled, but anyway. I think Elsa rather played down the saint bit later, because she didn't want to seem religious, which of course we never were from the start, it was never a religious group.' Thus, in their flyers, it was argued that Gemma was chosen because it was 'short and began with a G for Gay – we could derive no acronym for various permutations of 'disabled lesbians' or 'disabled gay women.' – Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019; Gemma flyer (March 1978) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/184.

²⁵⁵ Gemma flyers, LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/299.

²⁵⁶ Glenn McKee and Julian Salmon wanted to find a male equivalent of the name Gemma for their group. 'The nearest we got to a suitable name was 'Vulcan' - the disabled god of classical myth, but it was also the name of a porn magazine, so we couldn't use it.' Thus, they settled for the name Gay Men's Disabled Group. – *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter 1* (date unknown) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/413.

²⁵⁷ Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletters 1-8 (1982-1985) HCA/EPHEMERA/413; Newsletters 11-16 (1986-1988) HCA/EPHEMERA/745; Newsletters 2, 12 (1983-1987) LSE HCA/CHE/2/12/19.

²⁵⁸ The name 'Brothers and Sisters' was chosen to imply gayness and fraternity.

²⁵⁹ Brothers and Sisters Club newsletters and newssheets (March 1980 to April 1988) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/69.

²⁶⁰ *Sisters Against Disablement: A magazine by, for and about women with disabilities of relevance to everyone 4* (Winter 1985/1986) Bishopsgate Institute; 'Feminist Audio Books' *British Library* <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/sisterhood/clips/culture-and-the-arts/written-spoken-word/143133.html> [last accessed 26 October 2019].

²⁶¹ Greater London Action on Disability, 'Inclusion not ignorance', report on the Disabled Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Conference' (October 2002) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/413; Lesbians and Gays Unite In Disability Model Resolution; '£6500 needed for disabled lesbians and gays conference!'; '1st national conference for lesbians and gays with disabilities (July 27, 1987) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/745.

Regard in 1989.²⁶²

Despite the general trend in the UK to organise outside of existing organisations, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) also set up a workgroup for the elderly and the disabled in 1974.²⁶³ In 1978, another such a group affiliated to CHE was founded by James Farmer, Don Oswald and Trevor Thomas, called Gaycare. This groups was meant as a link between existing disability services and lesbian and gay aid initiatives, to ensure disabled lesbian and gay people could access their services.²⁶⁴ Trevor Thomas also set up GAYDAID, a befriending and counselling service, intended to help gay disabled men by way of letters and telephone calls.²⁶⁵

Activities of disabled lesbian and gay groups can be divided roughly into three categories. Firstly, groups provided social meeting spaces, which they also used to inform and educate their membership about lesbian and gay subjects. Secondly, groups worked to inform and educate the surrounding environment their membership had to engage with, which required collaboration with the institutions they targeted. Thirdly, groups lobbied other organisations to be more inclusive. Aside from discussing this, this chapter will show an international dimension to disabled lesbian and gay organising efforts. Moreover, this chapter will discuss the rhetoric used by the groups, which was also influenced by processes of transfer between lesbian and gay organisations, and disability organisations. Altogether, this chapter shows how ‘minority consciousness gone mad’ led to the creation of particular spaces designed to meet the needs of a multiply-identified group.

²⁶² Greater London Action on Disability, ‘Inclusion not ignorance’.

²⁶³ ‘A paper prepared for the Personal and Family Services group of NCSS by the CHE Elderly and Disabled Homosexuals working group’ (May 1974) LSE HCA/FRIEND/5/2.

²⁶⁴ ‘Gaycare leaflet with information for volunteers and membership form’, LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/693; Gaycare archive LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/485.

²⁶⁵ ‘Flyer Help for Gay Disabled Men GAYDAID’, LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/745; *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter* 1.

3.1: 'Freewheeler disco dances' and other social functions

Most disabled lesbian and gay groups were set up to alleviate the social isolation of its members. In order to do so, groups organised social functions. Gemma, for instance, set up meetings, 'freewheeler disco dances', cultural visits, and picnics.²⁶⁶ Gemma meetings were not largely attended: in 1998, on average, about eight members attended.²⁶⁷ In addition to national meetings, Gemma had a music group; a books on tape group; a humorous magazine group; a group where members corresponded via tape letters; and a group for deaf and hard of hearing lesbians.²⁶⁸

Friendships have blossomed and we've had some brilliant discussions in the groups. It's a possible access route to a community for women who are unable to participate in the usual social/political meeting points for lesbians and bisexual women.²⁶⁹

Aside from London, socials were also held in Manchester, Lancashire and Newham.²⁷⁰ Both British and Dutch groups organised as national groups with regional divisions throughout the country.²⁷¹

Once every three months, Gemma held meetings together with Gay Men's Disabled Group.²⁷² While GMDG grew to have around a hundred members, of whom just over two-thirds had a disability, they were not very active.²⁷³ The reason for this was that membership was scattered throughout the country, and various members had limited mobility. Despite acknowledging that '[l]imited mobility makes personal contact and attendance at meetings

²⁶⁶ *Gemma Newsletter* 16 (November 1981) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/299.

²⁶⁷ *Gemma Newsletter* 87 (June 1999) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/785.

²⁶⁸ *Gemma Newsletter* 59 (May 1992) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/306; Gemma, *Silver Leaves* (London 2001) 5. This anthology was given to me by Kathryn Bell, and came from her personal collection.

²⁶⁹ *Gemma Newsletter* 84 (September 1998) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/785.

²⁷⁰ *Gemma Newsletter* 59 (May 1992); *Gemma Newsletter* 60 (August 1992) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/306.

²⁷¹ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 3 (Summer 1983); IISH Archive Roze Gebaar box 3, map 4; *Brothers and Sisters Newsletter* (April 1983); *Brothers and Sisters Newsletter* (August 1983); *Brothers and Sisters Newsletter* (March 1985); 'History', *Deaf LGBTIQA UK* <http://deafgltiqa.org.uk/history/> [last accessed 26 October 2019].

²⁷² *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 4; 5 (Spring 1984); 6 (Autumn 1984).

²⁷³ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 1; 2; 13 (Summer 1987).

virtually impossible'²⁷⁴, editors of the newspaper kept lamenting members inactivity:

Attendance at meetings this last year has been so poor, that one begins to wonder whether members really want to meet each other, whether it's worthwhile even having a group. If the group has to close down due to apathy of the members it would be a terrible shame—but you'd only have yourself to blame. Do you want the gay men's disabled group to continue? Come to the general meeting, YOUR GROUP NEEDS YOU!²⁷⁵

According to founder Glenn McKee, GMDG never took off because disabled people were much more dependent on others, and expected to be provided with services by the group instead of providing it services: 'I've come across people who expect us to just provide them with Mister Right. Like institutions supply all physical things (like food), they expect emotional things can be supplied in the same way.'²⁷⁶ The group threatened to fold several times, due to lack of interest in board positions, and members not paying their membership fees. In 1988, most of GMDG's services were discontinued until further notice.²⁷⁷

While Dutch social functions were also not always broadly attended—on average, SOG-homogroep weekends attracted about eight members—sources do not express as much indignation about this.²⁷⁸ Dutch groups often organised weekends where members could share experiences, get together and discuss the preferred strategies and structures of their groups.²⁷⁹ These could be themed, such as one for disabled women who love women in October 1991, in which they discussed their particular exclusions, how to deal with one's own body, and how to flirt.²⁸⁰

Roze Gebaar was founded during a weekend for deaf homosexuals in 1982. The first

²⁷⁴ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 13.

²⁷⁵ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 11.

²⁷⁶ 'Glen McKee interviewed by Margot Farnham'.

²⁷⁷ Greater London Action on Disability, "Inclusion not ignorance".

Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter 12 (Spring 1987); 13; 15 (Winter 1987/1988).

²⁷⁸ A. van Wijnen, *Een ontluikende liefde...*; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

²⁷⁹ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 3; *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 6; "Zit Roze Gebaar nog in de kast!?!"; 'Verslag van de vergadering over het "praatpapier" (14 October 1983). These minutes were given to me by Annemieke van Brandenburg, and came from her personal collection.

²⁸⁰ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot Nieuwsbrief* (22 juni 1992).

Dutch deaf woman to openly come out for her homosexuality, Bea Visser, had been visited by many other deaf people wanting to speak about their homosexual feelings. This made her realise the importance of bringing awareness about the subject, and she organised a weekend. The twenty attendants decided to form a club: ‘We, deaf gays and lesbians, were there. We were allowed to be, our feelings were allowed to be. We didn’t want to keep them hidden anymore.’²⁸¹ Roze Gebaar continued to organise social functions over the years.²⁸² This included trips abroad, mainly to Germany and England.²⁸³ Roze Gebaar was well-connected with Brothers and Sisters Club for Deaf Gays, which was also mainly focused on having social meetings, outings and parties.

The Dutch and British groups attended each other’s Christmas, Easter and Lustrum celebrations, and communicated in International Sign Language.²⁸⁴ There were some cultural differences, as a report of the first lustrum celebration of Roze Gebaar in 1987 stated that:

Representatives of the British and German gay group explained that in comparison with the Netherlands, it was way harder for them to be deaf and gay. This fact could luckily not prevent that mainly many foreign men looked beautiful. As punishment for this, a group of British drag queens was removed from the tram by the police. A nice example of Dutch hospitality and tolerance.²⁸⁵

The British group, on the contrary, remarked that finding a Dutch drag queen in Amsterdam

²⁸¹ P. Essink, *Bea Visser: dove princes* (Zwolle 2009) IHLIA ODE3 BIO 113-114; ‘Bijeenkomst op zaterdag 12 juni 1982’ (Amsterdam 1982) These minutes were given to me by Annemieke van Brandenburg, and came from her personal collection; Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

²⁸² “Zit Roze Gebaar nog in de kast!?!”; ‘Verslag van de vergadering over het “praatpapier”’; Beleidsnota ‘Roze Gebaar in goede handen (1997) IISG Archive Roze Gebaar box 3, map 3.

²⁸³ Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

²⁸⁴ *Brothers and Sisters Newsletter* (August 1983); *Brothers and Sisters Newsletter* (September 1984); *The Basset* (May 1985); *The Basset* (January 1987); Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

²⁸⁵ Author’s translation from the original Dutch: ‘Vertegenwoordigers van de Engelse en van de Duitse homomannen vertelden dat bij hen, vergeleken met Nederland, het nog heel wat moeilijker ligt om doof én homo te zijn. Dit feit kon gelukkig niet verhinderen dat met name veel buitenlandse heren er prachtig uitzagen. Als straf hiervoor was een groepje Engelse travestieten door de politie uit een tram verwijderd. Een mooi voorbeeld van Nederlandse gastvrijheid en tolerantie.’ – S. Claus, ‘Roze Gebaar: Werken in een tussenpositie’, *Sek* 17:6 (1987) IHLIA signature ts. dgb periodieken.

was like finding a needle in a haystack: ‘The Dutch are probably too modest to dress up as a lady. Perhaps the dresses were too short for tall Dutchmen.’²⁸⁶

Aside from meeting spaces, newsletters were important social features of disabled lesbian and gay groups. Newsletters informed members on the groups’ activities and relevant news on disability or lesbian and gay topics, and members could send in articles and in that way engage with other members.²⁸⁷ Gemma encouraged members to send in letters by opening the newsletter asking for opinions on contentious debates within the disability or lesbian and gay movements.²⁸⁸ Similarly, debates were held in the newsletters of the GMDG and the werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen.²⁸⁹

Moreover, newsletters came with penfriend listings. According to Gillespie-Sells, penfriend listings were vital for disabled people in rural communities, as for them it was near impossible to attend gay venues to meet others.²⁹⁰ Gemma stressed their penfriend listing was meant as a friendship service, not as a dating agency.²⁹¹ However, Kathryn Bell thought that a lot of people just joined to find a partner, anyways. This led to frustrations, as ‘either they found a partner and went off in their little world by themselves, or they didn’t find a partner and resented the fact that they hadn’t got what they’d come for.’²⁹² GMDG ran into similar frustrations— one member sent in multiple articles detailing his disappointment of not receiving any answers on his ad.²⁹³ In contrast, the werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen argued one of their aims was to help disabled male and female homophiles form relationships.

²⁸⁶ *The Basset* (August 1987).

²⁸⁷ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter* 3-6; Number 14 (Autumn 1987); *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* 5:2 (22 December 1993); *The Basset* (April 1984).

²⁸⁸ *Gemma Newsletter* 74 (March 1996) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/306.

²⁸⁹ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter* 7 (Spring 1985); ‘Glen McKee interviewed by Margot Farnham’; *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 5 (March 1975); *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 15 (May 1977).

²⁹⁰ Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 54.

²⁹¹ Gemma flyers, LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/299.

²⁹² Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

²⁹³ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter* 14; 15.

Their contact advertisements could be used for this.²⁹⁴

While the meetings and newsletters provided opportunities to meet others, disabled lesbian and gay groups also used these mediums to educate members on lesbian and gay topics, and give them information which was usually difficult to access. For instance, Gemma produced Disabled Gay Guides which provided information about groups specifically for disabled lesbians and gays in the UK, but also stated the accessibility details of other gay and lesbian groups.²⁹⁵ In 1980, they printed about a thousand copies, and distributed these to as many organisations and publications concerned with disabilities as they knew of.²⁹⁶ Moreover, both groups worked on setting up a tape library by recording important lesbian and gay texts out loud for members who could not read physical books. GMDG did so in collaboration with the group Talking Pink, which set up a National Gay Talking Newspaper for visually impaired lesbians and gays.²⁹⁷ Additionally, with the funds the gay pub Queen's Head raised for the group, GMDG began transcribing books into Braille in 1985: 'This is something which has never been done before (in fact there is NOTHING about gays or lesbians in Braille).'²⁹⁸

In the Netherlands, the efforts of the Disability, Relationships and Sexuality workgroup of the Gehandicaptenraad were mainly aimed at young people. They organised educational weekends, had a telephone line, and produced brochures.²⁹⁹ Similarly, the SOG-homogroep produced the flyer *Gefeliciteerd, Homoseksualiteit en handicap* ('Congratulations, homosexuality and disability'), which explained the prejudices disabled lesbians and gays

²⁹⁴ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 3.

²⁹⁵ Disabled Gays Guide (London 1981); Disabled Gays Guide (London 1984); Gemma's National Disabled Gays Guide: An access guide for lesbians and gay men with disabilities outside London (London 1985); Disabled Gays Guide (London 1986).

