Being in / Being out

Negotiating faith and homosexuality at the intersection of evangelical church and liberal society

Master thesis Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship

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Foreword

Several people have been of major importance to me while writing this thesis and executing my fieldwork. I would like to use this opportunity to thank them. First of all Cees van Baalen and Brenda Ottjes, directors of COC Friesland and Tûmba, for giving me the opportunity to perform this research and to publish it on their media channels. Knowing that my research has direct societal use means a lot to me. I also want thank Annalisa Butticci, my supervisor, who supported and inspired me with critical feedback during the last nine months of preparing and writing this thesis.

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Finally, I want to thank my dear family members and loved ones. I owe many thanks to my mother for her support, her listening ear when I needed it, and her endless willingness to take care of my daughter. I am also grateful to my partner Wout for his love and warmth, for babysitting to give me time to study, for proofreading my thesis and for inspiring me to study anthropology. And at last my daughter Lowys. I am grateful for her heartwarming smiles and very much needed distraction during the many hours of writing. Without them, I would never have reached this point in my life.

Chapter one - Introduction

Anna, a woman in her sixties with blond curly hair and a friendly expression, looks at me with a big smile on her face and states that she is the happiest woman alive. Anna doesn't stick to all kinds of rules that come with religion. She has a personal relation with God, and 'simply' follows Jesus. To the question what she thinks of homosexuality, she has a simple answer. Anna raises both her index fingers and hits them sideways against each other, as a way to symbolize two penises bumping onto each other, and says: "you see? This won't work".

I met Anna and her husband after service in an evangelical church. We had been talking for about an hour, and they had explained me everything about Jesus, heaven and hell. Anna was eager to convert me to Christianity. She felt sorry for me that I didn't know Jesus, and that there was a chance that I wouldn't be allowed in heaven. Anna therefore offered to buy me a Bible, just so that I could have a look at it. Her response to homosexuality is a very simplistic and perhaps offensive way to explain the issue, but it is nevertheless interesting, for several reasons. First of all, it captures the argument that two people of the same sex are not apt for each other *because* they cannot reproduce. Anna believes that God created men and women for each other, and that only within the formal boundaries of marriage, they may enjoy sex. Secondly, her response forms a stark contrast with secular ideas about homosexuality. Especially in the Dutch context, where gay acceptance has become a trademark of tolerance after it was the first nation to allow same-sex couples formal marriage. Anna, and many other evangelicals, resist such liberal ideas about (homo)sexuality. Evangelicalism is even known for its hostility towards non-heterosexuality (Aune 2009, 39; Walton 2006, 2). But also in these church communities, there are individuals who deal with homosexual feelings. Therefore, I wonder how, within an environment wherein homosexuality is often believed to be a sin or an abomination, homosexuals construct their life and their personhood. Also, I am curious to know what the influence of a gay-rights front running nation is on gay evangelicals and their communities. The aim of this thesis is therefore to describe the sexual discourse in evangelical communities, and to illustrate how evangelical homosexuals negotiate their faith and their sexuality. The central research question reads:

How do evangelical homosexuals in the liberal and secular Dutch society negotiate their sexuality and their faith?

This question indicates that the research focuses on the realms of sexuality, faith and society and on the instances where they challenge, intersect and contradict each other. Anna's response, but also many television programs and other media articles, may lead to the assumption that a homosexual orientation and membership to a Christian community are incompatible identities. In this thesis I will investigate and challenge this notion and go beyond oppositional framings of homosexuality and faith, or church and society. I will look for complexities, ambivalences and nuances by unfolding the life histories of evangelical homosexuals and by unraveling power, authority and resistance within these communities. The leading argument that I will develop in this paper is that evangelical communities prescribe a normative discourse of both identity and sexuality which affects and shapes the identification process of homosexual members. There are several mechanisms that constitute and uphold these discourses, both on authoritarian ground (church leaders, Bible and God) and on communitarian ground (fellow Christians). Homosexuals, by their very presence, resist a heteronormative discourse. And as a result of the conflict between their sexuality and their community, homosexual evangelicals negotiate these identities. The consequences hereof are diverse and lead to three subject positions; gay and not religious, religious and not gay, or gay and religious. This latter position indicates that there is resistance amongst gay evangelicals against the dominant sexual discourse. And influenced by such individuals and societal changes, alternative sexual discourses gain influence.

