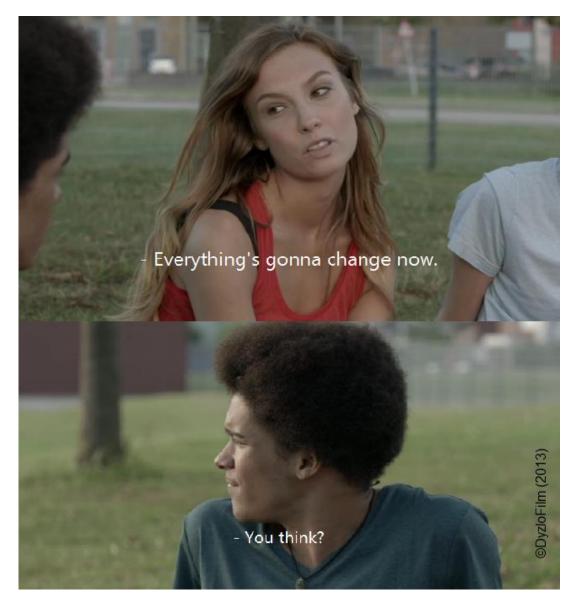Utrecht University

LGBT Acceptance in Dutch High Schools

The Case of Educational Short Films

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"Do whatever it takes to make your life more worth living. Anything at all. It can be illegal, immoral, unethical, self-destructive… anything at all if it makes your life more worth living. There's only one rule to follow to make that kind of blanket permission work: *Don't be mean*.

And if you're afraid of going to hell, don't worry. I got you covered. I made a pact with the Devil, right here. I said 'I'll send you some people, and they are good people.' "

- Kate Bornstein

To my wonderful parents,

to my amazing partner,

and to my incredible queer family.

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"And if she had to live it all over again, you know she wouldn't change anything for the world."

Against Me! – Thrash Unreal

Here we are, after this incredible one year-journey that changed me in so many different ways.

I want to thank my teachers and the Gender Studies Programme for opening my eyes and for teaching me how to look at the world in a clever and constructive way.

I want to thank my supervisor, dr. Peta Hinton, for her endless patience and hard work, and for the huge help she gave me with understanding what was, and is, going on in my head.

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And thanks to me. I made it, against all odds.

Now, let's go change the world.

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Introduction

In a 2006 report, provided by ILGA-Europe (European Region of International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) and IGLYO (International Lesbian, Gay. Transgender, Queer Youth and Student Organization), the associations declare that LGBT people and youth constantly face social exclusion at school, at work, and in everyday life. The European Council has defined social exclusion as a:

> process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and
>
> prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic
>
> competences and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination.
>
> This distances them from job, income and education and training opportunities as
>
> well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to
>
> power and decision-making bodies and thus often feel powerless and unable to
>
> take control over the decisions that affect their day to day lives. (European
>
> Council, 2004, quoted in Takács, ILGA-Europe and IGLYO, 2006: 12)

Social exclusion particularly affects LGBT youth, who experience estrangement from family and friendship networks, harassment at school and invisibility, which can all have several consequences, such as "underachievement at school, school drop-out, mental ill health and homelessness" (ibid, 6).[1] In research conducted in 2011 by Saskia Keuzenkamp about the acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands, she demonstrated that, even though the Netherlands has been the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage in 2001 and has proven to be a "world leader as regards acceptance of homosexuality", discrimination and social exclusion against LGBT subjects are still performed in the country (Keuzenkamp, 2011: 7). Moreover, this study has shown that, within primary and secondary school environment, three out of ten pupils think that gay fellow-peers would not be able to

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[1] Social distance, or social distance, refers to the process of marginalization towards minority groups in social contexts. The term social distance was first coined in the 1920's by Emory Bogardus (1928) to describe feelings of discomfort between different ethnicities.

express their sexual preferences openly, a further three out of ten is not sure whether they would be able to, and only 5% of the sample think that gay peers at school would be able to tell everyone about their sexual diversity (Keuzenkamp, 2011). This demonstrates that, in spite of the positive results provided by Keuzenkamp's surveys, social inclusion for queer young people in schools still seems a far achievement in the Netherlands.

In order to increase LGBT acceptance and fight social distance and homophobia in Dutch high schools, the non-profit organization GALE (Global Alliance for LGBT Education), works with teachers and students nationwide and worldwide, organizing projects and workshops about sexual diversity.[2] With one of the key aims of this research being to adjudge LGBT acceptance via its uptake in the short film narrative and discussion, and before expanding on the GALE group's activities, a definition of 'acceptance' that guides this thesis inquiry is provided in what follows. In 1987, the sociologists Robert Bogdan and Steven Taylor defined an accepting relationship as:

> one between a person with a different attribute and another person, which is of long duration and characterized by closeness and affection and in which the atypical attribute does not have a stigmatizing, or morally discrediting, character. Accepting relationships are not based on a denial of difference, but rather on the absence of impugning the different persons' moral character because of the variation. (Bogdan and Taylor, 1987: 35)

This 'atypical attribute' refers to a wide range of aspects that do not conform to the social norm, namely "physical, mental, and behavioral differences" (ibid., 34), like disability, skin color, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, gender and gender identity. The idea of my thesis and the related research came up during the 10 week internship I undertook as part of my Master's training at GALE, from February to April 2015, where I decided to focus my study on the ARES project (Artistic Education System for Social Inclusion of Young

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[2] http://www.lgbt-education.info/

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Adults): an activity that uses short and long films as a tool for raising awareness about LGBT issues in educational environments. During this two day long project, which took place at the Hyperion Lyceum, Amsterdam, with a class of 24 students between 14 and 15 years old, ARES partners organized a film screening of the short movie *Uitgesproken* (Tonk and Tonk, 2013), followed by class and small group discussion.

As it derives from this research, the central aim of this thesis is to investigate the role of the educational short movie about LGBT acceptance, *Uitgesproken* in raising awareness about homophobia, social justice, and social inclusion and exclusion within a school activity environment. With the help of queer theory (especially Annamarie Jagose, 1997) and queer theory applied to pedagogy (in particular Elizabeth Meyer, 2007, and Susanne Luhmann, 1998), the thesis will analyze the potential reasons why this short movie may or may not work in its aim to sensitize the viewers to practices of discrimination, homophobia, and social distance. Specifically, my intent is to examine the different levels of acceptance by Dutch high school students towards sexual diversity by drawing a link between the film and its effects in terms of consciousness raising.

My research methodology for this study is Feminist Ethnography. Feminist Ethnography differentiates itself from mainstream ethnography for its political aim: it has the tendency to give voice to minority groups and has methods that have feminist theory as a theoretical framework. More specifically, feminist ethnography aims to analyze social relations with a theoretical lens that challenges taken-for-granted notions about gender, sexuality and power relations. By using feminist ethnography as a method of research, I have the political purpose, or focus, to analyze how LGBT (and gender) stereotypes are constructed in the educational and social context of Dutch high schools, and to examine how an activity such as the ARES project works in decreasing episodes of homophobic bullying and in promoting social inclusion of sexual minorities. The main method utilized in the research undertaken for this thesis is participant observation, because it provides qualitative data derived from the

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researcher's keen observation of social settings. During my research at a conference organized with the GALE group, I collected data by observing the reaction of the students to the film from a distance, and I interacted with small groups following its viewing. This gave me the possibility to understand how the process of acceptance of sexual diversity among Dutch high school students works. Afterwards, I had several interviews with the directors of the movie, Dylan and Lazlo Tonk, who both identify as homosexual and often share their own experiences with the students in order to understand why they constructed the film in this specific way. There is a quantitative component to my research also. After the activity, the participants filled in a survey containing questions about the experience they had during the film screening and the discussion in order to give me the possibility to statistically analyze the results (e.g. dividing the reactions by gender and age).

The choice of this topic has been mainly determined by passion and caring. I have always found working with children extremely satisfying and challenging and I have always advocated for the social inclusion of LGBT people, especially in schools. I consider high school a very important moment in one's life, specifically in matters of learning, sharing experiences, and preparing the student for further experiences and post-high school life. The inclusion in certain activities, such as the ARES project, are fundamental practices to teach respect, to encounter and discuss diversity, and to encourage a critical approach to social issues for the students, which may create a more open-minded climate. The main goal of this study is to understand how and why the film and the activity itself may or may not succeed in the intent of raising awareness in order to improve future similar approaches to challenge modern homophobia and social distance in an educational environment.

The thesis will be divided in four chapters. In the first chapter, I outline the theoretical framework I used for the analysis and the methodology of research. The second chapter will describe the short educational film, *Uitgesproken*, and the activity conducted at the Hyperion Lyceum in Amsterdam, the focus for this research. The third chapter will provide an analysis

of the research results of the participant observation and the evaluation survey filled by the participants and the fourth chapter will engage in a discussion of the study.

The thesis will examine the masculine perspective of homophobia presented in the movie, and will investigate the importance of the visual component within school activities for raising awareness around LGBT acceptance. There will be a specific focus on both the short film and the activity of the ARES conference, with an attention to processes of normalization of gender roles and heteronormativity within an educational environment. Finally, the study will provide some advice to improve further activities on LGBT acceptance and homophobic bullying at school.