²⁹⁶ *Gemma Newsletter* 16 (November 1981).

²⁹⁷ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 12.

²⁹⁸ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 8.

²⁹⁹ 'Beleidsnota van de werkgroep Handicap, Relaties en Seksualiteit (SOG)' (Utrecht 1988) Archive Ieder(in) 18-20, 25; 'Activiteitenplan' (1985) Archive Ieder(in) 20-14, 33-37; Gehandicaptenraad, *Oh... zit dat zo; Jongeren met een handicap en seksualiteit* (Utrecht 1995) Archive Ieder(in); Gehandicaptenraad, *Je moet er wel wat voor doen: handicap en seksualiteit*.

might face, and spoke about what possibilities there for finding their place in the gay subculture.³⁰⁰ Roze Gebaar also organised meetings and weekends especially to inform and educate deaf lesbians and gays. Topics discussed were things such as parenthood, legislation, domestic partnerships, and coming out.³⁰¹

Roze Gebaar also organised a lot of activities to educate deaf people on HIV/AIDS. Their vigilance around this subject was transnationally inspired. During an international weekend on the subject in 1991 in Belgium, Roze Gebaar disclosed that there had been no Dutch deaf people yet who had openly admitted they had contracted the virus. However, according to Annemieke van Brandenburg, a lot of German and British deaf people had contracted HIV/AIDS due to lack of accessible information.³⁰² Roze Gebaar followed international precedent, and organised a HIV theme day, with special educational material; strove to make existing HIV/AIDS organisations more accessible; and attempted to gain a say in development and execution of HIV/AIDS actions, publications and policy.³⁰³ Aside from this, Roze Gebaar made sure they had one professional deaf ‘buddy’ for those with HIV/AIDS³⁰⁴, and set up a special talking group.³⁰⁵

In the UK, a specific organisation was set up for deaf people in 1985, by a consortium of deaf organisations and the Terrence Higgins Trust: AIDS AHEAD.³⁰⁶ One of their recommendations was founding a working party of forty deaf people who could be trained on AIDS-prevention and care, ‘so that they will in turn train the rest of the deaf community about

³⁰⁰ Gehandicaptenraad, *Gefeliciteerd: homoseksualiteit en handicap*.

³⁰¹ Beleidsnota ‘Roze Gebaar in goede handen.’

³⁰² ‘Notulen algemene jaarvergadering 27 april 1991’ IISH Archive Roze Gebaar Box 3, Map 4; Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

³⁰³ Santé, Feenstra, ‘Twintig jaar Roze Gebaar: ‘Moet dat nou, een aparte werkgroep?’; Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

³⁰⁴ The ‘buddy’ system was set up in various countries by LGBTI movements. Volunteers would help those with HIV/AIDS to help fight social isolation, and give assistance where needed.

³⁰⁵ Beleidsnota ‘Roze Gebaar in goede handen.’

³⁰⁶ *The Basset* (November 1987); *The Basset* (April 1988); AIDS AHEAD Archive (1974-1999) LSE HCA/Hart and McLean.

AIDS.³⁰⁷ According to the BaSSET, the work of AIDS AHEAD was well received by international deaf communities: ‘Britain is now regarded as world leader in this area.’³⁰⁸

The achievements in education described in this section would not have been possible without the efforts of disabled lesbian and gay groups combatting social isolation through social functions; by connecting and informing their membership they made up for lack of accessible information on gay and lesbian topics.

3.2: ‘Working from an intermediate position’: collaborating with disability or lesbian and gay organisations

Aside from informing their own members, groups worked to educate the environment directly surrounding disabled lesbian and gay people. In doing so, they often needed to work together with the organisations they attempted to improve.

As early as 1975, the werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen began to notice that providing social function was not enough, and that it was necessary to change the attitudes of the outside world regarding homosexuality and disability. They did so by educating and collaborating with other groups, including, with varying success, the COC. Moreover, they worked closely with the Werkgroep Emancipatie Gehandicapte Mens en Gemeenschap (‘Emancipation of Disabled Person and Society’) which was part of the Nederlandse Vereniging voor Seksuele Hervorming (Dutch Association for Sexual Reformation, NVSH).³⁰⁹ According to member Koert Diesveld, working together with the NVSH was important in their goal of emphasising that disabled homophiles were not different from disabled heterophiles. They however rejected NVSH’s suggestion that the disabled homophile

³⁰⁷ *The Basset* (March 1987).

³⁰⁸ *The Basset* (November 1987).

³⁰⁹ *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 3 (December 1974); *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 4 (March 1975); *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 12 (August 1976); *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 14 (January 1977).

workgroup would join together with them completely, out of fear of losing visibility and safety for the specific problems of disabled homophiles.³¹⁰

Roze Gebaar also worked to influence other organisations, by educating children, parents and social workers within deaf schools, and by making contact with schools for deaf and hard of hearing people.³¹¹ The group also aimed to inform the gay world about deafness, as they felt like they operated from an intermediate position between the deaf, lesbian and gay worlds.³¹² Yet, during their first weekend in 1982 they decided that ‘working within the deaf world was secondary.’³¹³ This may have been because initially, deaf organisations had been unreceptive towards them, and schools were often unwilling to cooperate.³¹⁴ Their focus on the gay world resulted in Roze Gebaar integrating with COC as one of their workgroups in 1989.³¹⁵ The group maintained its own character, but was able to use COC facilities and funding. Now from within, they strove for inclusivity in all COC activities, and offered sign language courses to all COC divisions.³¹⁶

An ongoing debate at this time was whether the disability movement or lesbian/gay movement would be stronger for collaborating in the efforts to further gay disability activism. This discussion took place in part during the 1991 European Conference on Homosexuality and Disability, in Uddel. One of the speakers was Janneke Graamans, who gave a lecture on organising and network formation. She argued that as disabled gays and lesbians were a

³¹⁰ *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homoseksuelen* 6 (May 1975); *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homoseksuelen* 12.

³¹¹ ‘Verslag van de vergadering over het “praatpapier”’; ‘Zit Roze Gebaar nog in de kast!?!’; J. van Rooy, ‘Waar haal je lesbische dove vrouwen vandaan?’ *Sek* 13:2 (1983) IHLIA signature ts. dgb periodieken.

³¹² ‘Zit Roze Gebaar nog in de kast!?!’; Beleidsnota ‘Roze Gebaar in goede handen.’; Claus, ‘Roze Gebaar: Werken in een tussenpositie’; Van Rooy, ‘Waar haal je lesbische dove vrouwen vandaan?’

³¹³ Van Rooy, ‘Waar haal je lesbische dove vrouwen vandaan?’

³¹⁴ Despite such difficulties, over the years Roze Gebaar became a more accepted group in the deaf community and developed better relationships with deaf associations. In a 1997 policy nota, they remarked that Roze Gebaar had become more accepted in the deaf community than it had been. – Claus, ‘Roze Gebaar: Werken in een tussenpositie’; Julien, ‘OOGgetuigen’; Beleidsnota ‘Roze Gebaar in goede handen.’

³¹⁵ Initially, working together with the COC was not wholly successful either, as their attempts to collaborate were unanswered. – Van ’t Sant, Visser, ‘Doven: wat hoort nou wel en wat niet?’

³¹⁶ ‘Beleidsplan Roze Gebaar’ (1988) IISH Archive Roze Gebaar Box 3, Map 4; Beleidsnota ‘Roze Gebaar in goede handen’.

relatively small group, it was unwise to found separate organisations. The advantage of organising within existing organisations was that they could use existing facilities, contacts, and media, instead of having to create these anew.³¹⁷ Furthermore, she made a case for organising within the lesbian and gay movement, for several reasons.

To begin, ‘there is within the gay and lesbian movement a better climate to organize around a second shared identity characteristics, than there is in the disability organisations.’³¹⁸ Within disability organisations, she argued, too many nondisabled people were in charge, and therefore ‘[t]here is too little space there to give our own definition to the position we take.’³¹⁹ Secondly, within the gay and lesbian movement there was a more positive climate to emancipate themselves as a subgroup. Thirdly, she felt that ‘affiliating with disability organisations helps us less with integrating in society than if when we conquer our place within the gay movement.’³²⁰ Fourthly, with this structure they could pursue multiple goals and plan multiple activities, and could therefore also support disabled gays and lesbians within disability organisations.³²¹ This is remarkable advice, especially seeing as the SOG-homogroep –which had organised this conference– rather than organising within the lesbian and gay movement, was part of the Gehandicaptentraad.

Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that within the Gehandicaptentraad, the subgroups focusing on sexuality and homosexuality were ‘an alternative bunch’ (‘een aparte bende’), according to Agnes van Wijnen. Colleagues would be ‘giggly’ about sexuality, and ‘snigger’ about the needs of the SOG.³²² Agnes argued they were only able to exist because they were funded separately by the Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Culture. Had they not had separate funding, the group would have quickly been deprioritised by the

³¹⁷ ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’ 33-34.

³¹⁸ *Idem* 32.

³¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

³²⁰ *Idem* 33-34.

³²¹ *Idem* 32.

³²² Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

Gehandicaptenraad, which felt sexuality was a private issue.³²³ This differed significantly from what president of the Gehandicaptenraad Ab Vriethoff said during the European Conference on Disability and Homosexuality in 1991 in Uddel. He argued that while he was heterosexual, his disability bound him and all the participants in a joint battle. Moreover, ‘the battle of homosexual men and lesbian women to live freely their homosexual life, without getting negative comments or being limited by discrimination rules and laws, is rightly a part of, and should be a part, of the activities of the Gehandicaptenraad.’³²⁴ Yet, when the allocated funding for the SOG was stopped, the group was eventually discontinued in 2004, due to austerity and out of fear of offending the organisations for parents of people with developmental disabilities that the Gehandicaptenraad had fused with in 2001.³²⁵ This also meant an end to the SOG-homogroep, which likewise had only been able to exist due to the personal engagement of a few individuals within the Gehandicaptenraad.³²⁶

Anticipating this risk, the SOG had decided to change from providing direct individual help to focusing on mainstreaming their issues and integrating disability in general organisations centred around sexuality.³²⁷ According to Agnes van Wijnen, while they had their doubts about integrating into other groups –fearing the topic of disability would disappear or become invisible because of it– they did so out of necessity.³²⁸ In order to mainstream sexuality, the SOG developed educational material and seminars targeting parents, caregivers and teachers of young people with physical disabilities, and made folders and brochures for healthcare professionals. Moreover, they organised symposia and seminars

³²³ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

³²⁴ ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’.

³²⁵ Bahner, ‘Chapter 5: Netherlands’; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

³²⁶ Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

³²⁷ ‘Beleidsnota van de werkgroep Handicap, Relaties en Seksualiteit (SOG)’ 55.

³²⁸ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

for other associations, such as the Association for Sexology, or the Rutgersstichting.³²⁹ The SOG also tried to work with other advocacy organisations, parent-led associations, special education schools, and care homes, but this turned out to be more difficult as these groups feared losing members by speaking about sexuality. Parents found it hard to consider their children as sexual beings, and were afraid to ‘wake sleeping dogs’³³⁰ by bringing up the subject.³³¹

The SOG began also taking lesbian and gay issues into account in their attempts to educate and inform other organisations, following a report written by the SOG-homogroep in 1989, demanding that the SOG take on an active, militant attitude against discrimination.³³² They argued that the SOG ‘cannot just look on calmly and think “a gay group has been erected, so they will do what needs to be done!”’.³³³ Several recommendations were made: to take along homosexuality and bisexuality in all future publications and courses; to address the topic in regional groups; and to stand up for the interests of disabled gays to the COC.³³⁴ The SOG took up their recommendations, and began routinely taking up gay and lesbian examples in their educational material.³³⁵

³²⁹ ‘Verslag studiedagen Handicap, Relaties en Seksualiteit ten behoeve van medewerkers van de Rutgersstichting (Utrecht 1993) Archive Ieder(in); ‘Beleidsnota van de werkgroep Handicap, Relaties en Seksualiteit (SOG)’ 61-63.

³³⁰ A Dutch saying: ‘geen slapende honden wakker maken’, used to indicate that keeping silent about something would be better than bringing it up and alerting someone of the presence of the issue.

³³¹ ‘Beleidsnota van de werkgroep Handicap, Relaties en Seksualiteit (SOG)’ 36, 39.

³³² Beyond asking the SOG to include homosexuality in their educational tools, the SOG-homogroep itself also worked on spreading information about disabled gay and lesbian people in disability education and within disability organisations – H. Bergman, A. van Wijnen, ‘Gehandicapt: test-tocht om hindernissen te nemen’ *Sek* 17:4 (1987) IHLIA signature ts. dbb periodieken.

³³³ A. van Wijnen, *Een onthuilende liefde...*

³³⁴ Ibidem.

³³⁵ Inclusion was also ensured in other projects. For instance, the SOG-group had collaborated with Karin Spaink and Gon Buurmans to develop the book *Aan hartstocht geen gebrek* (‘No lack of passion’). This book was published in 1991 to paint a positive and innovative picture of disabled people’s sexuality. The models were found through the SOG and SOG-homogroep networks, and therefore homosexuality was casually represented, in both textual and visual examples. According to Agnes van Wijnen, the book was received as ground-breaking in other countries, such as in the US, the UK and Germany, where showing disabled sexuality so openly was ‘not done’. Agnes argued that when it came to sexuality the Netherlands was ahead of other countries, even if the Netherlands was behind on other countries in a rights-based narrative of disability. – G. Buurman, K. Spaink, *Aan hartstocht geen gebrek: handicap, erotiek en lichaamsbeleving* (Amsterdam 1991) IHLIA signature cat. (buurm/har) bb; C. Gekeler, K. Spaink, ‘Lesbies komplot tegen modderpoel van ellende’, *Scheluw* 7 (1991) IHLIA signature ts.; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

British groups did not publish much about initiatives to educate and inform others, with exception of Regard, which argued they had become ‘an established point of reference for service providers, education establishments, families and friends seeking information or advice about the needs and aspirations of this particular group of disabled people.’³³⁶ In addition, Gemma did try to get local organisations, newspapers and women’s centres to display their information, and asked libraries to consider subscribing to *Gay News* and *Sappho* so that gay women who could not obtain these or get these at home because of lack of privacy, would still be able to learn of them.³³⁷ Furthermore, Gemma manifested themselves where they could, attending seminars to do with disabled women or disability and sexuality, and speaking at relevant conferences.³³⁸

The question of whether to organise within the lesbian and gay movement or within the disability movement also came up in the British context. Gemma, for instance, felt that the gay community was ‘uniquely placed to de-segregate disabled people’, as there were already so many gay and lesbian groups covering a range of different interests where they could become active.³³⁹ Still, Gemma collaborated with disability groups as well. Gemma was one of the founding members of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP), with two members on its founding committee.³⁴⁰ Together with Regard and various other marginalised voices, and with support of the BCODP management, they founded a focus group for equal opportunities, to ensure that marginalised voices were represented in the BCODP and in member organisations.³⁴¹

³³⁶ Moreover, they planned to establish a comprehensive nation-wide database of relevant organisations for disabled LGBTI people, and to develop a help and advice line accessible to anyone interested in the wellbeing, advancement and rights of disabled lesbians and gays. – ‘Letter from Kath Gillespie Sells, Chairperson, about a Regard and the creation of a database of disability, lesbian and gay and relevant organisations (6 February 1997) HCA/EPHEMERA/1078.