1.2 Theoretical approach

Before presenting the ethnographic research findings, I will outline the theoretical approach as a way to introduce the main authors and their contributions, as well as the academic lens and -relevance.

1.2.1 Post-structuralism

A major influence to the theoretical approach of this thesis is the philosophical school of post-structuralism. A post-structuralist approach investigates the nature of reality and argues that to understand a theme it is necessary to study both the topic itself and the systems of knowledge that produce it. As the semantics of the term indicate, post-structuralism is a

response to structuralism. Structuralism has its roots in linguistics and came to understand language not only through the outcome of historical changes, but also through a focus on its underlying structures and as part of a system (Olssen 2003, 189). Signs, such as words, were then defined in relation to other sings. This relational, systemic and 'structured' understanding of language had broader consequences for the social sciences. Structure came to be seen as "the way in which the parts were dependent upon the whole, […] the parts could only be understood in relation to the structure" (ibid. 190). In other words, parts were considered to not be understood in isolation of the structure where they were part of. Structure then, was seen as universal, coherent and omnipresent. As a consequence, a structuralist approach challenges the notion of a sovereign, rational subject. Although this latter concern was shared by Foucault, he, amongst some of his contemporaries, is often identified as one of the founding fathers of post-structuralism (albeit not by himself). Foucault transcended and even rejected structuralism. According to Olssen (2003, 192), one instance of his rejection was the notion of a universal and ahistorical structure. Post-structuralists would rather argue that structures are different in any historical period and in all cultures; they are specifically bound to time and place. Furthermore, Foucault's post-structuralism rejected the prioritizing of "structure over the parts, or the preexistence of the whole over the parts, whereby the units can be explained once the essence of the structure is uncovered" (ibid. 193). Shortly stated, Foucault rejects the notion of a singular essence, of linear processes, of universals and coherence, and argues in favor of endless varieties, complexities, layers and nuances. Such an understanding can be seen as the main framework of post-structuralism. Underlying post-structuralism, and this research, is the fundamental structure-agency debate, which concerns the question what determines our behavior: structures (of society, church, institutions, etc.) or our individual agency. Structure and agency are often framed in opposition to each other, in the sense that it is believed that either one is of major influence (e.g. structuralism). Through a post-structuralist lens, however, it is possible to transcend this conundrum and see structure and agency as equally important and mutually influencing processes. This and Foucault's preference for a focus on micro-practices of lived experience (Olssen 2003, 192) emphasize the relevance of a post-structural approach for this thesis. The complexity and ambivalence of lived experience, structures and agencies, can as such be demonstrated and unraveled. The main authors referred to in this paper all support this approach. I will now introduce them briefly and discuss their conceptual and theoretical contribution to and relevance for the topic of discussion.

1.2.2. Power and Foucault

It may be clear that Foucault's philosophy forms a common theme throughout this thesis. His works on power and authority, and more specifically *The History of Sexuality vol. 1* (1978) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975), form his most important contribution here. The above explained implications of post-structuralism are decisive in Foucault's analysis of power. But before I outline his thoughts on power, it is instructive to describe his view on discourse, a view that is central in his further theories. For Foucault, discourses – "the conversations and dissertations on a particular subject" (Wehr 2003, 60) – are always present, in different topics and in different varieties. There is not one discourse per topic or issue, but, rather, there are always multiple discourses. According to Foucault (1978, 100): "we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies". Discourse then, is socially and contextually determined, and is contingent upon time and place. It is both an instrument and an effect of power, and it both distributes and produces power. Power, according to Foucault, is therefore omnipresent:

> "not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (ibid. 93).

Thus rather than seeing power as a coercive force induced by a ruler, Foucault understands power as multilayered and multidimensional, restricting and empowering, and flowing both bottom-up and top-down. Power, as such, is not only held by people in leadership positions, but also by those who form their fellowships. For the scope of this thesis, this means that I will analyze the webs of power in evangelical communities which form discourses on identity and sexuality, and the effects this has on the individuals who feel unable to adhere.