Chapter 1: Theory and Methodology

1.1 Queer Theory: an introduction

The term "queer" originally indicated "men who identified themselves as different from other men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than their womanlike gender status [between 1910 and 1920]" (Chauncey quoted in Jagose, 1996: 74). According to Annamarie Jagose, the word "queer" is often considered a synonym of "gay" or "homosexual"; however, whether the term "gay" carries a specific political opposition to "that binarised and hierarchical sexual categorization which classifies homosexuality as a deviation", "queer" distinguishes itself from "those terms which form its semantic history" (Jagose, 1996: 72-75) and was elaborated in order to question cultural and theoretical debates about gay and lesbian identity.

As stated in Jagose's *Queer Theory: an Introduction*, in the second half of the twentieth century, there has been a philosophical reconceptualization of identity as a "sustaining and persistent cultural fantasy or myth" (ibid.) defined by commonly used social constructions. The merge of Louis Althusser's, Jacques Lacan's, and Ferdinand de Saussure's theories provided the post structuralist context in which queer emerges (ibid.).

According to Althusser (1970), individuals are defined subjects by ideology, specifically a set of political beliefs or ideas that characterize a particular culture, and that definition is achieved through recognition and identification, meaning that one's identity is already constituted by ideology itself, rather than simply by resistance to it. On the psychoanalytic point of view, Lacan's interpretation of Freud's work (1936) described subjectivity not as something that has always been present 'in ourselves', but as "something that must be learned" (ibid., p. 79), suggesting that subjectivity originates outside the self, making identity an effect of identification. Finally, Saussure (1906-11) emphasized the importance of the language in one's identity, describing it as a system of signification that constitutes any individual speaker. As Jagose explains it:

Language is commonly misunderstood as the medium by which we express our 'authentic' selves, and our private thoughts and emotions. Saussure, however, asks us to consider that our notions of a private, personal and interior self is something constituted *through* language. (Jagose, 1996: 79, emphasis added)

What we can find most relevant for this quote is that language not only helps humans to express themselves, but it creates the personal identity itself. Later on, in addition to this post-structuralist reconceptualization of identity, Michel Foucault (1979-81) and Judith Butler (1990) elaborated two other key-concepts to queer theory. Foucault's discourse of sexuality denaturalizes the dominant understandings of sexual identity. According to the French philosopher, sexuality is not "an essentially personal attribute but an available cultural category" (Jagose, 1996:79) that becomes a discursive production operated by networks of power. After establishing that power is not primarily a repressive force, Foucault states that marginalized sexual identities are not simply victims of power, but are rather produced by the aforementioned networks. In other words, Foucault reconceptualized identity in ways that have reformed lesbian and gay studies because "within post-structuralism, the very notion of identity as a coherent and abiding sense of self is perceived as a cultural fantasy rather than a demonstrable fact" (ibid., 82). This post-structuralist insight allowed gay and lesbian studies to demonstrate that every single component of identity (including sexuality) is not natural, but cultural and social.

Finally, Butler's concept of gender is illustrated in her widely cited book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), where she elaborates Foucault's argument about the operations of power challenging the traditional notion and concept of gender itself. Butler states that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990: 33). Specifically, she defines gender as *performative*, which means that it produces a series of effects. Gender does

not only act or consummate an action, but it produces and reproduces itself every time it is executed. The way people talk, walk and act consolidates an impression of being a man or being a woman because a set of social and cultural beliefs embedded in every socialized person makes people believe that this "being a man" or "being a woman" is an internal reality or something simply true about us. Butler's performativity debunks this type of assumption and argues that gender is a phenomenon that is produced and reproduced all the time because it operates as a regulatory construct which is culturally formed, but, at the same time, a domain of agency. In other words, Butler wants to say that the social construction of gender can both be limitative and liberatory at the same time, because if some people do not fit into the gender binary (and all its set of rules), they can choose to adapt their gender expression to their gender identity, utilizing the aforementioned ways of talking, walking and acting in whatever way it helps them to express their gender. On the other hand, "since gender itself remains controlled and constrained by norms, taboos and expectations, all of which originates outside ourselves", the limitation consists of interpreting received gender norms that are already set (Chambers and Carver, 2008:57). She further argues that gender, as a cultural fiction, privileges and normalizes heterosexuality through the performative repetition of normative gender identities.[3] According to Butler, the deconstruction of these normative models of gender legitimates lesbian and gay subject-positions, but can also originate discrimination, violence and bullying towards these minority identities (Butler, 1990).

After stating that identity is a 'cultural fantasy' which is already constituted by ideology; that subjectivity originates outside the self, making identity an effect of identification; that language is not a medium of expression of oneself, but a *constituent* of oneself; that sexuality is a discursive production, and that gender is performative, it is possible to say that queer

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[3] This privilege towards heterosexual people, whose relationships are considered the social norm, is also referred as 'Heteronormativity'. The concept has been elaborated by several academics, including Adrienne Rich (1978) and Gayle Rubin (1975), but the term was popularized by Michael Warner in the easy *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1991).

theory investigates both the psychical *and* social states and processes of identity formation (Fuss, 1989) at the same time it works to challenge and deconstruct social categories. As Meyer contends:

> Queer theory goes beyond exploring aspects of gay and lesbian identity and experience. It questions taken-for-granted assumptions about relationships, identity, gender, and sexual orientation. It seeks to explode rigid normalizing categories into possibilities that exist beyond the binaries of man/woman, masculine/feminine, […] and gay/straight. (Meyer, 2007:15)

In other words, queer theory, aims to denaturalize what is considered normal, criticizing the notions of identity, community and politics that are considered as a natural, cultural and social evolution.

1.2 Queer Theory in Education: Queer Pedagogy

When it comes to queer theory applied or introduced within the field of education, William Pinar's anthology *Queer Theory in Education* (1998) offers a challenging articulation of queer pedagogy elaborated by Susanne Luhmann (1998). In "Queering/Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing" Luhmann firstly criticizes lesbian and gay politics' educational approach to homophobia and marginalization for its tendency to consider homophobia a problem of lack or misrepresentation of queer subjects, and provides as a solution new representations that aim to normalize homosexuality instead of "attacking and undermining the very processes by which (some) subjects become normalized and others marginalized." (Luhmann, 1998: 122) She goes on stating that in earlier years attributes such as 'radical', 'feminist', and 'anti-racist' have been added to the word "pedagogy" in order to redefine a new teaching methodology that has a critical approach and political agenda that involves the "desire to intervene in the reproduction of power dynamics and to make education part of a process of political empowerment and liberation of students." (ibid., 125) Luhmann, however, wants to shift the most common

focus of pedagogy, which is the process of teaching, to the question of how knowledge is produced in the interaction between teacher and students. In order to investigate the production of knowledge from the students' side, she explores Felman's concept of ignorance (1987). For Felman, if we are understanding all learning as remembering and recollecting, ignorance works against this delineation by defining ignorance as *part of* knowledge, instead of its exclusionary opposition. In other words, according to Luhmann, ignorance is not a *lack* of information, but a form of 'psychic resistance', *a desire not to know*. The author, finally, wants to merge queer theory and pedagogy in her own, unconventional way:

> [W]hat is a t stake in a queer pedagogy is not the application of queer
>
> theory (as a new knowledge) onto pedagogy, nor the application of
>
> pedagogy (as a new method) for the dissemination of queer theory and
>
> knowledge. Instead, at stake are the implications of queer theory and
>
> pedagogy for the messy processes of learning and teaching, reading and
>
> writing. Instead of posing (the right) knowledge as answer or solution,
>
> queer theory and the pedagogy I have outlined here pose knowledge as an
>
> interminable question. (ibid., 128)

Specifically, what Luhmann wants to say is that in response to homophobia in schools, there is a need for a pedagogy, such as queer theory, that instead of the repressive, passive, and conventional "banking approach to education", constantly questions knowledge and learning in the first place, that has a critical approach to the constructions of social norms and is an inquiry into the conditions that make learning possible or prevent learning. This, according to the author, will avoid a dehumanization of both students and teachers, which always stimulates oppressive attitudes in society.[4] In addition to that, Luhmann's pedagogy aims to

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[4] "Banking approach to education" is a metaphor formulated by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) in which he criticizes the traditional passive pedagogy accusing it of considering the students as empty bank accounts open to deposits made by the educators. The students are often considered

investigate processes of identity and subject formation and encourages an "ethical practice by studying the risks of normalization, the limits of its own practices, and the im/possibilities of (subversive) teaching and learning" (ibid. 130).

There has been further contribution on the introduction of queer theory in pedagogy and an author that applies the theory in order to decrease and defeat homophobia is Elizabeth J. Meyer. In the essay "'But I'm not Gay': What Straight Teachers Need to Know about Queer Theory" (2007), she first illustrates how considering bullying as an isolated act of teasing or violence leads to an enforcement of the norms of Western cultures, stating that the discriminatory reasons for it "act to create and support a social hierarchy that privileges mainstream identities and behaviors over marginalized ones" (Meyer, 2007: 16). In order to focus on the nature of the bullying act, Meyer suggests a feminist, specifically queer, approach that works toward more 'liberatory' educational experiences for all students.[5] This is a pedagogy that emphasizes the importance of consciousness raising, the existence of an oppressive social structure and the need to change it. With an analysis of Deborah Britzman's (2000) work, Meyer suggests the recognition of the power that *eros* can play in teaching:

> [Sexuality must be understood as a force that] allows the human its capacity for passion, interests, explorations, disappointment, and drama and because sexuality is both private and public – something from inside of bodies and something made between bodies – we must focus on sexuality in terms of its contradictory, discontinuous, and ambiguous workings. (Britzman quoted in Meyer, 26-27)

Meyer advocates for a queer pedagogy that empowers educators to explore topics that have been silenced by mainstream and traditional education and to give the students the possibility to investigate and question the hierarchy of binary gender identities and their intersections with sexuality that are often encountered at school. In order to provide approaches that can be

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empty minds that the teachers have to fill up with notions and knowledge. The theoretical foundation of feminist pedagogy is grounded in Freire's critical theories of learning and teaching.