³³⁷ Gemma, *Silver Leaves* 4.

³³⁸ Gemma flyer (March 1987).

³³⁹ Ibidem.

³⁴⁰ *Gemma Newsletter* 87; Gemma, *Silver Leaves* 4.

³⁴¹ *Gemma Newsletter* 61 (November 1992); *Gemma Newsletter* 64 (September 1993); *Gemma Newsletter* 65 (December 1993) HCA/EPHEMERA/306.

Gay Men's Disabled Group felt very differently about the BCODP. In 1986, there was controversy within the group, as a member had argued that it was wrong that the GMDG had decided without consulting full membership to end their affiliation to the BCODP while still donating to a campaign to defend the recently raided bookshop Gay's the Word.³⁴² 'Surely for a gay disabled men's group the priorities should be reserved!'³⁴³ The GMDG editor disagreed, as 'our priorities are to the gay community and the disabled community equally.'³⁴⁴ GMDG considered withdrawing from the BCODP because the organisation had a lack of consideration 'for our particular needs as a small gay group.'³⁴⁵ The BCODP subscription was ten percent of GMDG's bank, and the group was unable to send a representative due to their members' inactivity, meaning they had less of a vote. Aside from this, the committee argued that:

BCODP until just recently (because of a change in personnel on the committee) was utterly insensitive to the dual oppression of disabled gay men and lesbians. In their directory they published the full names, addresses and private telephone numbers of representatives of GMDG and GEMMA without asking those concerned whether they minded the whole world knowing their identities.

GMDG felt that 'no apology or assurance that this will not happen again can undo the damage that had been done for this particular person who already had several abusive telephone calls as a direct result.'³⁴⁶ Despite a letter from a BCODP member that BCODP was willing to learn, and to waive their subscription fee, GMDG left the BCODP after a vote during a general meeting.³⁴⁷

³⁴² 'Defend Gay's The Word' was a campaign set up after the London bookshop Gay's The Word was raided by Customs and Excise, and the book shop was charged.

³⁴³ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 11.

³⁴⁴ He felt they were quite right to support Gay's the Word, particularly because GMDG used the address for their incoming mail, and because 'one of our members was one of the directors of the bookshop at the time of the Customs raid and charges. – *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 11.

³⁴⁵ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 11.

³⁴⁶ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 15.

³⁴⁷ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 16.

Collaboration with other disability groups went better for GMDG, and national and local disability organisations frequently consulted them.³⁴⁸ Additionally, the group advised gay and lesbian organisations on access, communication and relationships.³⁴⁹ In 1985, GMDG and Gemma visited the Greenwich Lesbian and Gay Rights Group, who were open to becoming more accessible, and offered to visit isolated gays and lesbian with disabilities in Greenwich, as well as to help disabled people get to their meetings.³⁵⁰ Contact with gay groups could also be less successful. Glenn McKee reported that on a ‘Meet the club’ meeting, few people showed up, which he argued was ‘a typical turn out’:

Only disabled people themselves, and able bodied people who either work in field of disability or have disabled friends or lovers, come along to these meetings. That’s quite a small number of people. Many gay men, like people in society at large, can get by without meeting or having anything at all to do with disabled people.³⁵¹

Elsewhere, he argued: ‘other groups at the ‘meet the group’ slot have had all sorts of people along, disagreeing and pointing out what they were doing wrong. It’s quite an insult not even to be considered worth being shouted at!’³⁵²

In summary, disabled lesbian and gay groups often needed to collaborate with those organisations they needed to inform and educate. Whether groups chose to collaborate with disability groups, or with lesbian and gay groups, degrees of success varied.

3.3: ‘Access required’: lobbying and negotiating lesbian and gay groups for access

Beyond trying to inform and educate, disabled lesbian gay groups also approached the lesbian and gay movement to ensure accessibility. Lobbying, negotiating and collaborating were the

³⁴⁸ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter 1; Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter 2.*

³⁴⁹ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter 16.*

³⁵⁰ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter 8 (Summer 1985).*

³⁵¹ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter 2.*

³⁵² *Ibidem.*

preferred tactics to do so, rather than direct political action. Within Gemma, this was because there was a fear to come across as too militant. In a newsletter, they reported that Gemma had carried a banner at the national Gay News Defence rally in February 1978, leading to ‘some controversy within the London group about the advisability of this, some feeling strongly that if we appear too ‘out’ and militant we shall intimidate and discourage the very women we are hoping will join us.’³⁵³ According to Kathryn Bell, Gemma was ‘never a very political group.’³⁵⁴ She referred to the fact that Gemma did not often stage protest acts in order to ensure inclusivity, except once, in 1981:

A few of us picketed the CHE winter fair. [...] In this particular year they decided to hold it in a hall in central London, which was up a very steep flight of stairs which made it inaccessible. And we printed some leaflets and handed them out to the people who were going in. We were not trying to stop people going in, we just wanted to bring awareness to the fact that they were excluding disabled people from the event. And they did take notice and after that they always held them in accessible places.³⁵⁵

Otherwise, Gemma strove for achieving inclusivity in other ways. Their Disabled Gays Guides helped with this, as contacting many organisations to find out their inclusivity details raised awareness of the issue. Kathryn Bell argued: ‘Mostly, all the venues were helpful and told us what the access was, except for one, who said that they did not wish to appear in our guide and that they would sue us if we put them in.’³⁵⁶ Lila argued: ‘as long as they didn’t have to do anything, they were okay, weren’t they? [...] What they absolutely didn’t want to do was change in any way.’³⁵⁷ Due to groups’ unwillingness to change, Gemma women at times regretted organising separately. Kathryn argued:

³⁵³ Gemma flyer (March 1978).

³⁵⁴ Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

³⁵⁵ Ibidem.

³⁵⁶ Ibidem.

³⁵⁷ Ibidem.

There was a sense in which we thought Gemma was counterproductive in that— and this had also been overheard, that other gay groups would think it unnecessary to make themselves accessible, because it would just say ‘well there’s Gemma for them’, ‘if you’re disabled, go to Gemma.’ In that sense, we were perhaps more of a hindrance than a help.³⁵⁸

Nevertheless, Kathryn and Lila did feel as though they did help raise awareness of disability issues.³⁵⁹ Elsa Beckett agreed that sometimes she felt they should have stayed in Sappho and kept pushing them to organise accessible meetings. ‘But on the other hand, having a sort of lesbian disability group means that we’ve been able to push other disability groups and say ‘What are you doing about the disabled lesbians and gay men in your group?’³⁶⁰

They did so, together with Gay Men’s Disabled Group, by lobbying to make the London Lesbian and Gay Centre accessible, when it was set up with Greater London Council (GLC) funding. While the management committee had a reserved space for a person with a disability, Gemma and GMDG were displeased because there was only access to the ground floor via a ramp in the back. There were restrictions on how many people in wheelchairs could be allowed into the basement or other floors due to fire regulations. Government restrictions on expenditure meant that the GLC did not have sufficient funds to pay for the cost of converting one of the lifts so it could still be used by disabled people in the event of a fire.³⁶¹ GMDG argued that: ‘At last we thought a venue for lesbians and gay men that was central (for London) accessible, friendly and encouraging. I’m afraid, however, [...] things did not quite measure up to our rather high expectations.’³⁶²

Rather than lobbying or negotiating, Sisters Against Disablement was one of the only groups choosing a method of direct action. They fought battles over access to, for instance,

³⁵⁸ Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

³⁵⁹ Ibidem.

³⁶⁰ Hall Carpenter Archives, Lesbian Oral History Group, *Inventing ourselves* 70.

³⁶¹ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter* 6.

³⁶² *Gay Men’s Disabled Group Newsletter* 8.

the Lesbian Sex and Sexual Practice Conference in 1983. Additionally, they produced an access code to be used in public listings of events in feminist publications:³⁶³

What we mean by access is that we are afforded the possibility to participate as fully as we wish despite our disabilities and because we have been thought about. But access goes further than we could ever display on a code. It is vital that adequate publicity has gone out beforehand, with correct and full access details on it, and that this info has reached women with disabilities. Access also what happens at the event, and making us feel welcome, and not accusing a speaker who refers to uses of handicapism both in the organising of the event and in its content as ‘hijacking the debate.’³⁶⁴

SAD felt that even though access was expensive, it was possible to find the money to ensure it. ‘[O]f course, my sisters, it’s all really about whether they want us to participate or not.’³⁶⁵

Kathryn Bell and Lila argued Gemma disagreed with SAD’s attitude, however:

They drew up an access code, and it was enormously long and complicated and no venue would ever have given their access details in so much detail. You know they wanted to know whether they had high or low seating, hard or soft seating, what the lighting was like, all sorts of details, which obviously people might want to know but would just be too much to try to put into any short publicity.³⁶⁶

Gemma women were present at one of the meetings where they drew up the code, but they did not raise the issue of the length and complexity of their code. According to Kathryn, this was because ‘they were rather militant, I think, and rather touchy, and didn’t take well to criticism, even if it was constructive criticism, so I just tended to keep quiet.’³⁶⁷ SAD’s militant attitude received more hostility from the women’s movement than Gemma’s lobbying approach. Feminists remarked that SAD women ‘would sit outside in their wheelchairs and

³⁶³ K. Hearn, ‘Oi! What about us?’ in: B. Cant, S. Hemmings eds., *Radical records: Thirty years of lesbian and gay history, 1957-1987* (London, New York 2010).

³⁶⁴ *Sisters Against Disablement Magazine* 4.

³⁶⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶⁶ Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

³⁶⁷ Ibidem.

look a bit threatening'. One remarked: 'You didn't say anything when a disabled woman spoke. [...] In the end [their tactics] just felt like bullying and harassment'. Another said that 'It was a bit Lord of the Flies [...] It was like a cult where everyone keeps turning on everyone until there's only one left.'³⁶⁸ Conversely, Kirsten Hearn argued that whenever disabled women would raise their issues, they were accused of 'thinking that the more oppressed we were, the more points we could have.'³⁶⁹

That Gemma and GMDG were less political than others also became apparent from their response to the 1988 Disability and Homosexuality Conference in Manchester which was organised by Lesbians and Gays Unite in Disability. The conference was meant to 'share experiences, gain strength, and learn to fight back. Our ultimate aim is to draw up charter of demands and create a supportive network.'³⁷⁰ They felt that the conference was an integral part of the fightback by lesbians and gays with disabilities against the discrimination and oppression they faced within and outside of lesbian and gay communities. Coming together furthered their liberation, as they could share ideas, plan strategies for change and action, express their anger, talk about rejections, and think of positive ways to redress the balance.³⁷¹ GMDG and Gemma were invited by LANGUID to contribute, but there was some discussion about the conference during one of their joint meetings, as, amongst other things:

Some people wanted something less political, but weren't quite sure what. The most constructive suggestion was that the conference should discuss setting up a phone line for disabled lesbians and gay men, because isolated disabled gays would gain a lot of support from the phone if they could not come to meetings.³⁷²

³⁶⁸ K. Guest, 'Whatever happened to feminism's extreme sects?' *Independent* (12 February 2006) <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/whatever-happened-to-feminisms-extreme-sects-5335348.html> [last accessed 27 October 2019].

³⁶⁹ Ibidem.

³⁷⁰ 'Lesbians and Gays Unite In Disability Model Resolution'; '£6500 needed for disabled lesbians and gays conference!'; '1st national conference for lesbians and gays with disabilities (July 27, 1987) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/745.

³⁷¹ 'First national conference for lesbians and gays with disabilities', Bishopgate Institute FL B115.

³⁷² *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 15.

This shows that the GMDG and Gemma membership were not that interested in political messages or organising, being rather more focused on providing a social function.

Regard, the National Organisation for Disabled Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals, was more 'political' in their protest actions.³⁷³ Regard used lobbying tactics in their efforts to make Gay Pride events more accessible. In 1996, they found a useful ally in this, namely one of the funders of the next year's Pride, British Telecom. They were sympathetic to their cause and suggested a combined British Telecom and Regard approach to Pride Trust. Together, they wrote to the chair of the Trust requesting Regard's involvement in the preparations of Pride 1997.³⁷⁴ Beyond lobbying, they also considered direct action: 'We are still waiting to hear, but at this stage it's a possible picket if the Pride Trust and its sponsors do not take us seriously.'³⁷⁵ Regard offered their experience to make events accessible for free, but organisers were not always willing to take their advice. Due to some bad experiences with inaccessibility at Pride, Gemma therefore advised their members to only attend parades where Regard had some influence over access and safety.³⁷⁶

The SOG-homogroep similarly lobbied and collaborated to ensure inclusivity in the lesbian and gay scene, with varying degrees of success. In their flyer *Pils met een rietje* ('lager with a straw'), they argued they were 'not just the umpteenth group that wants their own meetings. No, we want to exist within all the groups that exist.'³⁷⁷ While in one of their newsletters they argued they also went onto the street to protest, there are not many examples of direct protest actions.³⁷⁸ Rather, they worked together with other organisations to ensure inclusivity. Like Regard, they worked to make the Roze Zaterdag accessible, in collaboration

³⁷³ Greater London Action on Disability, 'Inclusion not ignorance'.

³⁷⁴ *Regard Writes Update*.

³⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁷⁶ *Gemma Newsletter* 88 (September 1999) HCA/EPHEMERA/785.

³⁷⁷ Gehandicaptenraad, *Pils met een rietje*.