1.2.3. On personhood

Whereas Foucault focuses on the multidimensionality of power, Braidotti and Butler attribute this approach to personhood. They argue that personhood is fragmented and constructed in relation to power. Rather than the term 'identity' I will use the terms personhood and subjectivity because these concepts refer to the flexibility of the human

condition. In chapter one I do refer to the term identity. This is because it is an 'emic' category; it is the way wherein being evangelical Christian is described within these communities.

An important contribution of Butler to the study of sex(uality) and gender, is her rejection of the binary frames of sex and gender as belonging *naturally* to a person. She argues that "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts there would be no gender at all" (1999, 178). Butler therefore asserts that discourses give gender and sexuality the effect of the natural. The construction of these categories is, according to Butler, instituted by relations of power, rather than by nature. Therefore, she refers to these acts of gender as performative; it is in fact the performance of gender that creates the reality of these binary categories. I am aware that this argument may be controversial in evangelical and other Christian communities. Yet in this paper, I will attribute this concept to the broader understanding of social constructs, and more specifically to the idea of a Christian identity and to heteronormativity. Furthermore, what is important for this research is that Butler takes her argument further by focusing on the consequences of deviance to fixed categories. These consequences will be explained throughout this thesis. Rather than challenging evangelical truths, I will thus demonstrate how they are constructed and focus on its effects.

Also of major importance for this thesis is Rosi Braidott's concept of 'nomadic subjectivity' (2011). Braidotti also sees subject formation as a result of power relations, and focuses on the flexibility of personhood. She frames this flexibility as 'nomadic': "the figuration of the nomad renders an image of the subject in terms of a nonunitary and multilayered vision, as a dynamic and changing entity" (2011, 5). Braidotti, and also Butler, see personhood as a fragmented set of belongings, rather than a static or coherent entity. One is not frozen in a social context, but engages in different, and changing, relations of power. This theory is described in detail in the third chapter and functions as a framework to analyze the trajectories of the homosexual evangelicals that I have interviewed for this thesis. A post-structuralist understanding of social processes thus forms the basis of these theories, and, hence, of this thesis.

1.2.4. Homonationalism and the Dutch context

In the analysis of my research data, I explicitly seek for the effects of and connections to the Dutch society as the larger structure where participants are embedded in and influenced by. In the next paragraph I describe the research location and population, but here I will focus on a conceptual implication of the Dutch context, namely homonationalism.

During my fieldwork I found that there are changes in the vangelical sexual discourse. These changes are by several participants ascribed to a broader culture wherein homosexuality is increasingly normalized. The Dutch society is particularly interesting in this respect, for liberal ideas about sexuality have become a national reputation. After the Netherlands was the first nation to allow same-sex couples formal marriage, the country is commonly known for its front-running position on the gay rights discourse. This moment is often heralded as a milestone for equal rights for sexual minorities and overcoming sexual stigma (Andersson 2013, 246; Jivraj and De Jong 2011, 146). Over the years, homo-emancipation became a pet issue in the Netherlands. This is for example reflected in formal policies: high-school education about homosexuality is mandatory, and subsidies are provided to further gay-emancipation. The final goal is to ban discrimination against LGBTQI's (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer and Intersex) and to create a safe environment for all LGBTQI's in which they can express themselves. Much has been established by such means, yet there are still incidents to recall which show that LGBTQI discrimination remains prevalent. One recent example is the severe assault and beating of a homosexual couple in Arnhem by 'Moroccan'[1] youngsters. There was huge national commotion after this incident, and as a protest, politicians and other pre-eminent men and women walked hand in hand with a person of the same sex to show their indignation[2]. Another such example is the commotion that arose when a student was refused internship by a Christian employer, because the student was openly gay and had a boyfriend[3]. What these events have in common is that the perpetrator is in both examples a 'cultural other' that is identified as a threat towards gay-emancipation; in the first example it were 'Moroccan' youngsters, in the second incident Christian beliefs. Interesting then is that the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science (OCW) formed a clause on sexual diversity. Special attention is paid to religious and ethnic minority groups, as the following is stated on the website of the ministry; "the more religious one is, the bigger the chance he or she will not accept LGBTI's. There is also strong resistance amongst bicultural Netherlanders"[4]. These bicultural people are in the next sentence defined as Turkish and Moroccan Netherlanders. The imperative of the ministry is to universalize certain values amongst the different components of the pluralist and multicultural