[5] When I use the word 'liberatory' I do not only refer to it within a pedagogical work, but also to liberation as emancipation as a way of getting rid of narrow social and cultural definitions.

used to challenge multiple forms of hierarchical oppression towards minorities in schools, the author examines Kevin Kumashiro's work in *Troubling education: Queer activism and antioppressive pedagogy* (2002), which illustrates four different ways to analyze social oppression: "education for the Other, education about the Other, education that is critical of privileging and Othering, and education that changes students and society" (Kumashiro quoted in Meyer, 27). However, in order not to place himself in the position of authority, Kumashiro does not provide specific activities for curious educators, rather he pushes them to find new methods to "destabilize traditional ways of learning and offers different tools with which we can build that understanding [of the world]" (ibid, 27). Finally, Meyer, just like Luhmann, suggests the schools create critical, engaged students who are independent thinkers in order to make a more egalitarian society through a queer approach that "challenge[s] and disrupt[s] traditional ways of knowing and encourage[s] students to question and 'trouble' all that is passively assumed and taken for granted in society" (ibid., 28). According to the author, a queer pedagogical approach will provide a critical analysis on the social categories that will contribute in fighting homophobia and discrimination in schools. Given the focus of queer theory on the challenge of processes of normalization, and the attention of queer pedagogy to the existence of oppressive social structures, it is important to utilize a queer and feminist research methodology in order to investigate the role of the short educational movie in raising awareness about homophobia and LGBT acceptance.

1.3 Methodology

Since the topic of this study investigates the role of the educational short movie *Uitgesproken/Caged* (2013) in increasing LGBT acceptance in Dutch high schools, and the pedagogical methodology performed during the class discussion at the Hyperion Lyceum in Amsterdam with 24 students (14-15 years old), my research is largely qualitative but draws on quantitative survey data. Since I aim to concentrate on the student's reactions to the topic

of the film, and to understand how power circulates around queer identities and acceptance, I have approached the following case study with an ethnographic lens in order to make the research more personalized, representative of a spectrum of experience, and multifactorial.

The research methodology that will be used in this study is Feminist Ethnography. According to Christa Craven and Dána-Ain Davis, this typology of ethnography is "a project committed to documenting lived experience as it is impacted by gender, race, class, sexuality, and other aspects of participants' lives" (Craven and Davis, 2013: 1) that engages in "research[s] that [are] socially and politically relevant to those we study" (ibid., 9). What is politically and socially relevant to the participants in my research is, as stated in the introduction, to promote and advocate for a social safe inclusion of LGBT individuals in Dutch high schools and to end homophobic bullying. I chose ethnography because it is a "flexible, iterative method that enables researchers to gain a nuanced, contextualized understanding of the everyday social lives and relationships of those they study" (Hesse-Biber, 2014: 141).

Ethnography is a field-based methodology of research that is conducted in settings where people live. It utilizes different data collection techniques that usually are qualitative, such as interviews, but does not exclude quantitative tools, such as questionnaires (Whitehead, 2005). A common method utilized in ethnographic research is participant observation. With this method "the researcher observes the life of the group under investigation by participating in it" (Aune, 2008: 1), because the research aims to create a close and intimate familiarity with the informants.

Initially, feminist ethnography had the political aim of giving voice to women as a focus and "tended to advocate analyses that were detailed, flexible, and subjective, arguing that [it] would be more conductive to representing women's experiences in a patriarchal society" (ibid.). Later on, influenced by queer theory and its political aims, the focus shifted to the discovery of the process in which taken-for-granted assumptions about men and women are

constructed in different social contexts in order to question and challenge them (ibid.). Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber provides three principal characteristics of feminist ethnography in her book *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer* (2014): as stated before, a focus on the processes that construct taken for granted assumptions about men and women and a concentration on highly gendered settings, "methods or writing styles informed by feminist theories and ethics and an analysis that uses a feminist theoretical lens and/or attends to the interplays between gender and other forms of power and difference" (Hesse-Biber, 2014: 113).

As previously stated, both traditional and feminist ethnography have different techniques of research. Sometimes ethnographers have a specific set of methods in mind, but find themselves in unexpected places that provide kinds of information that can create new connections and possibilities in their field site (Hesse-Biber, 2014). An important feature of ethnographers is to think broadly and creatively about different methods of research and it is crucial to them to "continuously reevaluate whether their planned approach is acceptable to those they are working with and is helping them better understand their ways of life" (ibid., 129). Just like queer theory in pedagogy aims to question knowledge and to always have a critical approach to the constructions of social norms, feminist ethnographers have always to take into account the possibility to shift their methods of research in order to maintain criticality in what they are studying. Just like the students and the teachers have to understand that knowledge is an interminable question, the researcher has to take into account that the knowledge produced in her/his research, is not a stable, universal truth. The most common ethnographic approach is the above-mentioned participant observation. Participant observation requires the ethnographer's engagement in the everyday lives of the group of people that is studied with a simultaneous observation of the details about the social dynamics encountered (Hesse-Biber, 2014). The reason why participant observation might be one of the most immediate approaches is given by its deeply relational form: "it creates

knowledge about social relations through social relationships" (ibid., 129). This means that the relationships established during the research highly influence the responses of the informants during the research itself, and the researcher, in order to be as objective as possible, has to keep the balance between being an 'insider' and an 'outsider' of the group (ibid.). It is clearly important for the ethnographers to consider their own role within the research field, especially because it might change with the passage of time. Another aspect that researchers must take into account is how to establish the relationships with the people they will observe. The practice of participant observation, its consequent engagement in relationships with the informants and the consideration of power and\or discrimination issues as part of the research process demonstrate how ethical issue are embedded within feminist research. Specifically, within a school environment and within this study, it very important to observe how the group dynamics work within a class discussion, how the teacher mediates the conversation, and, most of all, whether or not the teacher encourages the students to think critically and to question taken-for-granted assumptions about gender roles and social norms. According to Hesse-Biber, this is the reason why it is extremely important for a feminist ethnographer to ensure confidentiality, privacy, and informed consent (ibid. 99), and, to come back to Meyer (2007), a further essential dynamic for this specific study is to reduce authority on the part of the person that looks into gender and sexuality in pedagogy. In this way, the participants (in this case, the students) might engage in a relationship that makes them feel comfortable with the researcher.

Usually, feminist ethnographers utilize formal or informal interviews with research participants in order to gather more information. Interviews allow the researchers to closely explore participants' thoughts and reflections and compare these with their previous observations. While formal interviews have been planned ahead and take place outside the normal course of social interactions, informal interviews may occur during the course of participant observation.

I apply a feminist approach because I wanted to examine the discussion dynamics about gender and sexuality that were performed in a Dutch class of 14-15 year-old students: for example, I collected data by observing the reactions of the students from a distance and I interacted with small groups later on. This gave me the possibility to understand how the process of acceptance of homosexuality among Dutch high school students works. Afterwards, I had several formal interviews with the directors of the movie in order to understand why they constructed the film in the specific way that they chose.

To wrap it up, using a feminist ethnographic methodology and analyzing with a theoretical lens that engages with queer theory and queer pedagogy will help me investigate the grey area between social acceptance and homophobia in Dutch high schools. Moreover, there will be a focus on the dynamics of power relations and hierarchy found in the classroom with a methodology that "will undoubtedly continue to keep issues of relationships, gender, and power central to discussion of knowledge development and dissemination even as the social and political conditions of [minority groups] continue to evolve" (ibid., 141).

In the next chapter, I am going to illustrate the material of my case study, namely the short educational film *Uitgesproken* (2013), the research conducted in the Dutch high school (Hyperion Lyceum in Amsterdam), composed by both quantitative and qualitative elements, and, finally, my position within the research.

Chapter 2: Film and Research

2.1 Uitgesproken/Caged

The educational short movie that constitutes this case study is *Uitgesproken* (2013), also referred in English as *Caged*, written and directed by Dylan and Lazlo Tonk. The Dutch term 'uitgesproken' has a particular meaning that refers to something that is clearly expressed (an opinion, for example), the English title refers to a cage in a park where the group of friends depicted in the movie play football. The directors chose the word 'uitgesproken' to emphasize the moral of the movie, which encourages teenagers to 'make the right decision and stand up for one's own choices', whereas for the English title they decided to use the cage as a metaphor for being influenced by peer pressure and not being able to express oneself explicitly in a group of friends (Tonk and Tonk, 2015, personal interview).