³⁷⁸ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* (June 1993).

with the Roze Front ('Pink Front') which organised the yearly event.³⁷⁹ According to Ab Vriethoff, the SOG-homogroep managed to make the yearly Roze Zaterdag 'quite accessible, but we do need to talk about it every time.'³⁸⁰

Next to making pride celebrations accessible, the SOG-homogroep attempted to make the COC accessible. The SOG-homogroep focused mainly on the COC in the Dutch lesbian and gay movement, according to Nicole Franssen, because it represented an important part of the movement and was an easy point of contact. It was harder to find attention for the subject in other, smaller groups, which were more isolated. Additionally, in the COC there was less infighting and the SOG-homogroep felt like lobbying and advocacy were more important than infighting over radical ideologies.³⁸¹ Regionally, the efforts of the SOG-homogroep could be successful: the COC divisions The Hague and Leiden were made accessible in the early 1990s.³⁸² On the whole, however, making the COC accessible proved difficult.

In 1987, the SOG-homogroep wrote a report which was presented during the COC Congress of 1987, laying out all the issues faced by disabled gay and lesbian people and following this up with several recommendations. Changes needed to be made both to physical accessibility and mentality: 'the waiting is not primarily for a lift or ramps, but for people who want to see a human (with a disability), instead of just a disability, or indeed, only an electric wheelchair.'³⁸³ They advised to gradually make COC venues more accessible, in consultation with experts; to develop a guide with information on the current accessibility of all COC venues; to enable members to subscribe to a Braille or tape version of their magazine; and to

³⁷⁹ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* (June 1992); *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* (December 1993); *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* 4:2 (June 1994); *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* 5:1 (May 1995); Bergman, Van Wijnen, 'Gehandicapt: test-tocht om hindernissen te nemen'.

³⁸⁰ 'Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei'.

³⁸¹ Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019. I reached out to Nicole after dr. Paul van Trig recommended speaking to her. Nicole is a trans woman with a disability. She has a background in political science, and studied the women's and gay movement. She was Agnes van Wijnen's successor in the SOG, and was active in the SOG-homogroep.

³⁸² *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* (Oktober 1992); Bergman, Van Wijnen, 'Gehandicapt: test-tocht om hindernissen te nemen'.

³⁸³ SOG-homogroep, *Handicap en Homoseksualiteit*.

make demonstrations and other COC activities accessible.³⁸⁴ They also stressed the need to make aid services for lesbian and gay people accessible, such as the Schorerstichting and Gay Switchboard. Moreover, educational material ought to represent disabled gays and lesbians, and education ought not only to be given at schools, but also at care homes, special education, and activity centres. Their final recommendation was that the national board needed to report every year on what progress they had made.³⁸⁵ The SOG-homogroep was willing to help realise the recommendations made.

The COC congress unanimously accepted the report, and set up a national workgroup to realise the recommendations in December 1987.³⁸⁶ To help regional COC divisions realise accessibility, they set up a folder with guidelines for building an accessible COC, ‘Geboden Toegang’ (‘Access Required’). If the guidelines were met, the venue could apply for the International Symbol of Access.³⁸⁷ Moreover, they contacted regional COC’s to ask for their access details.³⁸⁸ In spite of these efforts, the workgroup had to conclude that the majority of regional divisions, because of their limited size, lack of volunteers or own building, could not and would not prioritise a disability policy. This was also due to a lack of interest, proven by lack of responses.³⁸⁹ To inspire more interest, the workgroup wanted to organise a theme day with several activities to give an impression of the problems of disabled gays, hoping that as soon as people could empathise better they would be more interested in improving. Additionally, the workgroup recommended that the COC Congress install a person at every regional division tasked with disability policy, and make all divisions with their own buildings research their own accessibility and work together with experts to find the financial

³⁸⁴ SOG-homogroep, *Handicap en Homoseksualiteit*.

³⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁶ A. van Wijnen, *Een ontluikende liefde...*

³⁸⁷ ‘Geboden Toegang’: Richtlijnen voor bouw COC’, IISH Archive COC Landelijke Werkgroep Homoseksualiteit en Handicap Map 1, folder 1.

³⁸⁸ IISH Archive COC Landelijke Werkgroep Homoseksualiteit en Handicap Map 1, folder 1.

³⁸⁹ ‘Totstandkoming landelijke werkgroep homoseksualiteit en handicap’, IISH Archive COC Landelijke Werkgroep Homoseksualiteit en Handicap Map 1, folder 1.

possibilities for adjusting it.³⁹⁰

Despite such plans, in 1989 the SOG-homogroep noted that the COC workgroup had stopped functioning.³⁹¹ In 1990, the group was revitalised, and it was noted that the initial group had not achieved much, and that those involved had dropped out.³⁹² The revitalised workgroup started anew, making similar plans to those of the group before them.³⁹³ Nevertheless, the SOG-homogroep was displeased about the slow progress. In 1992, they initiated a meeting with the national COC board, where they met with spokespersons Joop van der Linden and Lodewijk Palm. They argued the COC agreed with the objective of the SOG-homogroep, but that they were not planning on developing a disability policy without the involvement of gays with a disability. However, their own workgroup had provided inadequate work to develop a policy from. Thus, the COC asked the SOG-homogroep to provide concrete plans, so that they could negotiate about these.³⁹⁴ This shows that the COC took on a passive attitude, willing to work together, but wanting the SOG-homogroep to make the effort.

Frustrations with the COC continued after this, for instance over the fact that the national COC building, renovated in 1994, had not been made accessible.³⁹⁵ Responding to the group's critique about the inaccessibility of the COC, Jan van der Linden did admit that aside from the national building, local COC's were also inaccessible, due to lack of money. SOG-homogroep member Janny Figeë critiqued this, arguing the COC was creative enough to

³⁹⁰ 'Aanbevelingen COC voor handicap' IISH Archive COC Landelijke Werkgroep Homoseksualiteit en Handicap Map 1, folder 1.

³⁹¹ 'Notulen werkgroep homoseksualiteit en handicap' (29 November 1989) IISH Archive COC Landelijke Werkgroep Homoseksualiteit en Handicap Map 1, folder 1.

³⁹² 'Werkplan tbh werkgroep homoseksualiteit en handicap' (February 1990); 'Notulen werkgroep homoseksualiteit en handicap' (11 Januari 1990) IISH Archive COC Landelijke Werkgroep Homoseksualiteit en Handicap Map 1, folder 1.

³⁹³ 'Werkplan tbh werkgroep homoseksualiteit en handicap'.

³⁹⁴ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot Nieuwsbrief* (June 1992).

³⁹⁵ When in 1994, the national COC reopened their renovated building they said on their invitation that they had forgotten to take into account disabled people, and whether people would be willing to donate in order to make the building accessible. This angered the SOG-homogroep, as it made accessibility dependent on charity, which was precisely what they did not want. – *Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot Nieuwsbrief* 5:1; *Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot Nieuwsbrief* 4:2.

update and adjust the COC venues to the times during renovations, but that they still remained ‘old-fashioned inaccessible’. Accessibility was not, she argued, only about finances, but mostly about ‘which value one gives to the term ‘GAY PRIDE’’.³⁹⁶

During the European Conference on Homosexuality and Disability in 1991, organised by the SOG-homogroep with the support of the COC, the president of the COC, Anja van Kooten Niekerk invoked a message of solidarity: ‘Every homosexual man or woman knows from their own experience what it means to have a lifestyle that diverges from the mainstream. This could be our strength. This should be our strength!’³⁹⁷ She said she wanted to ‘emphasise the importance of the existence of just as many groups and places that we homosexual men and women need. Each of us need to have the possibility to meet people on their conditions, whether these are based on sex, ethic or cultural background, age or interest.’³⁹⁸ With this remark, she disregarded that disabled lesbian and gay groups were founded not because they wanted to organise separately, but because they were excluded from existing organisations. However, Van Kooten Niekerk did show an appreciation of the things that ought to change within the COC.³⁹⁹

In her interview, Agnes van Wijnen expressed the feeling that the SOG-homogroep did not permeate much in the gay world, and did not achieve a lot of results. Looking back now she felt that they did make a few steps, but back then she thought this was not enough.⁴⁰⁰ At the time, however, other members were more positive about the progress made. One argued:

I think that the accessibility of the gay world could/should be much improved, especially in the area of mentality! But compared to about 5 years ago, I think the gay world has

³⁹⁶ Author’s translation from the original Dutch: ‘Bij zo’n vernieuwing gaat het naar mijn idee niet alleen om het aanbod en de financiën, maar vooral ook om welke inhoudelijke betekenis men geeft aan de term ‘GAY PRIDE.’ – *Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot Nieuwsbrief* 5:1.

³⁹⁷ ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’.

³⁹⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

become way more open, and I think it can be way more open still. People are becoming way more conscious of our existence.⁴⁰¹

Ab Vriethoff argued that ‘the big difference between now and five years ago is that gays with a disability stand up for themselves and openly speak about their experiences, needs and demands.’⁴⁰² Results were also tangible in the British context, as over the years more and more organisations would reach out to Gemma and GMDG when they wanted to ensure inclusivity.⁴⁰³

One major result of achieved accessibility in the Dutch context were the 1998 Gay Games. This was the first major gay event in the Netherlands ensuring full accessibility for disabled people, as well as deaf and hard of hearing people. Inspired by the Gay Games New York in 1994 and by the 1987 Women’s Festival in Michigan, which ensured physical accessibility and accessibility for deaf and hard of hearing people, Maloush Köhler –who had attended both– set up an effort together with Lydia Zijdel to ensure the same accessibility in the Gay Games Amsterdam.⁴⁰⁴ Maloush coordinated the group Deaf Access. They ensured that all sports that needed to be were adjusted, and regulations were made accessible. Sign language interpreters were present not only at sports events, but also at all cultural events, even musical performances.⁴⁰⁵ For the performance of the Rocky Horror Show, the sign

⁴⁰¹ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot Nieuwsbrief* (June 1993).

⁴⁰² ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’.

⁴⁰³ For instance, in 1993, it was announced in the newsletter that the Lesbian Information Service was compiling a comprehensive information pack for disabled lesbians. Gemma encouraged members, ‘especially isolated, black, old, young, fat, Jewish, Asian, Irish, working class and other minority groups’ to contact LIS. Moreover, Lesbian and Gay Switchboard reached out to GMDG to ask for disabled volunteers, wanting to be a mixed organisation. Likewise, when setting up an oral history project, recording gay and lesbian life stories, the Hall and Carpenter Archives also extended an invitation to people who are older or who had disabilities. The Camden Council Lesbian and Gay Unit made sure their events and venue were absolutely accessible to people with disabilities. – *Gemma Newsletter* 64; *Gay Men’s Disabled Groups Newsletter* 13; 14; ‘Glen McKee interviewed by Margot Farnham’; ‘Elsa Beckett interviewed by Jacqueline Faith’; ‘Disability Arts Events At North London Lesbian Strength And Gay Pride’ *Disability Arts in London* 52 (March 1991); *Disability Arts in London* 50 (1991) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/60.

⁴⁰⁴ ‘Tussenrapport van “special needs” Gay Games Amsterdam, 1-8 augustus 1998’ (date unknown) Scans of this material were sent to me by Maloush Köhler; Interview with Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

⁴⁰⁵ Many interpreters were not willing or able to volunteer their services, because it was a very tiring job. Deaf Access offered another solution: sign interpreters were asked to exchange twelve hours of interpreting work in return for two free workshops: one on translation of music into sign language as theatrical form, and another on

language interpreters were even in drag themselves.⁴⁰⁶ According to a report of the Gay Games, ‘For many deaf, it’s the first time they can choose between more than one event, knowing that sign language interpretation will be provided.’⁴⁰⁷ Aside from interpreters, the opening and closing ceremonies had English subtitles on large screens, rentable portable audio induction loop systems, and International Sign Language interpreters.⁴⁰⁸

The Gay Games attracted about 100 deaf participants, and another 250 visitors who were deaf or hard of hearing. Initially, the broader Dutch deaf community had shown little interest, arguing that since they were not gay it was not for them. However, the event was popularised by a deaf man who interpreted music, something which was new in the Netherlands. This attracted a lot of deaf straight people, who because of this now felt that it was also meant for them. Their presence meant that there was integration in two directions: on the one hand of gay deaf people in the gay community, and on the other hand between gay and straight deaf people.⁴⁰⁹

Lydia Zijdel was coordinator of disabled people for the Gay Games, making the city and the sports events accessible, and creating resting rooms for those with HIV/AIDS.⁴¹⁰ Maloush Köhler felt that the Gay Games were a large step for the Netherlands, as it made many people realise the importance of access for the first time. It was the first event in the Dutch gay scene to be accessible to this extent; before this point no attention had ever been

international sign language. The workshops were given by well-qualified interpreters. In exchange for the offered services, there would be free access to the opening and closing ceremonies, and traveling and accommodation costs were covered. Moreover, deaf participants were asked to donate some of their government funded interpreter hours for the events. Interpreters came from the US, Germany, France, Denmark, and Australia, in addition to three interpreters from the Netherlands. Most interpreters were gay or lesbian themselves, but according to Maloush Köhler there were also very enthusiastic straight interpreters. Maloush argued it was hard to get Dutch interpreters, as they did not want to sign on stage with such crowds, or only wanted to sign in return for payment. – E. Selze, F. Jenkins, *8 Days of Friendship: Gay Games Amsterdam 1998* (Amsterdam 1998) Scans of this material were sent to me by Maloush Köhler; ‘Tussenrapport van “special needs” Gay Games Amsterdam, 1-8 augustus 1998’.

⁴⁰⁶ ‘Tussenrapport van “special needs” Gay Games Amsterdam, 1-8 augustus 1998’.

⁴⁰⁷ Selze, Jenkins, *8 Days of Friendship: Gay Games Amsterdam 1998*.

⁴⁰⁸ ‘Tussenrapport van “special needs” Gay Games Amsterdam, 1-8 augustus 1998’.

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with Lydia Zijdel, conducted on 18 June 2019.

paid to it so structurally or on this scale.⁴¹¹ However, Mariska de Swart, who attended the Games, expressed her disappointment that accessibility also came to an end when the Gay Games finished:

There were a lot of Americans [at the Games] and people from other countries, but mostly Americans– and that time, they made a lot of accessible activities. Because in America [disabled people] have a right to go [into these spaces] and if it's not accessible, you have a problem, as the one who's organizing. So, a lot of activities, were made just special...just for that week, accessible! And after the Gay Games, it is closed again. And it's amazing, because at first it's like 'Okay, I can go out there and it's no problem and I can go in [to bars] and I'm involved, and then the Gay Games are over and the same bar...was inaccessible again. They just took out the [wheelchair] ramp and you just couldn't go in there anymore.'⁴¹²

The reason for this was that the accessibility had been achieved not by individual initiatives of bars or theatres, but by the Gay Games Special Needs group, and by Deaf Access.