[1] http://nos.nl/artikel/2166201-mishandelde-homo-s-arnhem-we-hadden-beter-onze-mond-kunnen-houden.html
[2] https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/04/03/hand-in-hand-tegen-mishandeling-homos-a1553006
[3] https://www.trouw.nl/home/bedrijf-mag-homostagiair-niet-weigeren~ada55988/
[4] https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/lhbti-emancipatie/inhoud/accepteren-van-lhbtis-in-demaatschappij My translation

Dutch society, thereby deploying the gay rights discourse as a symbol of modernity (Ticktin 2011, 138). The inquiry of the ministry indicates certain 'homonationalist' values. This term was coined by Jasbir Puar (2007) for the rise of nationalism in American LGBTQI communities, and the use of American LGBTQI acceptance to promote a unified identity of a tolerant USA. And although the concept of homonationalism initially refers to formulating a homonormative measure as a means to distinguish the West from its Islamic 'others,' this othering principle can as well be attributed to orthodox Christian communities which are equally framed as a threshold to full emancipation of sexual minorities. This is illustrated both by the described occurrences, and by the ministry's clause; both on the governmental level and on the societal level discrimination of sexual minorities is deemed undesirable or 'un-modern'. Puar (2007, 2) also uses the term national 'homonormativity' to describe homonationalism. The question is then how, within a religious community that is primarily heteronormative, and a national context that is also homonormative, evangelical homosexuals negotiate their faith and their sexuality. In the fourth chapter I will analyze the effects of this tendency and explore the intersection of church and society.

1.3 location and population

I performed my fieldwork in the Dutch province of Friesland. Friesland is located in the North of the Netherlands and is a predominantly rural province. The capital city is Leeuwarden, the biggest urban region with around 100.000 inhabitants. And although there are several other small cities, Friesland is a rather extensive and thinly populated part of the Netherlands. The participants and churches are spread throughout the province, and come from both rural and urban regions.

The Netherlands is historically seen a predominantly Christian country, in which the main denominations are Roman-Catholic and a large range of different protestant denominations (though mainly *PKN, hervormd* and *gereformeerd*). Friesland is a particularly protestant province since, according to the Dutch bureau for statistics (CBS), in 2014, 15% of the Friesian population was affiliated with the PKN (Protestant Church in the Netherlands), 7,4% with the *hervormde kerk*, and 8,4% with the *gereformeerde kerk*, while only 5,5% of the population was member of the Roman-Catholic church (CBS 2015, 5). Evangelicalism is not a historically embedded denomination, and is often not represented in statistics. With the term evangelicalism I refer to both Baptist and evangelical communities. This is first of all because Baptism in the Netherlands is an evangelical denomination. Although there are

differences, their theology and ecclesiology are pretty much the same. The Baptist union also refers to their denomination as evangelical on its website[5].

Evangelicalism is characterized by the mission of evangelism, the 'born again' experience and a belief in the authority of the Bible as God's revelation to humanity (Walton 2006, 3). Their ideas about faith are therefore rather orthodox. This orthodoxy is reflected in ideas about sexuality, for sexuality is often viewed as something that may only occur within a formal marriage between a man and a woman. Furthermore, evangelical churches often have growing membership rates (CBS 2015, 5, Van Der Bie 2008, 15). This growth is by several participants ascribed to the lively service, the mental support network, and the high degree of social inclusion. According to De Hart (2014, 67), mainly young orthodox-protestant church members shift towards a church with more lively, warm, communal, positive and dynamic service, because these Christians want to live according to the Bible, while they "keep up with the times". Evangelical service is precisely that. When entering the church hall before service, one sees many youngsters and families with young children. Many people know each other and greet each other in a jovial way. I often observed these interactions, and it occurred to me that the church community is a tight social network. Service itself is reminiscent of a pop-concert, with dimmed daylight and a band playing on a stage with colored lights. Johan, a church member, explained that churches have to be culturally relevant in order to keep their members involved. This resonates with the observation of Klassen (2014, 24) that "it is becoming increasingly obvious that a religious organization unwilling to engage in more popular forms of information sharing and experience will lose its influence on practitioners". As such, evangelical churches apply an interesting combination of 'modern' techniques and orthodox beliefs. They thereby challenge the boundaries of modernity and secularization.