The 14 minute long film is set in the suburbs of a Dutch city, which remains unknown, and starts with two teenage boys, David, the protagonist, and his best friend Niels, training on a running track. When they take a break, David asks Niels about Michelle, his friend's alleged girlfriend and Niels responds vaguely and quickly turns the conversation onto David's girlfriend, Stella. Later on, the two boys are playing football together with their group of friends in a cage, which is located in a park, when Stella arrives with Tim, a friend of hers. Bas, one of David and Niels friend's, and his girlfriend, Angela, aggressively approach Tim, saying "Faggots are not welcome here" (Tonk and Tonk, *Uitgesproken*, 2013).[6] Stella and Tim leave and the boys doing the bullying say that they will get him later. In the following scene, David and Stella are talking about the reason why the girl hangs out with Tim. Stella says that he is simply a very good friend of hers and David expresses his own reluctance in being a friend with a gay boy. Stella states that David might already be friend with a gay boy and that she would not be surprised by it, and her boyfriend quickly states that he would know it. Afterwards, David sees Niels talking to Tim and keeps asking

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[6] All the dialogues are originally in Dutch and are translated by the author.

him about Michelle, as if he needs confirmation of his friend's heterosexuality, but Niels remains vague. In the next scene, Bas leads the group of friends to a parking lot where Tim's bike is located, in order to color it pink with spray. The only one who tries to take position against him is Niels, however, nobody listens to him and before starting coloring the bike, David looks at Niels with an expression of both apology and challenge, because on the one hand, he knows that Niels is against this type of acting and does not want to hurt his best friend, but on the other hand, he also wants to prove his masculinity to his peers. Later on, after a close up of Tim's pink bike next to the football cage, the group of friends sees Niels kissing Tim and when the former sees the boys, he keeps kissing the latter. David looks at Bas and they start running towards the couple and the audience can see the confrontation between the two best friends:

> **David:** "Dammit, man! What are you doing?! Why didn't you tell me?"
>
> **Niels:** "As if it were that easy!"
>
> **David:** "I thought we were friends."
>
> **Niels:** "So did I." (ibid.)

In the meantime, Bas and Angela are harassing Tim, but they soon let the couple go. In the following scene, David is nervously smoking a cigarette alone, when Stella approaches him and starts talking about how nice she finds Niels and Tim together. When she asks for David's opinion, he does not reply and tries to kiss her, probably to prove his masculinity and virility. However, Stella stops him and says: "What are you afraid of?" (ibid.). The next scene depicts the group of teenagers playing football in the cage, and David standing against the fence with a sad expression on his face. When Bas asks him if he misses his boyfriend, referring to Niels, David gets nervous and throws the ball against the bully. Bas shouts out that if David chooses "the faggot" over his friends, he must not come back ever again. After the aggressive response ("You're the faggot here!"), David leaves. In the last scene the audience sees Stella and Tim talking friendly while Niels is running on the track. David sits

next to his girlfriend and apologizes to Tim about the bike prank, Tim shrugs and says "Maybe I'll keep it this way". David smiles, looks at Stella and states "You've always known it", Stella smiles, kisses him, and says, looking at Niels: "Everything is going to change now". David looks at Niels as well and says, smiling: "You think?" He stands up and runs towards his friend, they smile at each other and the movie ends exactly how it started: with two best friends running.

The first component that stands out in the film is that the story is told from the heterosexual friend's perspective. It is quite rare to find a LGBT movie with a straight protagonist. The directors clearly wanted to show the struggles of a heterosexual teenage boy surrounded by heteronormative cis-friends in dealing with his best friend's homosexuality, and the tagline of the short is indeed "How would you react if you discovered your best friend is gay?"[7] The whole short film is focused on David's feelings that depict struggle, indecisiveness, confusion and surprise and this makes *Uitgesproken* a movie about friendship, instead of a 'gay movie' or a 'movie about homophobia'. This makes the audience's self-identification almost automatic because it appeals to the majority of the public, since "this is a thing that could happen to anyone" (Tonk, D. 2015, personal interview). Furthermore, it avoids the typical emotional reactions to a mainstream representation of a bullied gay boy, such as sympathy and pity.

A further point that has to be discussed is the ethnic variety of the characters. Although the majority of the group of teenagers is white, David is mixed-race, and one of the background characters, is Middle-Eastern. This give the movie the possibility to address the topic to mixed race classes of teenage students, which are common in the Netherlands. In a personal interview the directors, Tonk and Tonk, explained that the whole film was written and created for an educational environment. Thus, every single thing, from the length of the film, to the characterizations and the storyline, was elaborated for a very young audience

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[7] Cisgender or cissexual describes related types of gender identity perceptions, where individuals' experiences of their own gender agree with the sex they were assigned at birth (Crethar & Vargas, 2007).

(approximately from 12 to 18 years old). The directors further stated that when a movie aims to be addressed to a young audience, the writers have to provide role models because the viewers tend to look for a character to identify with and to rely on.

Another interesting feature of *Uitgesproken* is the two opposite female characters. On the one hand, there is Stella, who has a positive attitude and behavior, which supports Tim and Niels. On the other hand, there is Angela, who is clearly homophobic and has the same aggressive attitude and behavior as her boyfriend, Bas. Stella evidently is 'the voice of reason' (Tonk, L. 2015, personal interview) and tries to convince David to accept his best friend in a very clear and respectful way. Differently, Angela is not open for dialogue, and is offensive and overbearing. The directors affirmed that they created these opposite female characters because they wanted to eschew the stereotype of the 'fag hag' with the only two girls in the movie.[8]

The lack of stereotypes, especially concerning the gay characters, is a further key-aspect of *Uitgesproken*. Although every single character is now deeply elaborated, due to the short length of the movie (14 minutes), it is possible to see that both Niels and Tim are not depicted like mainstream gay characters are depicted. For example, Niels is not feminine or flamboyant, he is 'normal', which tends give the movie a normalizing atmosphere towards sexual diversity. This implication and its consequence will be discussed in the following chapter.

In the final analysis, *Uitgesproken* gives a vivid representation of a straight boy's emotional reactions to his best friend's coming out within a macho environment of the sporting area (the running track and the football cage, where only the boys play) and focuses the entire story and moral on the topic of friendship.

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[8] 'Fag hag' generally refers to an outgoing woman who is seeking a substitute for heterosexual relationships, or who are secretly (or openly) sexually attracted to gay men. Many women who identify as fag hags are already in romantic relationships, either with straight men or with women but appreciate the alternative experience of socializing with gay men and may prefer the gay culture to the straight counterpart. (Thompson, 2004)

2.2 Research and my position within it

Most of the research for this study took place at the Hyperion Lyceum, a high school in Amsterdam, during a two day-project called ARES (Artistic Educational System for the Social Inclusion of young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender adults) organized by the Global Alliance for LGBT Education (GALE), my internship provider. The project consisted of showing *Uitgesproken* to a class of students and having a discussion afterwards. The case study is composed of 24 students (between 14 and 15 years old), involving 12 boys and 12 girls. Before the screening, the teacher showed the students the advertising poster of the LGBT film festival that was about to happen in Amsterdam a few days after the project, and asked them to react in order to get a general feeling about the topic and to prepare them for the film. During this introduction, the film screening and the discussion afterwards, I took field notes and focused on the reactions of the students, including their facial expressions. Afterwards, the students were divided into small groups (composed by four students and one mediator, for instance a teacher or one of the partners that took part in the project) to discuss biased and stereotypical statements related to the topic of the movie and the conference. During this activity, I was the mediator of one group of two boys and two girls. As a framework for discussion, four statements took the focus. These were:

- Homosexuality is a Western invention
- Lesbianism is more accepted than male homosexuality
- Showing off homosexuality is promoting it
- Stereotypes about homosexuality ruin homosexuality itself [9]

The quantitative part of my research was also collected at the ARES conference when, at the end of the project, all the participants (students, teachers, organizers and partners, 34 persons in total) filled in a general evaluation form. A further element of this study consists of a

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[9] The reactions of the students will be analyzed and discussed in chapter 3 and 4.

formal interview with the directors of *Uitgesproken*, Lazlo and Dylan Tonk, during which I asked them information about the storyline and the script in order to understand how they constructed the short film. Moreover, since both of them usually go school by school to show the movie to the students, they have seen several and different reactions and answered the students' questions. This gave me the possibility to discuss the role of the movie in raising awareness about homophobia and the potential reasons why the movie may or may not work in fighting homophobia in schools.

The last component of the research was collected in another location. When I attended a one week project in the south of Italy (also organized by GALE), a delegation of six students from the Hyperion Lyceum came with us to exchange good practices of learning and of school improvement with Italian students. Since the six Dutch students were selected from the same class that had taken part in the ARES conference, I had the possibility to observe and to interview them informally during the whole week. Sharing the project with the students every day generated a sort of school trip atmosphere that put me and the students at the same level, hierarchically speaking. Here, it is possible to see that I reduced my authority as an adult, which made the students more open to talk and to feel comfortable with my presence. During the first part of the research I did not have enough time to bond with the participants, however, during the film discussion, I had the chance to describe my own experience of being a homosexual person that had faced religious resistance. This self-exposure might have made me vulnerable in the first place, but it turned out to be a reason for bonding with some students. For example, right after my testimony, the small group discussion started and two extremely gay-friendly students specifically requested to have me as a mediator of their group, and during the upcoming activity they all showed interest and curiosity towards my experiences and my opinions. However, declaring my homosexuality might have been a reason for curiosity and open-mindedness, but it might have also increased the number of politically correct answers. It is important to take into account this latter

possibility because, as I could notice during the whole research, all the students tended to be very polite with adults involved in the project, hence some socially appealing answers may have been given.[10]

During the second part of the research, in Italy, I had the possibility to spend seven full days with six Dutch students and to follow and guide them in the several activities that were undertaken. It is possible to say that not presenting myself as a teacher in the first place and having a very friendly and humorous attitude helped the students to open up and it helped to create a peer relationship. To put this into bell hooks' words:

> I realized that both with and regular old everyday humor could really serve to create a more open atmosphere in the classroom. Simply put, laughter shared can draw groups closer together. This is especially true in classrooms where there is much that separates, where diversity is the norm, or where the subjects studied confront students with depressing facts (hooks, 2010:127).