Nevertheless, the Gay Games do show that accessibility could reach far into the gay and lesbian scene.

To sum up, disabled lesbian and gay groups preferred lobbying, negotiation and collaboration over direct protest actions. While collaboration brought along its difficulties, tangible results were also achieved.

3.4: 'A proud consciousness': rhetoric and processes of transfer

The British and Dutch groups were not isolated from one another. An instance of international contact was the 1988 Manchester Conference, which was attended by people from England, Germany and the Netherlands. Emboldened by the realisation that problems were shared internationally, participants decided to organise a European conference. The SOG-homogroep

⁴¹¹ Interview with Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

⁴¹² Cavar, '(Dis)locations: Dutch Disabled LGBTQ+ Subjects and Queer Social Space' 21.

took initiative in planning this.⁴¹³ The European Conference on Homosexuality and Disability in May 1991, in Uddel, was attended by 55 homosexual men and lesbian women with physical disabilities from the Netherlands, England, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. For some, this conference was the first opportunity to meet other gay people with a disability.⁴¹⁴ While it was often stressed that the Conference was an opportunity to learn from one another on an international level, the lectures and stalls at the information market were all Dutch-centred.

Beyond meetings to discuss their shared problems, there were also workshops on self-defence and wheelchair-dancing, which could be put into practice during a party. Because the conference took place on the Dutch day of remembrance of the victims of the Second World War, participants were especially aware that because of their sexual preference and disability, they would not have been allowed to exist under fascism, and in various countries still were not as free as others. This gave the remembrance an emotional charge.⁴¹⁵

One of the conclusions of the conference was that an international organisation ought to be set up. The wish had been expressed to integrate this organisation fully into the gay world, while also keeping a strong connection with the disability world.⁴¹⁶ Dutch participant Marian Lamboo was appointed to approach participants of the conference to become a member of the network and to plan together for activities for the network. Another Dutch woman, despite the fact that during the conference it was stressed multiple times that men and women should not separate, wanted to find women to help set up a European Network for

⁴¹³ 'Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei'.

⁴¹⁴ R. Koole, 'Eerste Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap: onbekend maakt onbemind', *Sek* 21:6 (1991) IHLIA signature ts. dgb periodieken; 'Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei'.

⁴¹⁵ Koole, 'Eerste Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap: onbekend maakt onbemind'.

⁴¹⁶ In addition, they argued that contact ought to be made with disabled gay people in Southern and East European countries, to involve them in the international network. There also needed to be an investigation of which social and financial obstacles there would be for them to join the international network. – 'Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei' 38.

Disabled Lesbian Women.⁴¹⁷ While such a European network did not crystallise as envisioned, a Danish group did begin a European group, called Pandora, with its own newsletter.⁴¹⁸ Dutch and British groups did not engage with this group much, however.

During the workshops about the experiences of participants, it was found that most participants felt like they were separate from society. ‘On the one hand, this position gives many participants strength. A proud consciousness. Being a freak. On the other hand, many participants experience this position as social isolation.’⁴¹⁹ The need was expressed to:

let ourselves be seen and heard. We are proud of who and what we are. And for this we will put our hands together and dare to stand up to the worlds that do not understand us. But let’s because of all that fighting not forget our most important goal, namely that it is about finding that incredibly great feeling to be able to love the person we prefer, an awesome disabled or nondisabled dyke or queer.⁴²⁰

During the conference, Lydia Zijdel gave a lecture about the history of both the Dutch gay and lesbian movement, and the disability movement. She argued for the use of a social model approach, and compared ableism with sexism and racism. Lydia stressed the need to change the mentality and attitude of society: ‘When we as people with a disability find our strength from our own identity and self-awareness, we can emancipate ourselves.’⁴²¹ In her interview, Lydia spoke about being heavily influenced by the British disability movement, seeing their emancipatory rhetoric as exemplary for the Netherlands, where this was lacking.⁴²²

⁴¹⁷ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* (June 1992).

⁴¹⁸ *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* 4:1; *Van Doofpot tot Mankepot Nieuwsbrief* (December 1993).

⁴¹⁹ Author’s translation from the original Dutch: ‘Aan de ene kant geeft deze positie veel deelnemers juist kracht. Een trots bewustzijn. Freak zijn. Maar aan de andere kant ervaren veel deelnemers deze positie alsoe en sociaal isolement.’ – ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’ 18.

⁴²⁰ Author’s translation: ‘Wij durven ons te laten zien en horen. Wij zijn trots op wie en wat wij zijn. En daarvoor slaan wij de handen ineen en durven een vuist te maken naar de werelden die ons niet begrijpen. Maar laten we tussen al die strijd door niet het belangrijkste doel vergeten: namelijk dat het uiteindelijk draait om het ontzettende lekkere gevoel te kunnen houden van die mens waar ons voorkeur naar uit gaat: een te gekke al of niet gehandicapte pot of flikker.’ – ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’ 27.

⁴²¹ Author’s translation: ‘Wanneer wij als mensen met een handicap vanuit een eigen identiteit en zelfbewustzijn onze kracht vinden, kunnen wij ons emanciperen.’ – ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’ 24.

⁴²² Interview with Lydia Zijdel, conducted on 18 June 2019.

As seen in Chapter 1, emancipatory rhetoric and social-model arguments came up in the Netherlands in the 1990s. The emancipatory rhetoric of the European Conference fit within that trend. Before the 1990s, however, as seen, disability organisations tended to follow the medical focus of the government. Therefore, it may be seen as surprising that Dutch disabled lesbian and gay groups did use emancipatory rhetoric well before the 1990s. As early as 1975, the werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen argued that the problems of disabled homophiles were actually the problems of the surroundings they had to depend upon.⁴²³ Mainly, they located the cause of disabled people's problems within the attitudes of society regarding (homo)sexuality.⁴²⁴ Emancipatory rhetoric was also used with regards to disability: they rejected 'pitiable' images of disabled people, and criticised existing disability organisations for their lack of emancipatory attitudes. One member argued that the reason their workgroup existed was that disability organisations had 'until now, intentionally or not, forgotten to pay attention to the humanity of the disabled, to their equal worth to able-bodied people.'⁴²⁵

Similarly, the Disability, Relationships and Sexuality workgroup of the Gehandicaptenraad leant heavily on notions of social constructionism. In their policy document of 1987, they gave a history of the oppression of sexuality, which sounded very much like the theories Dutch radical gay groups had.⁴²⁶ The SOG argued that while the church used to control normative notions of normal and abnormal sexuality, this control had shifted to psychiatrists, scientists, and healthcare professionals as moralising and disciplining institution. Due to industrialisation and the emerging emphasis on productivity, sexuality

⁴²³ *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 3.

⁴²⁴ *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 12.

⁴²⁵ 'De organisaties die zich bezighouden met gehandicapten, hebben tot nu toe- met of zonder opzet- vergeten aandacht te schenken aan het mens zin van de invalide, aan het gelijkwaardig zijn aan validen' – *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 5 (March 1975).

⁴²⁶ M. van Kerkhof, T. Maasen, F. Linschoten, *Rooie Flikker paper* (Nijmegen 1975) IHLIA signatuur: cat. (kerkhof-m/maa) brochures kluis nl; 'Flikkergedoe' IISH Archive Rooie Flikkers 10622/ARCH04510 box 1, map 3; G. Kerkvliet, 'Rooie Flikkers', *Sekstant* 9 (1975) IISH Archive Rooie Flikkers box 1, map 3.

became heavily moralised and tied to reproduction. The same was true for disabled people: society's focus on achievement rendered disabled people as objects of pity, or burdens. The stigmatisation of disabled people as asexual was because of the mental link between sexuality and reproduction, which prevailed until halfway the 1960s.⁴²⁷

Inspiration for their social constructionist account was not given, and may very well have come from the grand histories of the construction of disability that proliferated in the UK.⁴²⁸ However, as they firstly gave a social constructionist account of the development of pathologisation and discrimination of homosexuality, their subsequent similar analysis of the construction of disability may have also been inspired by the lesbian and gay example. Moreover, Agnes van Wijnen argued that while the notion that 'the personal is political' was not at all present in the Gehandicaptenraad, it was so in the SOG, as this group consisted of outsiders coming out of the women's and gay movements. While the Gehandicaptenraad did not use an emancipatory narrative, she felt that the SOG group was a group 'in which we all became more self-aware.'⁴²⁹

The SOG-homogroep also encouraged the use of emancipatory rhetoric. *Homo's met een handicap bestaan niet* (Gays with disabilities do not exist), published in 1991, was influential in furthering this, as the authors adhered to a social model of disability. Additionally, they argued that if disabled people could interpret their 'being different' as a challenge to be militant against a disability-unfriendly society, 'the word 'disabled' becomes a war cry.'⁴³⁰ Members also sent in emancipatory articles. Taco van Welzenis stressed how

⁴²⁷ Notably, they emphasised the connection of sexual issues to the broader disability issues such as the availability of transport, accessible buildings and social security. Being able to find a relationship and maintain it meant there needed to be enough privacy in the living circumstances; available transport; financial means to make contacts outside of the house; and accessible houses and public buildings. – 'Beleidsnota van de werkgroep Handicap, Relaties en Seksualiteit (SOG)'.

⁴²⁸ Borsay, *Disability and Social Policy in Britain* 10-16.

⁴²⁹ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

⁴³⁰ Author's translation from the original Dutch: 'Wanneer mensen met een handicap vanuit hun eigen identiteit en zelfbewustzijn hun kracht vinden, kunnen ze zich emanciperen. Ze verzetten zich tegen het validisme en vechten voor hun rechten. De normen die de samenleving voor hen ontoegankelijk maken, worden doorbroken en verworpen, het anders-zijn wordt een uitdaging om zich strijdbaar op te stellen tegen een handicap-

society's attitude and inaccessibility disabled him, writing about how his reality of being a 'kreupele flikker' ('cripple queer') is not easily fitted into how people think about other people.⁴³¹ He fought for disabled lesbian and gay interests, because he felt it was naïve to think that 'the same society that causes a lot of our problems will solve them naturally. We should not wait until a solution is presented by the government or by homeland.'⁴³² Another member wrote:

In what kind of time do we live? We, dykes and queers with and without disabilities. Do we allow ourselves to be put aside? Homosexuals without disabilities no longer, homosexuals with disabilities still! Why us, and not others? Are we lesser than others? We are different, and I, I am proud of it. Proud that I do not belong to the dim grey mass, because even in the gay world the idea 'exceptional is not normal' applies. People with disabilities need to stand up for themselves, because others will not do it!!! [...] Together we are big!!! We can do it, together!! React!! Extreme, militant!! Because we have to! Because we belong as homosexuals!⁴³³

The social constructionist arguments of the SOG group and emancipatory rhetoric used by the SOG-homogroep may have influenced the Dutch disability movement as a whole. As seen in Chapter 1, the book *Trots en Treurnis* (Pride and Sadness) was the first book to introduce social model-like arguments in the Netherlands, in 1996. Major figures in the creation of this book were Agnes van Wijnen and Nicole Franssen, who were both involved in the SOG-homogroep. The book's effort to stimulate a transfer from the medical model to the social model to further the emancipation of people with disabilities was influenced by several

onvriendelijke omgeving. Het woord 'gehandicapte' wordt tot een strijdleuze gemaakt.' – Van Wijnen, Van Brandenburg, Tielman, *Homo's met een handicap bestaan niet* 19.

⁴³¹ Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot *Nieuwsbrief* 6:1 (March 1997).

⁴³² Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot *Nieuwsbrief* 4:3 (October 1994).

⁴³³ Author's translation from the original Dutch: 'In wat voor tijd leven wij? Wij, potten en flikkers met en zonder handicap. Laten we ons aan de kant zetten? Homozoweelen zonder handicap niet meer. De homozoweelen met een handicap nog wel!! Waarom wij wel en anderen niet? Zijn wij minder dan anderen? Wij zijn anders en ik, ik ben daar trots op. Trots dat ik niet tot de grauwe grijze massa behoor want ook in de homowereld geldt bijzonder is niet normaal. Mensen met een handicap moeten voor zich zelf opkomen. Homozoweelen met een handicap moeten voor zich zelf opkomen, anderen doen dat niet!! [...] Samen zijn we groot!! We kunnen het, gezamenlijk! Reageer!! Extreem, militant!! Omdat het moet!! Omdat we erbij horen als homozoweelen!' – Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot *Nieuwsbrief* 4:1 (April 1994).

different angles. Firstly, Nicole mentioned she and Agnes were both trained as political scientists, which had its influence.⁴³⁴ Secondly, both Agnes and Nicole were influenced by international examples, mainly from the British, American and German movements. Thirdly, both spoke about how their aim to stimulate a proud self-image was inspired by gay and lesbian proud self-consciousness.⁴³⁵ This is illustrated by Nicole's article in the book, which encourages the Dutch disability movement to follow the example of lesbian and gay identity politics.⁴³⁶ In 1994, 'the Ivory Tower debates' were organised to discuss the book *Trots en Treurnis*, attracting between 60-100 people. One of these discussions was on this notion of 'pride', and disabled people debated among themselves whether they felt 'pride' on the basis of their disability. This turned out to be difficult; for most, disability was considered a part of their identity that they were not ashamed of, but pride was 'a bridge too far.'⁴³⁷ Nevertheless, according to Nicole *Trots en Treurnis* did help charging disability with a more positive meaning in the Netherlands, as before it was mainly regarded negatively.⁴³⁸

According to Van Trigt, due to the lack of emancipatory rhetoric in the disability movement in general, it was hard to develop a positive identity with disability as an identity marker. This was because it was difficult to start a new discourse in the face of the dominating medical discourse, but also because for many, disability and chronic illness could not be understood as merely positive. Another reason was that letting go of the image of 'pity' could risk the loss of necessary provisions connected to this image.⁴³⁹ These difficulties are exemplified by the disuse of reclaimed terms in the Dutch movement. In *Trots en treurnis*, Koster-Dreese lamented that Dutch people found the use of reclaimed terms, such as 'kreukel'

⁴³⁴ Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019.