Secularization is often viewed as a sign of modernity, or something that comes along with modernity, since strong religiosity is viewed as something of the past (Kennedy 2005 31; Cannell 2010, 87). Religion is then seen as backwards or 'medieval', while modernity is viewed as progression, rationality, the individual choice to detach from religion, and the emancipation of sexual minorities (Kennedy 2005, 32; Argyrou 2005). And although scholars do not exactly agree to a definition of secularization, a leading principle in the notion of the secular is that it is signaled by a diminishing legitimacy of religion, and is characterized by declining church membership and attendance (Cannell 2010; Habermas 2006, 4). This is a continuing process which is very prevalent in the Dutch context, as the Netherlands is seen as

[5] http://baptisten.nl/over/wie-zijn-baptisten

the second most secular country of the world (Sengers 2015, 11). The Dutch bureau for statistics (CBS) reported that in 2014 only 50,8 percent of the Dutch population called him or herself religious, a number that is decreasing every year (CBS 2015, 3). The biggest decrease is visible amongst young people (ages 18-35) and higher educated people (CBS 2015, 8). Yet this image of decreasing social legitimacy of the church does not fully reflect the existence or presence of the variety in churches, nor does it represent the religious communities that contradict these expectations. Evangelicalism is a denomination that contradicts the expectations of both secularization and modernity; their membership rates are growing, also amongst young and highly educated people, and their convictions towards sexual diversity are not in line with ideas that are often characterized as 'modern'. This makes the intersection of church and society an interesting subject of study.

The research participants are all related to evangelical churches. I interviewed three heterosexual members, three church leaders (two vicars and one pastor), two Christians who advocate for LGBTQI acceptance, and ten individuals who deal(t) with homosexual feelings and evangelical Christian faith. I chose to focus on homosexuality rather than the full LGBTQI group. This is first of all because I have only spoken to, and mainly spoken about homosexuality and therefore I cannot say much about transsexuals or queers. But it is also because I found that homosexuality is a different issue, because it is mentioned in the Bible whereas transsexuality isn't. However, a major argument that is made by evangelicals to disapprove homosexuality has to do with the order of God's creation and a dichotomy of men and women, and masculinity and femininity. Transsexuals on one hand transgress these boundaries, but on the other hand they often change their sex from one end of the scale to the other; from man to woman or vice versa. Thereby they do not necessarily violate this dichotomy. There are thus many parallels between homosexuality and gender issues, but I will not pay further attention to it for the reasons I just mentioned.

1.4 Methods

During my fieldwork, I used and triangulated several ethnographic research methods. Namely recorded (oral history) interviews, participant observations, informal conversations and online interviews. All these methods have been deployed under the umbrella method of engaged ethnography.

I performed this research at the request of a gay-rights organization, COC Friesland. As I am involved with this NGO, and I am not religious myself, I cannot claim to be objective

or value-free. Rather, I am aware that my own upbringing in a liberal and non-Christian family (although I went to a Sunday school at the *doopsgezinde* church – a church where already in the 1980's gay couples were allowed to marry and fully participate) undeniably formed my ideas about religion and sexuality and shaped my image of Christian people as 'the other'. In this sense I am part of the polarized worlds of orthodox church and liberal society. Furthermore, I do voluntary education work about LGBTQI discrimination. It would therefore be naïve to say that I am a completely unbiased outsider. But then, in the end, who isn't biased? And I think this and my indignation haven't formed a barrier to a comprehensive ethnographic research. Rather, quoting Laura Nader, I would say that this normative impulse leads me to ask "important questions about a phenomenon that would not be asked otherwise, or to define a problem in a new context" (1972, 285). Nader later asserts that "it is the anthropologist who, by virtue of his populist values, may be able to define the role of citizen-scholar – a science of man for man" (1972, 293). As my research project is conducted at the request of an NGO for LGBT-rights and an anti-discrimination office, and will be published on their websites, I hope to fulfill this role of the citizen-scholar who places social justice issues in a new context. My aim is mainly to educate, and thereby contribute to the public debate about this subject, and to give a social critique of the polarizing discourses of church and society in a secular nation. Low and Merry (2010, 208-209) identify this as features of engaged anthropology.