I do argue that humor played a very big role in the connection between myself and the students. After a few minutes and a few jokes, the students felt comfortable with my presence in the group and this, I believe, is what made them quite transparent in giving me answers. The next chapter will analyze the results and the implications of this kind of relationship with the Dutch students, and the outcomes of the quantitative and qualitative components of my research.

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[10] This will be discussed in the next two chapters in more depth.

Chapter 3: Analysis

After the description of the educational short Dutch movie and of the research conducted, in this chapter I am going to analyze the results of the conference activity and to highlight the most important and interesting outcomes related to my research question. Firstly, I will look at the quantitative part of the research, the survey, then I will examine the qualitative elements, such as the field notes taken during the participant observation, and the formal and informal interviews. In order to ensure the confidentiality of the students, fictional names are used in the quotes.

3.1 Quantitative Component: The Survey

The first extract of the study that will be analyzed is the quantitative part of the research, which consists of a survey of 12 questions related to the experience at the ARES conference. This survey, elaborated by GALE (Global Alliance for LGBT Education), had an evaluative purpose and specifically asked for comments and recommendations for future activities. As stated in the previous chapter, all the participants filled in the questionnaire right after the activity of the day was concluded. The questions were statements with which the participants had to agree or disagree (on a scale from 0 – strongly disagree- to 4 – strongly agree). In this section I will analyze the students' answers (24 students in total, 12 of which declared to be male and 12 female).[11]

On the first analysis, the results show a very positive evaluation of the conference organized to advocate for LGBT youth inclusion.[12] In fact, 100% of students considered the project "excellent", with: a knowledgeable trainer/speaker (92% agree, 8% neutral, 0% disagree); a good debate and comments (96% agree, 4% neutral, 0% disagree); pertinent and useful materials (92% agree, 8%, 0% disagree); and easy to follow (92% agree, 4% neutral and 4% disagree, probably because of the fact that the activity occurred in English and some

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[11] The complete statistical analysis can be found in the Appendix A.
[12] A complete report of the survey will be published by the end of the year 2015 on the official website of GALE: http://www.lgbt-education.info/

students had difficulty with the language). Moreover, the majority of students declared that the contents of the activity met their expectations (88% agree, 8% neutral and 4% disagree), while only less than a quarter of them (21%) found the content new (29% neutral and 50% already knew the content). 57% of students stated that they will be able to apply the knowledge learned (43% neutral, and 0% disagree). The comments and recommendations left at the end of the questionnaire showed that the activity was highly appreciated ("a very good class", "interesting project", "Great activity, I think it can help people"[13]) and 37% of the students suggested to dedicate more time to the activity (which lasted about one and a half hours).

The results of the quantitative data clearly suggest a positive attitude from the students towards sexual diversity and acceptance. According to one question of the survey, one third of the class was probably not aware of homophobic bullying or sexual diversity prior to their participation in the activities staged that day.[14] Although half of the students had already heard about the argument, they all showed interest in, and appreciation for, the whole project.[15] Nevertheless, only a little more than the half of them declared to be able to apply the knowledge learned and the rest of them were neutral.[16] This might show a didactic attitude towards the topic, which means that some students interpreted this knowledge as something that is produced at school for educational purposes, which usually stays at school. This can also be confirmed by the fact that 43% of the students were neutral to the question (see footnote 13), hence not interested in applying the knowledge outside the educational

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[13] Translated by the author. The original comments can be found in the Appendix A.

[14] The question was "The content of ACM was new to me." The answers were given on a 5 point scale, where 1 stands for 'strongly agree' and 5 for 'strongly disagree' and 3 for 'neutral'. Out of 24 students, 1 student responded with 1 (strongly agree), 4 with 2 (agree), seven of them were neutral (3) and 12 did not agree (thus, the content was not new to half of the class). See Appendix A.

[15] The question was "How do you rate the learning activities overall?" The answers were given on a 5 point scale, where 1 stands for 'excellent' and 5 for 'very bad'. Out of 24 students, 12 responded with 1 (Excellent) and 12 with 2 (Good). See Appendix A.

[16] The question was "I will be able to apply the knowledge learned". The answers were given on a 5 point scale, where 1 stands for 'strongly agree' and 5 for 'strongly disagree' and 3 for 'neutral'. Out of 24 students, 1 student strongly agreed (1), 12 agreed (2), 10 of them were neutral (3) and one did not give an answer to the question. See Appendix A.

institution. For example, during the introductory discussion the teacher asked the students what LGBT means and a girl quickly answered correctly, showing interest and enthusiasm, and she actively participated in the whole discussion. However, during the first bullying scene in the film ('Faggots are not welcome here' Tonk and Tonk, *Uitgesproken*, 2013), the same girl and a few more students were sniggering. This incongruous behavior might imply the girl's desire to be a good student, able to give the right answer in order to demonstrate that she possesses the right knowledge. Yet, the position she takes in relation to that knowledge seems to be quite distant from the problem represented in the film. It could be that this student considered the short film just a mere illustration of realistic events, such as homophobic bullying, that are detached from her every day experience at school. In this specific case, the affective component of the film does not influence this student's way of thinking and behaving, although she is aware of possessing a specific knowledge. One might argue that this is a film representation of events, and so it remains unconfirmed how this student would react to a more immediate act of bullying of this nature. Nevertheless, as I will illustrate in the next section, all the students found the movie relatable, credible and applicable to their school reality, specifically the interactions with their classmates and their friends.

3.2 Qualitative Components: Uitgesproken, Reactions, Discussions and Interviews

As stated in the previous chapter, immediately before the film screening, the teacher showed the students a poster of Roze Filmdagen ('Pink film days' in English), the LGBT film festival that would take place in Amsterdam a few days later, and then asked the students to state what the poster made them think of. There were a variety of answers, most of which were quite stereotypical and homonormative, like "Gay Pride/Parade", "Glitter, glamour, girly", "Gerard Joling" (a Dutch openly gay and flamboyant celebrity) and

"Rainbow flag".[17] Nevertheless, challenging and critical responses were also given ("Controversial", "Understanding what is different" "Discussion" and "Acceptance"). One student made a comment about the connection between homosexuality and the color pink: "I think they should have put LGBT instead of pink, because pink is not related to (homo)sexuality", which is important to point out because it demonstrates that the student in question is well aware of the stereotypical association of the color pink to gay people and, most importantly, she believes that a color cannot represent a sexual orientation, whereas the acronym provides a more direct and literal description. Finally, there were open-minded responses such as "Making the right choice", "Standing up for somebody else" and, related to the question "Who do you think will go to the festival?", a boy answered: "I think also closed-minded people should go to the festival, because they can go there, see something they have never seen before and change their minds!"(Jan, 2015, class discussion). This latter comment illustrates the importance of visual material in depicting and explaining a topic which is not very common or well-known, such as LGBT issues, and its high potential in raising awareness among the audience. This comment and its meaning are essential to the research question of the thesis that investigates the role of an educational short movie in raising awareness about LGBT acceptance, because it is possible to see how the visual material takes priority in Jan's experience. Jan wants to say that a visual component is the easiest and most reachable tool to illustrate such an important argument.

The first few comments given during this part of the activity suggest that the young audience is clearly influenced by the stereotypical representations of LGBT people in the media, that mainly depict homosexual men as feminine men obsessed with fashion and glitter. However, as it is possible to deduce from the following comments, these stereotypical

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[17] Homonormativity is the assimilation of heteronormative ideals and constructs into homosexual culture and individual identity. It refers to politics that do not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions such as monogamy, procreation and binary gender roles. The term has often been studied in Transgender Studies (especially in Susan Stryker's *Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity*, 2008).

assumptions do not imply a resistance to the acceptance of sexual diversity. On the contrary, due to the introduction of gay protagonists in popular TV shows like "Glee", some students showed undeniable support for LGBT people.[18] Once again, the visual component that gives visibility to LGBT subjects is undeniably crucial for its connection created with the viewers, who establish an affective bond with the characters of a film or a show, and its possible increase of an imminent acceptance of sexual diversity.

This support appeared in the course of the film screening, principally during the scenes that concerned the gay couple. Specifically, two female students, Olivia and Yael, were making negative comments about Bas, the bully, and were endorsing the romantic relationship between Niels and Tim. Furthermore, during the intense scene where David sees Niels kissing Tim and confronts him, Yael had the same reaction Niels had:

David: "I thought we were friends."

Niels: "So did I."(ibid.)

The fact that Yael said "So did I" as well suggests her identification with Niels' struggle in terms of acceptance within friendship. Self- identification and relatability of the story and the characters are the key point of the film. In fact, one of the very first comments during the discussion was "I really enjoyed the movie because it is about friendship and I could relate to it" (Sylvia, 2015, participant observation), which implies the need of the young audience to find role models to follow and a story that can speak also to their experience. This is why both the directors decided to shift the perspective of the protagonist from a straight character and opted in favor of a story about "being bullied and excluded" (Tonk, D., 2015, personal interview).