⁴³⁵ Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

⁴³⁶ Van Wijnen, Koster-Dreese, Oderwald, *Trots en treurnis* 181-192.

⁴³⁷ Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019; Interview with Petra Ybeles Smit, conducted on 22 April 2019.

⁴³⁸ Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019; Interview with Petra Ybeles Smit, conducted on 22 April 2019.

⁴³⁹ Van Trigt, 'Gelijkheid zonder beperking' 6.

(a Dutch variation on ‘crip’) abhorrent. According to her, the movement had no interest in collective militant re-appropriation, and only busied themselves with ‘dejected drivel in the margins’.⁴⁴⁰

However, positive identification was easier for those who were multiply-identified: disabled and on the LGBTI spectrum. While, according to a briefing paper from the organisation Regard, they faced double prejudice and double the struggle, ‘[t]hey can however feel twice the pride!’⁴⁴¹ It was possible to be positively identified when the two subjectivities were conjoined. Within both Dutch and British disabled lesbian and gay groups, members used reclaimed terms. Dagmar Wennink, for instance, in the Dutch context described herself as a ‘rolpot’, or ‘rolling dyke’.⁴⁴² Moreover, SOG-homogroep member Birgit van Putten wrote that she joined the Roze Zaterdag to celebrate her pride, militancy and collectivity.⁴⁴³ Similarly, Marjan Stuifzand encouraged deaf gays and lesbians to be proud of their subculture: ‘This is something that hearing deaf people do not have, because they are not deaf. The contacts of deaf gays and lesbians amongst themselves, their communication, are expressions of an own life, that is fabulous to see. That is your strength and richness.’⁴⁴⁴

These examples show that it was easier for disabled lesbians and gays to identify themselves proudly than it was for disabled people who were not multiply-identified. However, it was not self-evident: Mariska de Swart mentioned that she was not proud of her disability, as she felt she was unlucky when she acquired it, but she was in favour of promotion of the visibility of disabled people.⁴⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the above has shown that the Dutch disabled lesbian and gay groups tended to divert from national trends in the broader

⁴⁴⁰ ‘Niks geen gezamenlijke strijdbare geuzenkwalificaties, maar beteuterd geneuzel in de marge.’ – Koster-Dreese, ‘Mensen zijn niet autonoom’ 57.

⁴⁴¹ ‘Disabled Lesbians and Gay Men, Briefing Paper from Regard’ (1992), LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/1078.

⁴⁴² Claus, Wennink, ‘Gehandicapten: trap op, trap af, of het COC is gewoon te ver’.

⁴⁴³ Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot Nieuwsbrief (June 1992).

⁴⁴⁴ Author’s translation of the original Dutch: ‘Dit is iets dat horende homo’s niet hebben, omdat zij niet doof zijn. De contacten van dove homo’s en lesbo’s onderling, hun communicatie, houding en uiting van eigen leven, het is schitterend om te zien. Dat is je sterkte en rijkdom.’ – “Zit Roze Gebaar nog in de kast!?!”.

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Mariska de Swart, conducted on 14 June 2019.

disability movement, when it came to emancipatory rhetoric.

British groups could also divert from their national trends, however, as although the broader disability movement in the UK used emancipatory rhetoric and embraced a social model of disability, this was not always reflected by British disabled lesbian and gay groups. An obvious example of this are the efforts of Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) around disability, which used paternalistic language. They argued that they wanted to start paying attention to the needs of ‘the disabled’, because they were concerned ‘about how their ignorance about sex exuberates their problems. They feel sexual attraction but are totally ignorant of sexual behaviour and may lack social skills needed to create warm and loving relationships.’⁴⁴⁶ To help them, CHE urged disability organisations to pay attention to homosexuality, and to carry information about CHE for their members.⁴⁴⁷

CHE did realise that their efforts were made in the absence of disabled people.⁴⁴⁸ The reason for this, they felt, was that economic and physical reasons withheld elderly and disabled gays from attending their meetings. Because of the issues of transport, CHE had the idea that ‘local CHE groups would adopt if they so wish one or more Elderly or Disabled persons as their “sponsored gay”’. Sponsors would be:

responsible from ‘door-to-door’ for all costs, transport, care, seeing that their guests is helped to walk, attend meetings etc., dressed and toileted if need be. In fact in every way made to feel welcome and happy, enabled to enjoy themselves and, who knows, even find that they still have what it takes.⁴⁴⁹

The language is one of providing service, based on what CHE members thought disabled members needed, without negotiating with disabled people.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁶ ‘A paper prepared for the Personal and Family Services group of NCSS by the CHE Elderly and Disabled Homosexuals working group’.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁴⁸ ‘CHE Elderly Gays and Disabled Gays Conference Sponsorship’, LSE HCA/FRIEND/5/2.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁵⁰ CHE did send out a questionnaire to elderly and disabled gays, to gather basic factual information. – ‘Questionnaire Elderly and Disabled gays’, LSE HCA/FRIEND/5/2.

In 1978 Gaycare was founded. This group, also affiliated to CHE, was meant to give the elderly and disabled a means of communication, and help them receive the care they needed. The group acted as a 'web' between existing care groups.⁴⁵¹ Gaycare had been criticised by a spokesman of the Disabled Council, who argued 'We are very much into integrating disabled people with able bodied people and a group like this might separate them even more.'⁴⁵² In response, Gaycare argued disabled homosexuals needed specialised help. 'Sex and the disabled is a very touchy subject and some of the problems we have come across are quite shattering. Because some of us have a great sensitivity we can help people.'⁴⁵³ CHE's efforts may be seen as examples of groups *for*, not *by* disabled people. However, there were no clashes with groups *by* disabled people, like there were in the broader disability community. Elsa Beckett spoke at the Gaycare inaugural meeting about how hard it was for their group to reach isolated gay women who could not access gay media. 'This is why non-disabled people are needed as links.'⁴⁵⁴

Gemma itself also chose not to use too militant rhetoric, and did not take an open stance in any political debate, including the debate on the social versus the medical model. Kathryn Bell argued:

In Gemma we never tried to tell people what to think, however people's attitudes are towards disability, that is their business, we never tried to tell them, you should do this or you should think like that, we just tried to accommodate everybody. Gemma has never been a political organisation in any way. Sometimes there are questions in disability context, of for example assisted suicide and abortion of disabled foetuses. Gemma has never taken a stand on these issues. Because everyone has their own opinion, we wouldn't want to alienate any members by making Gemma take a stand on these subjects.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵¹ 'Gaycare information sheet' (1978) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/485.

⁴⁵² 'Backing for disabled 'gays'', *Sunday Sun* (8 October 1978) LAGNA sc.

⁴⁵³ Ibidem.

⁴⁵⁴ 'Report of Inaugural meeting of Gaycare' (London 28 January 1978) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/485.

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

Moreover, the notion of a proud identity was not always self-evident in the British context either. Kathryn and Lila spoke of a fight between two blind members of Gemma about whether to feel proud of or limited by their blindness.⁴⁵⁶ The main tendency in the British context was also to feel proud, however. For instance, Julian Salmon of the Gay Men's Disabled Group called for members to 'be proud of being Gay and proud to be Disabled. Only with that pride can we start to change the things that need changing, but we must be seen and heard to want that change.'⁴⁵⁷

Emancipatory rhetoric was also practiced at the Disabled Lesbians Conference in March 1994, organised by the Disabled Women's Project of the Greater London Association of Disabled People (GLAD).⁴⁵⁸ During this conference, participants discussed possible courses of action, such as networking and organising, writing letters to the gay and disability press; or would link with other organisations, such as the lesbian and gay anti-racist alliance, so they would take disability along as well. They wanted to invade places of entertainment and parties, so that their actions would also be fun. They stressed the importance of 'enjoying being a nuisance.'⁴⁵⁹ The participants made an inventory of how they felt experiencing the prejudices they did. There were negative keywords, such as 'alienated', 'hated', 'unequal', but also more positive ones like 'proud', 'defiant', and 'reclaim own oppression– turn into strength'. In dealing with it, they argued they needed to 'do things yourself' rather than asking someone else for awareness.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁶ Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

⁴⁵⁷ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 4.

⁴⁵⁸ *Gemma Newsletter* 65.

⁴⁵⁹ 'Notes from workshops held on Saturday (19 March 1994)' London Metropolitan Archive Greater London Association of Disabled People, Disabled Lesbian Conference.

⁴⁶⁰ Importantly, they felt also they needed to make a link between the survivors movement (a movement of survivors of interventions by psychiatry or (ex-)patients of mental health services) and other disability groups. They stressed the need of coming out as survivors and pulling together the threads of common experience as disabled lesbians with mental health needs. 'There are so many of us disabled people that we could be a huge and powerful liberation force– especially if we make links with the survivors movement.' This shows that also in the British context, contacts and collaboration between movements were important. – 'Notes from workshops held on Saturday (19 March 1994)'; 'Minutes of the third planning meeting for the Disabled Lesbian Conference held at London Women's Centre' (10 January 1994) LMA Disabled Lesbian Conference.

Aside from transnational contacts between groups, this section has shown the development of emancipatory rhetoric in disabled lesbian and gay groups in the Netherlands and the UK. This shows that disabled lesbian and gay groups could diverge from their national trends, and affect the direction of the broader disability movement as a whole.

Chapter 4: ‘A welcoming magnanimous ‘yes’ or a chilly exclusive ‘no’

I found and find it very tragic– minorities distance themselves from minorities. But isn’t that also often the case among people with a disability? Physically disabled people distance from intellectually disabled people, people with paraplegia from [people with spasticity] (‘spastici’), and so on. At the same time, we all suffer from the rejection of the society and fight it. [...] Important is that we develop a new, proud awareness, as being different (freak), disconnected from the norm. Maybe [once we have that] we can show one another solidarity again.⁴⁶¹

This was argued by a Swiss participant of the European Conference on Homosexuality and Disability. As mentioned in the introduction, marginalised people tend to create their own internal tensions and hostilities.⁴⁶² The groups disabled LGBTI people set up to combat their own exclusion and to create their own spaces were themselves not exempt from ‘horizontal hostility’. Either explicitly or implicitly, intentionally or unintentionally, these groups created a normative identity based on who they welcomed in their community. Disabled lesbian and gay groups considered whether nondisabled and straight people were welcome, for instance, and whether they were for men and/or women. British groups also considered whether members could be transgender, or how to attract members of different ethnic minorities. Both in the Netherlands and the UK, groups were generally more accommodating towards people with physical disabilities than those with intellectual disabilities.

Firstly, both British and Dutch disabled lesbian and gay groups were open to nondisabled members. In the Netherlands, the SOG group of the Gehandicaptenraad was initially dominated by nondisabled professionals, who wanted to talk about the sexual

⁴⁶¹ Author’s translation from the original Dutch: ‘Ik vond en vind dit alles heel tragisch – minderheden distantiëren zich van minderheden Maar is da tonder mensen met een handicap ook niet vaak het geval? Lichamelijk gehandicapten distantiëren zich van verstandelijk gehandicapten, mensen met een paraplegie weer van spastici, enzovoorts. Tegelijkertijd lijden wij allen onder de afwijzing van de gemeenschap en vechten daartegen. [...] Belangrijk is, dat wij een nieuw, trots bewustzijn ontwikkelen, als anders-zijnde (freak), los van de norm. Dan kunnen wij misschien weer solidair zijn onder elkaar.’ – ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’ 17.

⁴⁶² Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride* 92.

problems of disabled people they encountered during their work. This shifted in the beginning of the 1980s, as disabled people came into the group. According to SOG, this was ‘partly a result of the societal development of those involved beginning to stand up for their own interests and solving their own problems, instead of leaving that to professionals.’⁴⁶³ It was also a strategic choice, as they felt their message came across more intensely when it came from those who knew what their problems were like.⁴⁶⁴ The werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen, SOG-homogroep and Roze Gebaar consisted mainly of disabled members, but welcomed anyone.⁴⁶⁵

In the UK, Sisters Against Disablement was the only group where a debate was held on whether nondisabled women would be allowed to participate in SAD policy-making. SAD meetings were open to nondisabled women, but only women with disabilities had editorial control over the newsletter.⁴⁶⁶ Conversely, in Gemma and the Gay Men’s Disabled Group, nondisabled members were heralded as ‘doubly important’⁴⁶⁷ for the survival of the groups. Glenn McKee argued that GMDG was a ‘very integrationist group’: ‘I don’t think we can function any other way. By that I mean we have people with different disabilities as well as able-bodied people. We couldn’t, for instance, have produced the newsletter without the help of able-bodied people.’⁴⁶⁸

Gemma, similarly, emphasized that their group was an ‘integrated group’ founded as ‘a link between isolated gay women and the rest of the gay community.’⁴⁶⁹ They emphasized this, because often disabled women would be reluctant to join the group, unwilling to be part of a segregated clique around centred around disability.⁴⁷⁰ Gemma was also criticised for

⁴⁶³ ‘Beleidsnota van de werkgroep Handicap, Relaties en Seksualiteit (SOG)’ 48.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibidem 20, 48.

⁴⁶⁵ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019; Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019.

⁴⁶⁶ *Sisters Against Disablement Magazine* 4, 14.

⁴⁶⁷ Gemma flyer (March 1789).

⁴⁶⁸ *Gay Men’s Disabled Group* 2.

⁴⁶⁹ Gemma flyer (March 1789).

⁴⁷⁰ Gemma, *Amethyst* 33.

organising as a separate group. An interviewer had described the group ‘what must be the most exclusive club in the world!’⁴⁷¹ In order to emphasise the integrated nature of the group, Gemma therefore stressed the importance of nondisabled members.⁴⁷² Gemma’s membership grew substantially over the years, but almost always consisted almost equally half of disabled members, and half of nondisabled members.⁴⁷³ Next to helping with integration of disabled lesbians, a Gemma flyer stated that the presence of nondisabled women:

may encourage not only very disabled women to join us but also those with partial or minor disabilities who can then join more easily not feeling they have to state why they would like to be part of the group. Many disabilities are not obvious and there is no need why anyone joining us should declare the nature of her disability if she doesn’t wish to. Hidden disabilities may be just as inhibiting to meeting people and forming friendships as obvious ones, and we hope that Gemma may be a way through this difficulty.⁴⁷⁴

This was very similar to the reason Roze Gebaar allowed straight people. Some members had objected to the admittance of straight members, in part because they were afraid to be outed. However, eventually they voted to permit straight members, reasoning that they might be homosexuals who had not come out yet.⁴⁷⁵ The werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen had many straight members. Robert Pekel, a straight man, advised the group that in order to be respected, disabled people ought to mix with their ‘fellow humans’, regardless of their disability, gayness or straightness. ‘Difficult? Yes, very difficult, but because of this more than worth it.’⁴⁷⁶ Despite the many positive accounts of the group’s weekends away by heterosexual members, in 1977 it was decided that weekends would be especially catered towards disabled homophiles.⁴⁷⁷ In addition, in 1979, a member sent in his personal opinion

⁴⁷¹ *Gemma Newsletter* 4 (November 1978) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/299.