1.4.1 Data collecting

I conducted life history interviews with ten participants who deal(t) with homosexual feelings and an evangelical Christian belief. Their narratives form the primary data of this thesis and are predominantly described in chapter three. A life history includes the aspects of life that participants see as the essence of their process and the parts they want to pass on to others: "it highlights the most important influences, experiences, circumstances, issues, themes and lessons of a lifetime" (Atkinson 1998, 7). It therefore resonates perfectly with my research objective to contextualize the personal stories of evangelical homosexuals. I got in touch with these individuals through different channels. I knew some people via COC Friesland, and 'Wijdekerk.nl,' an online platform about Christian LGBT's, published a call for participants, which provided me with some contacts. But most important was the 'snowball-effect'; I knew a few people who introduced me to others. I figured that the 'gay Christian' or 'gay evangelical' scene is a world on itself, many people knew each other, or knew about each other. This made it easy for me to get in touch with participants. I

interviewed most participants once, and I met Hilde three times for an interview, and met with Niels twice; once for an interview, and once to visit service together.

Besides the life histories, I conducted ethnographic interviews with three evangelical church members; Johan, Hendrik and Sophia. The aim of these interviews was to get an understanding of their beliefs and to make them explain what they believe and why they believe certain things or act in certain ways. These interviews were semi-structured; I had an idea of what I wanted to discuss, according to a topic list, but I did not prepare specific questions. During these interviews I used the method as described by James Spradley (1979, 58-59), who views the ethnographic interview as a kind of friendly conversation, albeit with a more purposeful questioning. I visited participants in a place of their choice, as a way to make them feel more comfortable in their surroundings.

In addition, to gain a broader understanding of evangelical life and convictions, I visited six Sunday services in three evangelical churches. Before these visits I contacted the churches to explain my purpose and ask permission for a visit and an interview. I was welcome for a visit in two churches, of which one was willing to schedule an interview. This church became the most important church for my fieldwork. I visited four services there and was also welcome to join a gathering where members discussed the societal relevance of the church. The pastor and vicar, Chris and Justin, were very open and welcoming. I had the opportunity to hold several informal conversations with them, and I held two interviews with them; one at the beginning of my fieldwork, and one at the end as a way to explain and check my research findings. The third church I visited together with Johan, who I had met in the church of Chris and Justin. Johan is a heterosexual member, and we had a chat during the societal relevance gathering. He invited me to join him to a service where he would be preaching. Interesting was that because I came along with a respected evangelical, my status seemed to change and people were eager to talk to me. The church we visited was a small community, and because we arrived early and left late I had the chance to get in touch with many visitors. They gave me a valuable peek into their life and their beliefs. Also during the other visits to services I had the opportunity to hold informal conversations with church members which gave me a lot of information about evangelical life and the differing opinions about my research topic. An issue with participant observations is however that it is always “ethically challenging” in that we, as researchers, are looking for information that mainly insiders know about, making us constantly maneuvering “in a luminal state between overt and covert research” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 214). I noticed that when I explained my research topic some visitors seemed to shy away from a conversation. But I felt that it was

necessary to be overt as soon as I could, for reasons of consent. Sometimes I felt as if I was infiltrating in the safe environment of church. One church also rejected my request for a visit for this reason. This reminded me that I am an outsider, who is researching a controversial and sensitive topic. For privacy reasons I do not mention which churches I have visited, and which churches rejected me. All participants partook anonymous, except for Miranda and Eus who gave their explicit permission to mention their real names. Miranda and Eus are Christians who explicitly disagree with heteronormativity in evangelical communities, and Christian church in general. I interviewed Eus in a Facebook chat, and Miranda on the phone. Other sources of data are websites and books.