A further need of self-identification from the students arose when Dylan Tonk, one of the directors, took the lead in the conversation and answered the students' questions. After stating that both he and his brother are gay, one student, Michelle, asked whether or not they

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[18] This was stated by a female student, Olivia, in an informal interview after the film screening.

are religious because she wanted to know what the relationship was between their faith and their sexuality. Later on, I had the chance to ask Michelle her reason for the question and her answer was: "I am very religious, and I asked that question because I wanted to know what to do when my religion says something against who I am or something I do not agree with" (Michelle, 2015, personal interview). Michelle's need for a testimony regarding sexual orientation intertwined with religion suggests a level of acceptance that is related to her own experience, where homosexuality is not stigmatized as a difference. This student was clearly looking for a way, or advice, to face conservative comments stated by religious beliefs.

Moreover, the discussion between Dylan Tonk and the students was filled with questions related to the director's experience with his sexuality within a social context. After Tonk stated that he is homosexual and that *Uitgesproken* was the movie he would have wanted to watch when he was in high school, the young audience asked very personal questions, such as "Is your twin brother gay as well?", "Have you been bullied?" and "How did your parents react when you told them?". This curiosity insinuates that the students want a testimony of homosexuality from a homosexual person in order to completely understand the issues these people are dealing with, and to receive more direct information based in testimony. Around this issue, the students demand a type of approach that is based on personal knowledge and experience (hence, the testimony) and, as stated in the following quote, this positions the pupils on the informant's level and treats them with respect:

> People need to stop treating us like children. They think that, by avoiding
>
> certain kinds of topics, they are protecting us, but they are not. It is better to
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> face these uncomfortable conversations because it is better for us to know
>
> things from an expert rather than rely on what we see on TV or go on the
>
> internet and read the wrong information (Lotte, 2015, personal interview).

The fact that Lotte admits that she and her classmates prefer to have information "from an expert" rather than Internet or television further highlights the importance of a school activity

addressed to LGBT issues that features LGBT participants. Most importantly, whether Internet and TV shows offer something to read and/or to watch, an activity such as the ARES conference can provide the possibility of an active discussion between the participants and in relation to the film viewed. Furthermore, in such activity, the students have the chance to directly ask questions to an expert, which is not possible while watching a TV show.

As stated in the previous chapter, after the class discussion, the team divided the students into small groups (composed of four students and one mediator, for instance a teacher or one of the partners that took part in the project) in order to discuss biased and stereotypical statements related to the topic of the movie and the conference. The exercise was quite simple: we had to read a statement and declare why we did or did not agree with it. During this activity, I was the mediator of one group of two boys, Daan and Jan, and two girls, Olivia and Yael. The first statement we discussed was "Homosexuality is a Western invention". All the participants did not agree with it. One of the boys said "[i]t is not a Western invention because there are gay people in India, in Japan and everywhere" (Jan, 2015, group discussion) and the other students stated that homosexuality is not an invention at all because a sexual orientation cannot be invented. The second statement, "Lesbianism is more accepted that male homosexuality", was unanimously considered true and one of the boys provided the following example: "Yes, I agree with it, because a lot of boys do not like to see two guys kissing, but when they see two girls kissing they always want to watch" (Daan, 2015, group discussion). The third and fourth statements, on the other hand, generated nuanced opinions. To the statement "Showing off homosexuality is promoting it", one response was: "[w]ell, yes. I mean, sometimes it is not showing off, it is like a trend. Maybe they talk about it because they want to raise awareness. But I think that if you talk too much about anything, people can get tired of it" (ibid.). Similarly, to the statement "Stereotypes about homosexuality ruin homosexuality itself", another student responded "I do not think so. If you fit into a stereotype it is ok, if you do not, it is ok. I understand that people prefer

not to stick to the stereotype and confirm it, because it is easier to be normal, since you can be more accepted" (Olivia, 2015, group discussion).

The inclusive and open-minded comments to the statements, the emphasis on the importance of visibility in the media and the critiques given to the most biased considerations suggest an openness towards sexual diversity. Consequently, a certain level of acceptance, that might avoid the stigmatization of sexual diversity and might include an affective willingness towards accepting a minority group, can be assumed. However, this openness is qualified to a certain extent as it is associated with a process of normalization. Specifically, the students have the habit to consider the model of heterosexual relationships as the social norm, and to apply this model to LGBT couples.[19] As noted during the research, there is never a deconstruction of gender roles and heteronormativity within the film, and within the research process itself. For example, during the small group discussion, no student questioned the nature of social and intimate relationships, or the origin of certain stereotypes. Rather, there is tendency to emphasize the common features between gay and straight people ("In the end, gay people are normal, just like us!" Olivia, 2015, group discussion). Another interesting point that can be found in the latter examples, is the double role of stereotypes. On the one hand, a stereotype can function as an example to prove the truth about a general statement, and is therefore accepted as a fact. For example, the assumption that men like to watch two lesbians kissing and are appalled by gay men. On the other hand, the students are aware of the fact that stereotypes must not be taken seriously because they are too general and often do not speak the truth of a particular experience: specifically, they cannot speak to, or represent, every single individual. This process of both rejection and acceptance of stereotypes will be discussed further in the following chapter.

A further extremely important element that I needed to take into account across the research, for the evaluation of the students' level of acceptance towards LGBT issues, is the

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[19] See the definition for "heteronormativity" in chapter one (footnote 3).

lack of negative comments or, to put it more succinctly, the political correctness of the students. For the entire course of the conference activity, all the comments made and the questions asked by the students demonstrated curiosity, interest and positivity. This might also apply to the type of school the activity took place in. In fact, in a personal interview, the directors of the movie mentioned that students of VWO (voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs, literally, 'preparatory scholarly education') high schools that usually prepare the students to undertake university studies with the highest level of education, are the most politically correct during the activities that concern sexual diversity. On the other hand, the VMBO students ('preparatory middle-level applied education, the lowest level in Dutch high schools) usually come from a lower social class, have a greater cultural and religious diversity, and tend to offer resistance to LGBT inclusion and acceptance (Tonk and Tonk, 2015, personal interview). This, unfortunately, indicates a social and economic difference of education and nurture based on class. It is very likely that VWO students are taught by both their teachers and parents to be politically correct because that is considered a very important element of politeness. Nevertheless, I do not mean that pupils raised in a low class environment are rude, instead it may indicate a tendency in an upper-middle class setting to show a tolerance towards minorities (that are generally considered victims in need of help by people who are hierarchically and economically superior) that is only present on the surface.

The political correctness of the Hyperion Lyceum (a VWO school) can be described with the Dutch term *schijntolerantie*, which means 'seeming tolerance' (Dewaele et al., 2006, Keuzenkamp, 2011). Seeming tolerance finds its origin in heteronormativity and describes the attitude of most heterosexual people towards homosexuality (these studies have been elaborated in Belgium and in the Netherlands, respectively in 2006 and 2011). Dawaele's and Keuzenkamp's studies have shown that both the Dutch and Belgian public think that LGBT people may live their lives the way they want to live them, as long as they comply with the set of rules developed by the heterosexually dominant society. I do argue that seeming

tolerance is a consequence of the process of normalization that happens in Dutch schools and it is the same factor that prevents the students from applying the knowledge outside the classroom, or that, alternatively, makes the students indifferent to the practical application of the notions learned at school (Keuzenkamp, 2011; Paulhus, 1984). Seeming tolerance allows people to give 'socially desirable answers' (Paulhus, 1984) in order to appear tolerant, but it does imply an automatic mechanism of acceptance that leads to a caring and long relationship with LGBT individuals. This process was clearly visible at the conference with the students of the Hyperion Lyceum, and, as I noted, the teacher really cared about maintaining this atmosphere of tolerance. For example, during the discussion after the film screening, the group of students was debating about social distance (the marginalization of minority groups in social contexts) towards minority groups and most of the students were stating positive and inclusive thoughts regarding accepting LGBT peers.[20] There was, however, a student with a bothered expression on his face who clearly wanted to express an unpopular opinion, but the teacher did not allow him to speak. Without having asked him directly, it is of course difficult to determine whether the teacher ignored this student incidentally or on purpose, but I was able to observe that the teacher had noticed him with a raised hand and an annoyed expression on his face for several minutes, and took the uncomfortable decision of letting somebody else speak instead of him.[21]

The final point to be taken into account in the discussion that will follow this chapter concerns the age of the audience. In the formal interview with Dylan and Lazlo Tonk, they stated that the movie mainly affects a public made of 12-13 years old people. Students of this age have probably had fewer possibilities to discuss or encounter sexual diversity in comparison with older students who, according to directors, have often found the ending predictable. It is important to point out this element because it indicates the most appropriate

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[20] See the definition for "social distance" in the Introduction (footnote 1).
[21] As written in the field notes: "A boy clearly wants to say an unpopular opinion (he is definitely bothered and annoyed), and the teacher is not letting him speak (Ignored him? Avoided him on purpose? Why? Lack of confrontation)."

age to address the topic of sexual diversity. It is one of the suggestions of this thesis that age difference plays a role in how LGBT acceptance might be effected through this film, because viewers who have just began puberty are living a very intense moment of change and particularly sensitive to topic related to sex and sexuality, especially during the first times.