⁴⁷² ‘Gemma informational file’ LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/184.

⁴⁷³ Gemma flyer, LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/184.

⁴⁷⁴ Gemma flyer (March 1979).

⁴⁷⁵ ‘Verslag Ledenvergadering’ (23 April 1994) IISH Archive Roze Gebaar Box 4, Map 4.

⁴⁷⁶ Author’s translation of the original Dutch: ‘Moeilijk? Ja, heel moeilijk, maar daarom zeker meer dan de moeite waard’ – *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 12.

⁴⁷⁷ *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 14.

to the newsletter that members who were not physically disabled but entered the group because of other difficulties like having trouble making contacts or relationships, should not apply.⁴⁷⁸ Thus, it seems that though the group was open to anyone, in the late 1970s boundaries started to be created.

Nicole Franssen accounted she was not out of the closet as a trans woman yet when she became involved in the SOG-homogroep. While everyone was allowed membership, she had focused on the lesbian and gay movement during her Political Science education.⁴⁷⁹ The question of whether heterosexual people were allowed to be members was not discussed in British sources, and groups seemed to assume their members would be gay and lesbian. The membership of bisexual people was at times also discussed, both in the Netherlands and the UK, but groups would generally express their support. This was also due to a large amount of members being married, in Gemma and GMDG.⁴⁸⁰

During the European Conference, Van Kooten Niekerk argued on behalf of the COC that it was very important that homosexual men and women were not divided amongst themselves.⁴⁸¹ While there were no separate organisations for disabled gays and disabled lesbians in the Netherlands, some groups were male-dominated. The first weekend of the werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen attracted 21 people from across the Netherlands: ‘The group was an almost ideal composition, disabled and able-bodied, heterophiles and homophiles, men and (unfortunately only 2) women.’⁴⁸² Similarly, while the Roze Gebaar was set up by a founding group of whom fifty percent were women, their membership was male-dominated. The group argued that they treated men and women equally, however,

⁴⁷⁸ *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 20 (April 1979).

⁴⁷⁹ Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019.

⁴⁸⁰ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 12; *Gemma Newsletter* 61; 62 (February 1993); 69 (December 1994) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/306; Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019; ‘Verslag Ledenvergadering’.

⁴⁸¹ ‘Verslag Europese conferentie homoseksualiteit en handicap Holland 2-5 mei’ 13.

⁴⁸² ‘De groep was een welhaast ideale samenstelling, gehandicapten en validen, heterofielen en homofielen, mannen en (helaas slechts 2) vrouwen.’ – *Nieuwsbrief werkgroep gehandicapte homofielen* 3.

‘because their identity is primarily determined by their deafness.’⁴⁸³

The lack of women was an international phenomenon, as during the first lustrum celebration of the Roze Gebaar in 1987, from the 145 visitors from England, West-Germany, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands, only a third were women. Bea Visser explained the male-domination by arguing that contact is established easier among deaf men than women, because they had more activities outside of the house. Additionally, it seemed harder for women to come out.⁴⁸⁴ From 1997 onwards, Roze Gebaar set up a special policy for deaf lesbians, to strengthen their social position.⁴⁸⁵ Annemieke van Brandenburg, however, argued that attempts to set up a women’s subgroup in the Roze Gebaar failed, as there was too little interest.⁴⁸⁶ As for the SOG-homogroep, Agnes van Wijnen noted there was a good mixture of men and women, with perhaps a few more women than men.⁴⁸⁷ The same was noted by Lydia Zijdel for the European Conference on Homosexuality and Disability. She argued the reason more women were active in this group was because they tended to be more active politically than men, who were generally more interested in social contacts and relationships.⁴⁸⁸

In the UK, Gemma and GMDG organised along gender-lines. A flyer explained the reasons Gemma was all-female. Firstly, they felt they could not cope with the sheer weight of numbers which would be involved if men were included. Secondly, Gemma was formed to help women who would be too shy or suspicious to join a mixed group, ‘perhaps having led rather sheltered lives, meeting few men outside their immediate families. Such women would feel more at home in women’s groups. As they gained confidence through association with other gay women, they would be encouraged to join mixed groups.’⁴⁸⁹ Thirdly, there were,

⁴⁸³ Beleidsnota ‘Roze Gebaar in goede handen.’

⁴⁸⁴ Claus, ‘Roze Gebaar: Werken in een tussenpositie’; Van Rooy, ‘Waar haal je lesbische dove vrouwen vandaan?’

⁴⁸⁵ Beleidsnota ‘Roze Gebaar in goede handen.’

⁴⁸⁶ Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

⁴⁸⁷ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

⁴⁸⁸ Interview with Lydia Zijdel, conducted on 18 June 2019.

⁴⁸⁹ Gemmy flyer (March 1978).

‘regrettably’, women who did not wish to have anything to do with men at all, and Gemma wanted to offer its services to them as well.⁴⁹⁰

While Gemma wanted to preserve a safe space for women, this was not extended to trans women. In 1993, the newsletter opened with: ‘now here’s a question you won’t get asked every day of the week– what are your views on transsexuals? The subject came up at a Collective meeting, and it was agreed that we should have a definite policy.’⁴⁹¹ Kathryn Bell and Lila explained that they had had inquiries from trans women who wanted to join their group, but they felt those women did not fit in with them, nor could the group offer what they were interested in, which were, according to Kathryn and Lila, more traditionally feminine interests.⁴⁹² The topic of including trans women was put to the membership, and a vote was called:

Do you think that only women who are born women should be admitted? Would you feel uncomfortable in the presence of a member who was once physically a man? Would you be concerned that she may still have some male views/attitudes/reactions? Or would you say that a woman like this has suffered enough already, without being ostracised by those whom she might have hoped would empathise with women whose sexual problems put them in a minority group?⁴⁹³

Responses were mixed. Some felt very strongly against:

I don’t think that a man who was born a man and then chooses to become a woman should be a member of Gemma. HE IS A MAN. And certainly I don’t see that a man who chooses to become a woman and then decides he is a lesbian, or wishes to involve himself with women is in fact a lesbian. He is a heterosexual man with his bits chopped off.⁴⁹⁴

Other members wrote they would feel unsafe and were afraid they would be tricked.⁴⁹⁵ One

⁴⁹⁰ Gemmy flyer (March 1978).

⁴⁹¹ *Gemma Newsletter* 62 (February 1993) HCA/EPHEMERA/306.

⁴⁹² Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

⁴⁹³ *Gemma Newsletter* 62.

⁴⁹⁴ *Gemma Newsletter* 63 (June 1993) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/306.

⁴⁹⁵ *Gemma Newsletter* 63.

woman gave an example of when she had almost gone home with ‘a tall attractive lesbian.’

I found out next day from someone else this lesbian was a man who was only part way through process to becoming a woman. He still had his dick etc. It made us all feel sick and ANGRY that a man could (literally) penetrate so deeply into our culture. I DON’T want this sort of penetration of Gemma!⁴⁹⁶

There were also members who had no objections to trans members. One member wrote that if Gemma would not let trans women join, ‘we will be just as guilty of the discrimination we all fight against every day of our lives. I, personally, think we should welcome these women into our group with open arms, and a positive attitude.’⁴⁹⁷ Another member, similarly, wrote:

If a person has actually changed sex, taken the hormones and had the operations, I don’t know what more they can do. If they regard themselves as women then as far as I am concerned they are women, they have certainly gone to a lot more trouble to become women than the rest of us had to, least we can do is accept them as such. And I don’t know what is meant by “male views/attitudes/reactions”. There are only varying human views etc. Isn’t it sexist to say some are ‘male’? I hope Gemma will vote a welcoming magnanimous ‘Yes’ on this question, not a chilly exclusive ‘no’.⁴⁹⁸

Trans women were banned with a vote of 30 people in favour of admitting trans members, and 41 against. Still, Sally wrote that ‘any who contact Gemma can be sure of a sensitive response, and a referral to an appropriate source of support.’⁴⁹⁹ Disagreeing with the result, one member resigned from Gemma, and another sent in a message about her dismay.⁵⁰⁰

Another member was ‘relieved’, writing:

⁴⁹⁶ *Gemma Newsletter* 65.

⁴⁹⁷ *Gemma Newsletter* 63.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹⁹ *Gemma Newsletter* 65.

⁵⁰⁰ *Gemma Newsletter* 66 (March 1994) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/306.

I have nothing personally against them. I have several gay men friends and I love them. [...] maybe I am being prejudiced. I just feel transsexuals would create an undercurrent of disharmony in the unique group of Gemma.⁵⁰¹

In following newsletters, sometimes reminders were given that the exclusion of transgender/transsexual people was the result of a vote.⁵⁰² The irregularity of these reminders suggest that these followed inquiries or comments from members. They were also criticised by someone writing to the Pink Paper, who argued that they should not have received a grant from the local London Borough of Newham because they excluded trans women.⁵⁰³ The vote has since never been revoked.⁵⁰⁴

GMDG also asked their members in 1985 how they felt about transsexual members. Their approach was strikingly different than Gemma's. While Gemma debated whether trans women could be accepted as women, GMDG asked:

Although a person who is undergoing a change from one gender to the other could be considered in some way to have had a handicap by having had to live, as it were, "in the wrong body", can we count them as "Gay Disabled Men?" which is what the Group is for?⁵⁰⁵

This is a remarkable point of consideration, as the group otherwise stressed being open to nondisabled members. The issue did not attract many members' responses, and during a general meeting in 1987 they voted in favour of admitting trans people:

Julian brought to the attention of the meeting that this issue had been brought up initially by members of the Group who had lovers that were either TV [transvestite] or TS [transsexual], and that it had been felt that membership of GMDG should not be denied to

⁵⁰¹ *Gemma Newsletter* 66.

⁵⁰² *Gemma Newsletter* 76 (September 1996); *Gemma Newsletter* 80 (September 1997) LSE HCA/EPHEMERA/306.

⁵⁰³ Interview with Kathryn Bell and Lila, conducted on 17 May 2019.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰⁵ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 11.

those members' lovers. One man present at meeting said that his present lover was a Transvestite. Acceptance of TVs and TSs was carried by 8 votes to 1 with 1 abstention.⁵⁰⁶

By treating transvestites –men who cross-dressed as women– and ‘transsexuals’ in the same way, the question is raised of whether they were considering the admittance of trans men, or trans women, which is nowhere specified.

Whether to admit trans women also came up during a preparatory meeting of the Disabled Lesbian Conference of March 1994. They debated whether to publicise the conference as ‘strictly for disabled lesbians only, no transsexuals or bisexuals.’ They did not, because they thought that might exclude women who were unsure about their sexuality.⁵⁰⁷

Trans acceptance became more common with the turn of the millennium: In 2002, the group Greater London Action on Disability organised a Disabled Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Conference, explicitly including trans people. However, their bi and trans workshop did not take place because no participants registered.⁵⁰⁸

In the Netherlands, inclusion of trans members was not discussed, which may have had to do with all groups being mixed. Nicole Franssen argued there would have been room for trans people within the SOG-homogroep, and that the reason she had not come out yet was not because she did not feel welcome in the group.⁵⁰⁹ Agnes van Wijnen recalled there was one trans man in a wheelchair involved with them, but acknowledged that their group was not catered towards him.⁵¹⁰ Annemieke van Brandenburg said she knew two deaf trans members of Roze Gebaar, from Rotterdam and from Groningen, as well as British trans people from Gay Deaf On Tour.⁵¹¹ Thus, it seems there was a little more openness towards trans members

⁵⁰⁶ *Gay Men's Disabled Group Newsletter* 12.

⁵⁰⁷ ‘Minutes of the third planning meeting for the Disabled Lesbian Conference held at London Women’s Centre’.

⁵⁰⁸ Greater London Action on Disability, ‘Inclusion not ignorance’.

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with Nicole Franssen, conducted on 23 April 2019.

⁵¹⁰ Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

⁵¹¹ Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

in the Netherlands, even if the topic was not explicitly raised.

Generally, issues of inclusion and exclusion were sooner openly discussed within British groups than they were in Dutch groups. This was also the case when it came to people of colour. In British groups, more attention was paid to reaching out to black people or people from ethnic minorities, or appearing diverse. Gemma made an effort to mention black women and women of ethnic minorities in their publications and statements.⁵¹² They published a call for artists to create a picture for a new Gemma leaflet, which ‘should represent all women in Gemma: white women, black and Asian women, disabled women, young women, older women and lesbian mothers.’⁵¹³ Pictures from the group show they had at least one active black member.⁵¹⁴

The Disabled Lesbian Conference especially paid attention to the experience of those who were also part of other marginalised groups, acknowledging that they also had commitments outside of the lesbian and gay and disability community. The organisers recognised that the ‘problem of disability and lesbian organisations– also this conference’ was that it was dominated by white middle class people, and they felt the need to change this.⁵¹⁵ Attempts to involve black women beforehand had not been very successful, however:

Black lesbians have so far been reluctant to get involved with the planning of the black women’s conference because of homophobia. We are also aware that there are no black women on the planning group– several black women have been approached but have not responded.⁵¹⁶

In the absence of many black and ethnic minority participants, the organisers of the conference wanted to make statements about the effects of multiple discrimination, and the

⁵¹² Disabled Gays Guide (1984); Gemma’s National Disabled Gays Guide: An access guide for lesbians and gay men with disabilities outside London (1985).

⁵¹³ *Gemma Newsletter* 6.

⁵¹⁴ *Gemma, Silver Leaves* 6-7.

⁵¹⁵ ‘Notes from workshops held on Saturday (19 March 1994)’.