1.5 Structure

This thesis is structured into three main chapters. In the first chapter I will explain what it entails to be an evangelical church member. Here I will describe the power mechanisms that construct the Christian identity discourse and the sexual discourse. This chapter rests mainly on participant observations and informal conversations and is supported by theories on power, authority and identity. In chapter three I build on the knowledge from chapter two to illustrate the effects of evangelical discourses on homosexual members. I will describe the subject positions where homosexual evangelicals navigate towards. This chapter rests mainly on the life histories of homosexual participants and theories of identity and subjectivity. The fourth chapter relates these findings to the Dutch context and provides an account of resistance and change in evangelical communities. For this chapter, the data is mainly collected from secondary sources (people telling about others), media and Facebook interviews. Thus whereas chapter two focuses on structures, chapter three and four focus on agency and resistance against these structures. Chapter five contains a conclusion and a discussion of the academic and societal relevance of the research.

I have been provided with many theological arguments about why homosexuality is seen as an undesirable sexual orientation. I will however not focus on the theological implications of my research theme. This is first of all because the explanation of Bible texts is sensitive hermeneutic matter, and I am not a theologian, nor a Christian. As such I don't feel entitled to discuss theological matters. As an anthropologist I will solely discuss the social context and implications of my research theme.

Chapter two – Being a Christian

"We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."
Holy Bible, Romans 6:4, New International Version (2011)

The aim of this chapter is to explain what it entails to become an evangelical church member and to pursue an 'identity in Christ', and I will discuss the sexual discourses in evangelical churches. Evangelicals often acquire their Christian identity during their youth. It is thus from this context that they negotiate their sexuality and their faith. Comprehending evangelical life is of major importance to understand the complexity of coming out as gay in this environment, because the (hetero)normative character of the Christian lifestyle hampers an easy coming out. The analytical gaze in this chapter is mostly on authority and power relations, and the forthcoming shaping of dominant discourses on identity and sexuality. To illustrate how this works, I will first outline what it entails to be a church member. Thereafter I will argue that this identity is performative, as the reiteration of this social construct by members and preachers creates its existence. Theories of Foucault on power, and Butler (1999) on personhood form the main conceptual framework in this chapter.

2.1 A Christian identity – a new life

The above mentioned Bible text is written on a card Hilde received from her church when she was baptized 24 years ago, at the age of 16. Hilde showed me pictures from this day in her photo album, depicting herself in a white dress, surrounded by other teenagers who were being baptized that same day. She experienced this as a ritual of weight, but also as something that was a matter of course in her life as a Christian. In the community Hilde was a member of, people can only be baptized when they are considered adults, a policy that is common in evangelical churches. As the Bible text indicates, being baptized is a symbolic representation for dying and resurrecting in Christ, and results in a 'new life'. This new life often starts with a born-again experience, which entails the acknowledgement that God is your heavenly Father and that Jesus is your savior who was crucified as the ultimate sacrifice for your sins. For some Christians this can be a memorable event wherein they believe to be touched by God. For others, it is less tangible but they remember it as a moment of insight that persuaded them to get baptized within the community they were already involved. Chris,

an evangelical vicar, explained the relation between being born again and being baptized as following: “[baptizing] is an external symbol of an inner reality that has already taken place”. Before people are baptized they are an aspirant-member of the community. In this phase they visit church regularly and are increasingly involved in the community. Baptizing is a rite of passage, which makes people a ‘true’ Christian and an officially committed member. Yet to become a baptized member, one has to adopt a lifestyle that is in accordance with the norms that the church authorities deem apt for a ‘true’ Christian. This entails for example monogamy, celibacy until marriage, no lying, no stealing, and, most importantly for this research, no same-sex intercourse. This results in a relatively homogenous fellowship of like-minded Christians who are all aware of, and agree to the terms and conditions of membership. The new Christian life is centered on the mission to expand the Kingdom of God by spreading the good news (evangelism) and through upholding an attitude of modesty and care for other people. This mission is believed to be in Jesus’ legacy and is based on what evangelicals call a personal relation to God. One thing that has been emphasized by many (ex) members, and during service and other evangelical gatherings is that this Christian identity is to be seen as a primary identity, and that the relation to God is to be considered the most important relation of all. Being born-again and baptized, and accepting a new life and a forthcoming new identity, then has huge implications for the social life of Christians. They consider themselves to be new human beings within a new life and a new identity, who have to resocialize themselves within this new context. Crucial to demonstrate the relevance of this identity shift is that people tend to shape their new life together with Christian ‘bothers and sisters’, and therefore erase all, or aspects, of their previous life which are considered incompatible with their new, Christian identity. Jildou for example expressed her indignation about her mother who was troubled by her radically changing lifestyle after she was born again. They became less close, and she also broke with most habits and friends from her previous life. Abandoning this Christian life again then has a dramatic and profound impact for homosexual born again Christians.