The next chapter will discuss the implications of the research results and will try to answer to the research question, which investigates the role of the educational short movie *Uitgesproken* and the ARES conference itself in raising awareness about LGBT acceptance in Dutch high schools.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The role of Uitgesproken in raising awareness about LGBT acceptance

The main research question of this study is "what role can educational short films play in raising awareness about LGBT acceptance in Dutch high schools?" and in this final chapter I am going to investigate the role of the movie *Uitgesproken* from several different perspectives in order to contribute the findings of this research to improve future similar approaches to challenge modern homophobia and social distance in an educational environment.

My first point of intervention would be to suggest that the short movie explores the topic of homophobia from a distinctively *masculine* perspective: the main protagonists and the writers of the movie are all boys and men and the homophobic attitude illustrates how masculinity is a 'homosocial enactment' (Kimmel, 1994). As Kimmel puts it, "homophobia", in this context, "is the fear that other men will unmask us [men], emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. We are afraid to let other men see that fear" (1994: 214). This fear of homophobic humiliation is clearly depicted in David's character principally when he, with his group of male friends (Bas' girlfriend plays a background role), encounters a gay boy. This depiction, and David's acceptance of Niels' homosexuality at the end of the movie, challenge this masculine fear of homosexual individuals and helps the self-identification of the male audience. The short film demonstrates that a straight boy can be friends with a gay boy and, at the same time, maintain his masculinity.

As stated in the previous chapter, self-identification and relatability are a key element of the movie in terms of raising awareness about homophobia and facilitating LGBT acceptance. The students can relate to a very common problem linked to adolescence and exclusion (social distance) and can project themselves onto the main characters, finding a role model to follow. So far, the movie might seem to work in the process of raising

awareness about LGBT issues, and, as it is possible to see in the survey students completed after the activity, the topic discussed and activity executed in class are highly appreciated by the young audience. However, *Uitgesproken* applies a process of normalization to the 'different' sexuality of Niels that, I believe, works only on the surface. On the one hand, normalizing Niels' homosexuality might make the viewer more open to accept his diversity, since the element that is mainly explored in the film is acceptance within a friendship. On the other hand, as stated by queer theorist Susanne Luhmann (1998: 124), "neither an explicit ethic of anti-homophobia nor goals such as the exploration of queer subjects can ensure the classroom as a safe space for queer students or teachers", especially when the method of discussion has the aim of accepting LGBT individuals simply because 'they are just like us'. Normalization does not challenge the "very processes by which (some) subjects become normalized and others marginalized" (Luhmann, 1998: 122). It does not explore the reasons why a queer person is bullied, considered inferior and/or ignored. Ideally, normalization would work in the following way: given that LGBT subjects do not conform to a heteronormative sexualilty and are consequently considered a minority and different, which is the reason why these individuals are bullied and teased (Butler, 1990), defining them as normal and convincing a heterosexual audience that queer sexualities are regular sexualities as well should automatically work to erase homophobia. It goes without saying that the problem is not solved in this way and that this process often does not work, as stated by Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell in their study "Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect" (1993), in which they show the reemergence of heterosexism and homophobia in queer studies classrooms that threaten to overwhelm queer subjects.

The activity with the students that I have analyzed did not question the origin of either homophobia or bullying in the first place. The reactions to the scene that depicted acts of bullying were seen as mean, intense, and the violence (both verbal and physical) was completely disapproved by the students. Some students defined the main bully (Bas) as

'intimidating', 'scary', and 'ignorant', but no one wondered why Bas was acting in that way.[22] It is true that, on the one hand, showing an act of bullying can raise awareness about LGBT acceptance and can help a heterosexual audience to understand the actual consequences of homophobia faced by queer people in day to day life, but, on the other hand, not discussing the meaning of an act of bullying reinforces the norms of a given culture and hierarchy within an educational environment. In other words, to come back to the process of normalization, I do argue that this lack of focus on the meaning of bullying continues to normalize bullying itself, and leads to a fortification of social hierarchy and heteronormativity. As stated by Elizabeth Meyer (2007: 16), "[s]ince much of the bullying that occurs in schools is discriminatory in nature […], it is clear that these behaviors act to create and support a social hierarchy that privileges mainstream identities and behaviors over marginalized ones".

A further element, which I believe is another direct consequence of normalizing the gay character of the movie, has not been analyzed during the class discussion following the film viewing, and that is the nature of homophobia. Kimmel, in his essay "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity", claims that:

> "[h]omophobia is intimately interwoven with both sexism and racism. The fear – sometimes conscious, sometimes not – that others might perceive us[heterosexual cismen] as homosexual propels men to enact all manner of exaggerated masculine behaviors and attitudes to make sure that no one could possibly get the wrong idea about us " (Kimmel, 1994: 216).

As I mentioned before, *Uitgesproken* offers a clear representation of this fear and solves the problem with the help of the 'good' female character (Stella, the protagonist's girlfriend) who asks David the rhetorical question "What are you afraid of?" (Tonk and Tonk, 2013) implying that there is nothing to be afraid of, since Niels is always the same person as he was

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[22] This was stated by some students during the discussion that followed the film screening and was collected during my participant observation.

before his coming out. However, during the whole movie, there is no character who questions the reason why most of Niels' peers are homophobes and, consequently, if the teacher has no interest in it, there is no input to start a discussion about it within the classroom afterwards. Analyzing the (hetero)sexism that causes homophobia may work to endanger traditional gender ideologies and can lead towards a deconstruction of the polarization of the masculine and the feminine. Moreover, it will help the young audience to understand how both "women and gay men become the 'other' against which heterosexual men project their identities, against whom they stack the decks so as to compete in a situation in which they will always win, so that by suppressing them, men can stake a claim for their own manhood" (Kimmel, 1994: 216).

As I stated in the two previous chapters, another strong characteristic of the film *Uitgesproken* is its non-stereotypical representation of the gay characters, which was highly appreciated by the students who, however, have expressed stereotypical assumptions during the activity in class. This suggests, as I have already stated, that the students are aware of the stereotypes concerning LGBT subjects, and the responses collected illustrate a very attentive use of biased statements on the part of the pupils. The research conducted showed that there is both a rejection and an embrace of stereotypes because, on the one hand, they are often related to discrimination and injustice but, on the other hand, they can serve as a point of reference to prove the truth about a general statement concerting a specific group of people. As stated by Galen Bodenhausen and Jennifer Richeson in the essay "Prejudice, Stereotype and Discrimination" (2010), it is, of course, impossible to establish a universal statement which defines stereotypes either as good or as bad because from one point of view, they "form generally accurate impressions of the social environment […] [and] represent our way of representing the general differences that actually exist between groups", but in contrast, these "noteworthy cognitive and motivational processes can and do introduce systematic bias into the representation of group differences" (Bodenhausen and Richeson, 2010: 367-8).

Consequently, it is very difficult to establish the role of stereotypes in the process of LGBT acceptance because, on the one hand, the "generally accurate impressions" can enhance the differences between the students and LGBT subjects and prevent a kind of acceptance that leads to possible durable affective relationships (ibid., 367). On the other hand, talking about LGBT stereotypes, discussing, and challenging and deconstructing them can facilitate acceptance and create a bond between a straight and a queer student, especially if the biases are examined with queer individuals, who can provide their own experience.

The last issue that has to be taken into account is the possibility that the students might have given socially desirable answers during the discussion that followed the film screening. According to Delroy Paulhus, socially desirable responding can be caused by two factors: "'self-deception', where the respondent actually believes his or her positive self-reports, [and] 'impression management' where the respondent consciously dissembles" (Paulhus, 1984: 599), which means that socially undesirable thoughts are hidden and not expressed on purpose. These two factors are highly influenced by social norms and political correctness and make it difficult to establish a true public opinion about a general topic (ibid.). It is possible to find a consequence of these socially desirable answers in Saskia Keuzenkamp's study about the acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands (2011), where she states that "one important limitation of the information presented [in the analysis] is that it reflects only what people *say* they think in response to a range of statements" (Keuzenkamp, 2011: 31, emphasis in original). According to Keuzenkamp, in order to provide an accurate reasoning about LGBT acceptance, one would have to know how people behave when they encounter gay men and women in practice, which is not always possible. To connect Keuzenkamp's statement to mine, I must admit that I had the chance to observe the reactions and behaviors of the students when they encountered a gay man (Dylan Tonk, the director) or a gay woman (me), which turned out to be positive, open-minded and accepting in both cases. However, it is one thing to show respect to an adult in an educational environment during a didactical

activity, and another to accept and welcome a LGBT peer in a group of teenage friends. Unfortunately, however, given the short time for research I was given during the internship, and the absence of openly queer students among the class involved in the ARES conference, it was not possible for me to further study the use of socially desirable answers given by the students of the Hyperion Lyceum during the activity.

As far as I am concerned, the normalization of the gay characters of the movie, the lack of investigation about the causes of bullying and homophobia during the class discussion, and the political correctness of the students played a major role in reinforcing seeming tolerance towards LGBT individuals. The copious amount of neutral responses to the content shown in the activity and the ability to apply the knowledge learned might suggest a lack of interest in LGBT issues and in everyday acceptance for everyone.[23] Moreover, another possible explanation may be the fact that these students do not see homophobia as a problem concerning themselves, which brings the discussion back to the problem of normalization again. A deep analysis of the reasons and the origins of bullying and homophobia during the class discussion may make these students realize that discrimination is a problem of every single individual and understanding and deconstructing the social norms that cause it may increase their interest in the topic.