⁵¹⁶ ‘Minutes of the third planning meeting for the Disabled Lesbian Conference held at London Women’s Centre’.

need to fight racism within their own communities. They stressed the need of working together with, for instance, the Anti-Racist Alliance, to attend anti-racist events, and to raise the issue of racism within the disability movement.⁵¹⁷ Gillespie-Sells argues that the reason black disabled women were inactive in this area was that they had different priorities: ‘Concern for sexuality and sexual health can so easily slip down the agenda when pressing issues such as employment, suitable housing, further education and adequate service provision are on the same agenda.’⁵¹⁸ Moreover, both Gillespie-Sells and the group Regard noted that the reluctance of black disabled lesbians to come out and be identified as such was due to homophobia in their communities. According to Gillespie-Sells, this was also true for lesbians with learning disabilities.⁵¹⁹

Kirsten Hearn also recognised that the disability movement in general was white-dominated, arguing that ‘We know that we can’t fight any more battles without involving all sections of the disability movement. We must now make anti-racist strategies a central part of the way in which we organise. Without this we will go nowhere.’⁵²⁰ In the Netherlands, the need to include black people or those from ethnic minorities was not addressed in source material. When asked, many interviewees acknowledged the groups they were involved in were predominantly white, reflecting the broader disability movement.⁵²¹ Agnes van Wijnen argued that during the time of the 1991 European Conference on Homosexuality and Disability –which also had mainly white participants– people were just beginning to think about including migrants with a disability.⁵²² Annemieke van Brandenburg argued that the Roze Gebaar at times had a few people of colour and that they were open to them, but that

⁵¹⁷ ‘Notes from workshops held on Saturday’ (19 March 1994).

⁵¹⁸ Gillespie-Sells, Hill, Robbins, *She dances to different drums* 13.

⁵¹⁹ *Idem* 62.

⁵²⁰ Hearn, ‘Oi! What about us?’

⁵²¹ Van Wijnen, Koster-Dreese, Oderwald, *Trots en treurnis* 12; Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019; Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019; Interview with Mariska de Swart, conducted on 14 June 2019.

⁵²² Interview with Agnes van Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

they did need to come themselves, as Roze Gebaar did not attempt to target them specifically.⁵²³

Conversely to the above examples, exclusion of people with intellectual disabilities was more explicit in the Dutch than in the British context. One exception is the British group Outsiders, a group centred around disability and sexuality in general, but which had a homosexual subgroup as well. Outsiders thought it was important ‘that people with learning disabilities should not be included’, as they wanted to ‘enjoy intelligent conversations together.’ Thus, they made it a rule that they would only accept those who could understand and complete their application form. ‘Equally, volunteers running Outsiders, chose to exclude people who cannot really handle their own affairs in a dignified manner, and cause trouble. This excludes people with brain injury and mental illness.’⁵²⁴ In other British groups, the issue was not raised specifically, but nevertheless, sources indicate that groups were mostly aimed at people with physical disabilities.

In the Netherlands, Agnes van Wijnen recognised that initially, SOG mostly focused on those with physical disabilities. The disabled world was divided into ‘pillars’ of physical, intellectual and psychological disabilities. Those with physical disabilities tended to strongly emphasise they did not want to be seen as intellectually disabled, as they were often assumed to have an intellectual disability by strangers who concluded this from, for instance, their wheelchair, or speech impediment.⁵²⁵ The subsequent urge to distance themselves from those with intellectual disabilities carried on in for instance the SOG-homogroep, which argued that disabled gays need to work twice as hard to show that they are ‘not retarded’ (‘niet

⁵²³ Interview with Annemieke van Brandenburg, together with sign language interpreter Maloush Köhler, conducted on 13 June 2019.

⁵²⁴ T. Owens, ‘History: Chapter 5’ *Outsiders.org* (19 June 2013) <http://www.outsiders.org.uk/outsidersclub/history/chapter-5/> [last accessed 27 October 2019].

⁵²⁵ Agnes van Wijnen argued that it took a long time before more space was made for those with intellectual disabilities within disabled groups, which is something she personally addressed within the groups she was active in. – Interview with Agnes Wijnen, conducted on 12 June 2019.

achterlijk’).⁵²⁶

Arnold Boekhoff, who has an intellectual disability, was also familiar with such distinctions. He spoke of a ‘Roze wielen’ (‘Pink Wheels’) workgroup of the COC Amsterdam, at the end of the 1990s or beginning of the 2000s, who did not want to organise with those with intellectual disabilities, as it did not ‘match their vision.’ Arnold noted how this excluded multiply disabled people; such as those who both use a wheelchair and have an intellectual disability. Moreover, Arnold felt such distinctions were limiting, as the distinct groups dealt with the same laws and regulations, and the same social questions. He felt labelling groups as separate (‘hokjesdenken’) was discriminatory, when actually collaborating was important.⁵²⁷ In the late 1990s, Arnold was involved in setting up a meeting place for LGBT people with intellectual disabilities, the first of which was set up in 1998 in Haarlem. Over time, meeting opportunities were established in more cities. These were mostly social, but also provided workshops and education.⁵²⁸ Likewise, in 1999 the meeting centre ‘Anders Roze’ (‘Different Pink’) was established in Brabant, which was meant to be a meeting place for people with cognitive and intellectual disabilities.⁵²⁹

Thus, this chapter has shown that even within groups for disabled lesbian and gay people, a normative identity of a white, physically disabled, sometimes predominantly male but in any case mostly cisgender member prevailed. British groups generally tended to make such issues explicit, and discussed whether to include certain groups, or how to promote inclusion. In the Netherlands, such topics tended to go undiscussed, which also meant that normative identities generally went uncontested. As a result, both British and Dutch groups mainly catered to white, physically disabled, cisgender people.

⁵²⁶ SOG-homogroep, *Handicap en Homoseksualiteit*.

⁵²⁷ Interview with Arnold Boekhoff, conducted on 17 June 2019.

⁵²⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁹ IISH Archive Roze Gebaar, Box 7, map 2.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that British and Dutch disabled LGBTI people faced exclusion both within the ‘disability world’, and within the lesbian and gay movement and subculture. Disabled LGBTI people were rarely educated about (homo)sexuality, and information on the subject was hard to come by. Caregivers, healthcare professionals and disability institutions could be inconsiderate with regards to their needs or downright hostile towards their existence. Coming out was challenging due to dependency on caregivers and family, and because of their small, heteronormative social circles. The disability movement often deprioritised lesbian and gay issues, or distanced itself from them. Additionally, the nondisabled lesbian and gay movement and subculture showed little interest in making venues, events and publications accessible. Communication difficulties due to deafness or blindness were not easily accommodated, and disabled LGBTI people faced intolerant attitudes and hostility in the lesbian and gay scene. Queer activist culture’s demands of productivity were exclusionary, as were the lesbian and gay subculture’s implicit values of beauty, strength, and independence. While some felt the scene got more accepting due to the HIV/AIDS crisis, others felt the situation did not improve.

All in all, this was experienced as a ‘double exclusion’ by disabled LGBTI people, who set up their own groups and created their own spaces, representations and content. Disabled lesbian and gay groups served multiple functions: to provide social meeting places for disabled lesbian and gay people; to educate and inform disabled lesbian and gay people on lesbian and gay subjects about which accessible information was often lacking; and to challenge heteronormativity in the disability movement, as well as ableism within the lesbian and gay movement. While British and Dutch groups developed similarly in this sense, there were also differences, primarily in organisation methods. In the Netherlands, disabled lesbian and gay groups were mainly structured within existing organisations. As a result they had

fewer financial concerns than British groups, and could maintain group continuity regardless of (in)active membership. Reliance on external financing also had downfalls, however, as evidenced through examples such as the disappearance of the Disability, Relationships and Sexuality workgroup of the Gehandicaptenraad when subsidies were redirected elsewhere.

In organising, groups challenged the normative identities within both movements they were excluded from, and created alternative identities. These could still be normative identities, however, based on implicit or explicit exclusions of trans people, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, or people with intellectual disabilities. As seen, with the exception of people with intellectual disabilities, British groups were more explicit about the boundaries around their memberships, and sooner discussed whether and how to include nondisabled people, people from ethnic minorities, and transsexual people. In Dutch groups, such issues frequently went unaddressed. The reason for this may be the stronger demand for political correctness within the British political culture, as cited by Duyvendak. Due to the perceived importance of adhering to a 'pure' ideology, that lacked in the Netherlands, British groups felt a greater need to explicate choices made around inclusion and exclusion.⁵³⁰ This shows that the development of the disabled lesbian and gay groups was to an extent influenced by their different cultural and political backgrounds.

As mentioned, Dutch and British disabled lesbian and gay groups also developed very similarly. One reason for this was because while lesbian and gay movements developed differently in the UK and the Netherlands, their subcultures developed very similarly to each other, leading to parallel experiences of exclusion and similar organising approaches in response.⁵³¹ Another reason is that both British and Dutch groups diverged from their respective national contexts. The Dutch groups used emancipatory rhetoric and identified positively with disability, while the broader Dutch disability movement generally still

⁵³⁰ Duyvendak, *De verzuiling van de homobeweging* 83.

⁵³¹ *Idem* 78.

followed the medical rhetoric of the government. In the British case, some groups diverted from the broader trend in the disability movement of emancipatory rhetoric and positive identifications— even if many did proudly identify as disabled. Moreover, British disabled lesbian and gay groups diverted from national trends as they did not mirror the clashes between groups *for* and *by* disabled people that existed within the broader disability movement. Even when tactics differed, such as between Sisters Against Disablement and Gemma, there were no open clashes and groups tended to collaborate instead. Most ideological debates within the disability movement therefore did not carry through in the movement.

Beyond developing in or out of tune with national contexts, the Dutch case shows that disabled lesbian and gay groups could also influence the development of their national contexts. At least to some extent, figures like Nicole Franssen and Agnes van Wijnen functioned as agents of transfer between the disability movement and the lesbian and gay movement, due to their multiple identifications. The examples of the gay and women's movements –and perhaps also the example of proud identification and emancipatory rhetoric already used in the SOG-homogroep– had its influence on the development of the disability movement as a whole, through *Trots en treurnis*. While the topic and contention of a 'proud identification' in the broader disability movement is deserving of further research, this thesis has shown that by being multiply-identified, disabled lesbians and gays were able to use the emancipatory rhetoric of the lesbian and gay movement to take up a proud, positive identity.

This thesis has shown that while there were instances of contact between the Dutch and British groups which were influential –as the 1988 Manchester Conference directly inspired the European Conference of 1991, and American examples inspired the inclusivity of the 1998 Gay Games– rhetoric and tactics were not to any great extent exchanged. This differed for the disability movement as a whole, as Nicole Franssen, Agnes van Wijnen and

Lydia Zijdel all stressed the importance of international examples for the development of the Dutch disability movement. Still, for disabled lesbian and gay groups specifically, transnational contexts were mainly social. Processes of intra-national transfer, between different movements, were more important than instances of transnational transfer.

While this thesis mainly shows how the lesbian and gay movement was treated as exemplary for the disability movement, there were also instances that the disability movement was cited as an example for the LGBTI movement. These have not to any great extent been discussed in this thesis, but deserve to be mentioned. For instance, in one of the SOG-homogroep newspapers, Nicole Franssen commented on the fact that in the early 1990s, people began to note lessened activity and a ‘general malaise’ in the Dutch gay movement. Nicole argued that perhaps due to normalisation, the concept of homosexuality had lost its militancy and rallying potential. As a solution to revive this, she argued:

People with a disability still have much to achieve, an emancipated world within which everyone could live to their full potential, because that is everyone’s right. Maybe we can take some of that spirit along to the gay movement in general, and the COC specifically.⁵³²

This is an interesting switch from the general idea in the Dutch context that the gay and lesbian movement was the best place to organise within.

Petra Ybeles Smit also cited the disability movement as an example, but in her case for the contemporary transgender movement. She spoke about being denied hormonal treatment and surgery to transition when she approached the Dutch gender clinic in 2011, due to complications that would arise from her disability. She was not granted hormones because of her history of depression and anxiety, as the medical experts were afraid of regression. Moreover, the gender clinic would not give her hormones, testosterone stoppers or gender

⁵³² *Van Doofpot tot Mankepoot Nieuwsbrief* (June 1992).

reassignment surgery because these could lead to weight gain, and she was over the required Body Mass Index (BMI). While Petra acknowledged these risks, she explained that her depression and anxiety were also caused by her gender dysphoria, which could also lead to weight gain. She argued for the use of an ‘informed consent’ model in transgender care, which entailed that medical professionals inform clients of possible risks, but the decision whether to transition remains theirs. In this, she felt like the trans movement had a lot to learn from the disability movement, who have also fought for having their own say in their medical treatments.⁵³³ Further research, focusing on trans people with disabilities, would be beneficial to further explore the connected interests of the transgender and disability movements.

All in all, this thesis has shown that disabled LGBTI people were able to use, bend and influence the frames of reference of the movements they were linked to, in order to create their own particular rhetoric. Moreover, they were able to change both the disability movement and lesbian and gay movements. Due to organising efforts, over time disability projects eventually became increasingly inclusive towards disabled lesbians and gays in the Netherlands, and while progress was slow and is far from finished, activism between the 1970s and 1990s ensured more accessibility in Dutch lesbian and gay scenes. Similarly, in the UK, disabled lesbian and gay groups successfully increased inclusivity and accessibility in the lesbian and gay scene, which was also promoted by the influence of the British disability movement on British public life in general.

Despite these achievements, attention paid to this subject has lessened over the 2000s both in the Netherlands and the UK. In the Netherlands, groups disappeared, and British groups shrank. With this comes the danger of institutional memory loss, as previous efforts of disabled LGBTI people become increasingly forgotten by those currently active in the area of disability and (homo)sexuality. In recording this unwritten history, this thesis has aimed to

⁵³³ Interview with Petra Ybeles Smit, conducted on 22 April 2019.

combat the threat of institutional amnesia, in the hopes of having the history of disabled LGBTI organising be considered in current and future efforts around the topic.

This thesis has given an intersectional account of disability and lesbian and gay history, showing the impact of homogenised identities on those who are multiply-identified. This thesis has also shown the productive processes of creating an own identity, which was not only to do with creating a proud positive identity, but also by explicit and implicit assertions of boundaries and exclusions. By focusing on a micro level of identity formation within the small disabled lesbian and gay groups, this thesis demonstrates that the tendency to create hierarchies persisted in groups for those who themselves already existed in the margins of other marginalised groups. In doing so, this thesis illustrates the importance of an intersectional approach, allowing space for those identifying along other axes beyond disability and lesbian and gay subjectivities.

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Map 1, folder 1

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Box 1, map 3

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Box 3, map 3

Box 3, map 4

Box 7, map 2

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