As it was possible to see so far, *Uitgesproken* and the ARES conference effectiveness in raising awareness about LGBT acceptance in Dutch high schools seems to be quite variant. I do believe that the movie is a good starting point for a discussion that can reach a wide audience, because it does not reinforce gay stereotypes beyond normalizing certain positions and sexualities, it is told from the straight protagonist's perspective and does not focus on Niels' homosexuality but on the topic of friendship. Moreover, the whole activity is extremely important in educational fields because simply talking about the issue of homophobia and LGBT acceptance automatically raises awareness about being homosexual

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[23] For the complete survey that contains the responses, see Appendix A.

in the society and it can teach the students to respect what is different from the norm that society provides. But since, as Megan Murphy argues, homophobia is a direct consequence of the imposition of certain gender roles by the society, it is crucial to evolve the activity in order to have the possibility to discuss and challenge gender roles. Specifically, because "if homophobia continues to persist without adequate challenge from individuals and organizations that seek to change traditional gender roles, homophobia will continue to reinforce and reproduce those roles, […] [and] gender inequality will remain" which leads the process to be a vicious circle where "society will continue to do gender in ways that facilitate homophobia" (Murphy, 2006: 219).

In conclusion, a possible solution that can constructively help the teachers and the students to fight homophobic bullying and create a safer environment in schools for every single student, and especially for queer students, is either a movie about LGBT acceptance that challenges the traditional gender roles and/or explores the origin of the fear behind homophobia, or a discussion that follows a film like *Uitgesproken* which aims to question the social constructions that lead to discrimination or simply to privileging mainstream identities over marginalized identities. By doing so, it would not only offer an opportunity for the students to think critically about taken-for-granted assumptions about sexuality and gender (like heteronormativity, sexism, gender roles, and homonormativity), it would also facilitate the inclusion of topics about transgender and bisexual identities which, unfortunately, as we have seen so far, have not been taken into account, at least in this context.

Conclusion

Although a recent study (Keuzenkamp, 2011) has established that the Netherlands is the most accepting, tolerant and gay-friendly country, homophobic bullying and violence towards LGBT individuals is still, unfortunately, present in the country (ibid.). As stated by the ILGA and IGLYO report (2006), the most common form of discrimination towards queer people in schools is social distance, namely marginalization. Given the dangerous consequences that this marginalization can have, like depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, the report has also pointed out the importance of fighting social exclusion (Takács, J., ILGA-Europe, & IGLYO, 2006).

This study set out to explore the role of the educational short movie *Uitgesproken* (2013), and the related activity organized by the Global Alliance for LGBT Education (GALE) conducted in Dutch high schools, in raising awareness about LGBT acceptance. With the first empirical findings, collected before the film screening, it was possible to understand how important the visual representations of marginalized realities is for the students when they have to deal with a new topic, such as homophobia, social exclusion and LGBT acceptance. In addition, the short film was highly appreciated because of its focus on friendship and the fear of being excluded by peers that both really touched the students, creating a strong sense of relatability and connection with the main characters. The process of normalization towards the gay characters of the film makes the viewers more open to accept the diversity represented there, and the exploration of homophobia through a male perspective helps the self-identification of the male audience because it challenges the masculine fear that generates homophobia, demonstrating that a straight boy can be friends with a gay boy without 'losing' his masculinity. However, as I argued in the discussion, this process of normalization can only work on the surface and generate a seeming tolerance that does not imply an automatic acceptance towards LGBT individuals. Without questioning the reasons of bullying or of social exclusion performed in the film, the students do not have to

chance to explore the mechanisms of hierarchy and discrimination within peer groups and educational environments (and, by consequence in everyday life). Furthermore, the normalization of the gay characters prevents the students from fully questioning and understanding what makes some identities mainstream and some other identities marginalized, a reflection that, according to several academics quoted in the last chapter, is key to deconstructing and fighting homophobia in a most effective way.

As far as the activity is concerned, it was possible to deduce by some students' comments that having experts who, or testimonies that, are able to provide a knowledge based on their own experience is what further makes the pupils interested in the topic of homophobia and LGBT acceptance. The presence of openly LGBT people at the ARES conference played a great role in raising the interest and curiosity of the students, who felt treated with respect and were happier to learn from somebody else's experience, rather than looking for information on television or the web. This shows how the students appreciated the activity and how relevant it might be. Nevertheless, it is crucial to point out that there is the need to teach these students that an activity like the ARES conference does not only have a didactical purpose and, therefore, the knowledge learned must be applied outside the class environment. Such activity is not about being a 'good student' who is always able to provide the right answer at the right time. It is about raising awareness on homophobic bullying and promoting the social inclusion of LGBT subjects. The problem, however, is that if the activity does not investigate bullying in the first place, it automatically takes it for granted and acts of physical or verbal violence will not end. Furthermore, discussing bullying in general (not only towards LGBT individuals) might increase a potential relatability with the problem for every single bullied student, which can lead the students to create an empathetic bond with people bullied for their marginalized sexuality. It is clear that an activity with the effectiveness of a visual medium that directly speaks to the viewers provides the opportunity for an empathetic reaction and a close understanding of the problem of discrimination.

Basically, a visual component, like the short educational movie *Uitgesproken*, that gives visibility to peer LGBT subjects is a most appropriate way to address the topic of social distancing and acceptance of sexual diversity to an audience of teenagers. On the other hand, as I mentioned in the last chapter is, it is crucial for the sake of the goal of the ARES conference to encourage the teachers, the students, and any other participant to have a discussion that questions the social constructions that lead to discrimination or simply to privileging mainstream identities over marginalized identities.

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Appendix A: The Survey

- Question 1: **The contents of ACM met my expectations**
- Question 2: **The contents of ACM were new for me**
- Question 3: **I will be able to apply the knowledge learned**
- Question 4: **The contents of ACM was organized and easy to follow**
- Question 5: **The materials distributed/presented were pertinent and useful**
- Question 6: **The trainer/speaker was knowledgeable**
- Question 7: **The of comments/debates was good**
- Question 8: **Class participation and interaction were encouraged**
- Question 9: **Adequate time was provided for questions and discussion**
- Question 10: **How do you rate the learning activities overall?**
- Question 11: **What aspects of the learning activities could be improved?**
- Question 12: **Do you have other comments?**

AGE DIFFERENCES

14-16   16-18   19-30   30+

Gender	A	B	C	D		14-16	16-18
Male	11	1	2	3	Male	48%	100%
Female	12	0	2	3	Female	52%	0%
Other	0	0	0	0	Other	0%	0%
Total	23	1	4	6			

1. Expectation	A	B	C	D		14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	9	1	3	5			
Agree	12	0	2	3	agree	88%	100%
Neutral	2	0	0	0	neutral	8%	0%
Disagree	1	0	0	0	disagree	4%	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0			
Total	24	1	5	8			

2. New content	A	B	C	D		14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	1	1	1	0			
Agree	4	0	0	1	agree	21%	100%
Neutral	7	0	0	2	neutral	29%	0%
Disagree	11	0	3	3	disagree	50%	0%
Strongly disagree	1	0	1	2			
Total	24	1	5	8			

3. Able to apply	A	B	C	D		14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	1	1	3	2			
Agree	12	0	2	4	agree	57%	100%
Neutral	10	0	0	2	neutral	43%	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0	disagree	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0			
Total	23	1	5	8			

4. Easy to follow

						14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	16	1	3	6			
Agree	6	0	2	2	agree	92%	100%
Neutral	1	0	0	0	neutral	4%	0%
Disagree	1	0	0	0	disagree	4%	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0			
Total	24	1	5	8			

5. Materials useful

						14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	13	1	2	3			
Agree	9	0	2	4	agree	92%	100%
Neutral	2	0	0	1	neutral	8%	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0	disagree	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0			
Total	24	1	4	8			

6. Good teacher

						14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	8	1	4	6			
Agree	14	0	1	2	agree	92%	100%
Neutral	2	0	0	0	neutral	8%	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0	disagree	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0		0	0			
Total	24	1		5	8			

7. Good debate

						14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	16	1	4	6			
Agree	7	0	1	2	agree	96%	100%
Neutral	1	0	0	0	neutral	4%	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0	disagree	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0			
Total	24	1	5	8			

8. Class participation

						14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	15	1	5	6			
Agree	5	0	0	2	agree	83%	100%
Neutral	4	0	0	0	neutral	17%	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0	disagree	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0			
Total	24	1	5	8			

9. Time for questions/debate

						14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	10	1	2	6			
Agree	5	0	1	2	agree	63%	100%
Neutral	4	0	1	0	neutral	17%	0%
Disagree	4	0	1	0	disagree	21%	0%
Strongly disagree	1	0	0	0			
Total	24	1	5	8			

10. General evaluation

							14-16	16-18
Strongly agree	10	1	3	5				
Agree	14	0	2	3		**agree**	100%	100%
Neutral	0	0	0	0		**neutral**	0%	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0		**disagree**	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0				
Total	24	1	5	8				

11. Recommendations

							14-16	16-18
Number of	23	1	4	5			70%	3%

12. Other comments

							14-16	16-18
Number of	15	1	2	3			71%	5%