2.1.1 Official authority

The Christian identity discourse is a result of various forms of power that discipline evangelicals. These power mechanisms are manifested in authoritarian and communitarian aspects of evangelical life, which together form a field of “polymorphous” (Foucault 1978) power relations. Here I will explain the authoritarian aspect, and in the next paragraph the communitarian aspect.

With authoritarian power I refer to the power that is held by church leaders and which is based on the Bible and, thereby, God. These institutions are leading in the construction of evangelical beliefs about a 'true' Christian identity. An important means of control herein is Sunday service. During service, members are instructed and inspired about how to shape their beliefs and their life. They are for example encouraged to discover their gifts and talents, to look after people in need and to honor God and others who deserve it. Service and other gatherings as such have a function of educating people about how to be a good Christian. This is by three ex-members referred to as 'brainwashing' and 'indoctrination', while current members explain it as finding inspiration and truth. In both instances it is however clear that service is a performance of authority. The vicar is believed to be consumed by the Holy Spirit while he preaches. This gives him major authority, and from this almost divine position, he conveys his version of truth to the audience and shapes evangelical discourses.

The relation between power and truth as found in evangelical communities is exemplary for Foucault his line of thought on this matter. According to Foucault (1978), "those who are seen to be 'experts' are those who can speak the truth." The vicar is, obviously, seen as an expert in interpreting the Bible and God's will. His version of faith is therefore commonly accepted as the truth, and his ideas about a sound Christian identity are widely applied. In addition to the vicar, the main authority is God. He is seen as the absolute expert, as the heavenly Father who has a monopoly position on knowing the Truth. And although believing in God is a matter of faith, for He is not an embodied person, His power is evident. Evangelicals believe that they have a personal relation to God, which forms a looming thread in everything they do. It shapes their everyday life and behaviors. God's authority can then be contemplated as real for its effects are visible and real. One example of the direct effect of God's power is that evangelicals believe that they are able to directly receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Van Klinken 2015, 9). Thus not only the vicar can be consumed by the Holy Spirit, also members can receive it. One day I was sharing a ride to church with Johan, an enthusiastic and creative man in his fifties, who sees being Jesus' hands as his life assignment. He told me that when he prays he often speaks in tongues; a language that is believed to be gifted by the Holy Spirit. To me it sounds like jabbering, but Johan explained that it can be a real language, which he has not studied but which is gifted to him. For Johan, this confirms his personal relation to God; God speaks to Johan through the Bible, and through the language of tongues, Johan is able to speak back to God. Also during one service, the vicar preached about such gifts and the miracles it may create. It is thus a common believe that both members and leaders can become consumed with the Holy Spirit.

This indicates that there is little hierarchy between members and leaders. The vicar is "in principle only a first among equals" (Asamoah-Gyandu 2005, 96), as he is not the only one who can speak to God and receive His gifts and messages, but all members are equal in this respect. The Dutch word for vicar in these communities is therefore *voorganger,* which means as much as 'first person' or 'leader'. The crucial difference between the vicar and the members is however that the vicar is considered to be an expert about God's word. And however real the effects of God's power may be, his authority runs through human interpretations, and mainly through people in positions of authority who educate members about how God would like humans to be and to behave. For that reason, the vicar has a leading position in the production of truth and thereby guides members in the construction of their beliefs, behaviors, and ultimately, their identity.

Yet the notion of power and authority is more complex, as it runs not only through individuals in a leadership position, but also through those who agree to dominant discourse. Foucault (1978) therefore understood power in a more dispersed way. It is, he said, "polymorphous": something that takes many shapes, and invades all aspects of life, rather than something imposed by one ruler. The polymorphous notion of power relations shows that the community of evangelicals is equally powerful in constructing discourse and controlling members.

2.1.2. The community

Besides the official authorities, the community is an equally important mechanism of discipline and control. As I already mentioned shortly, an important aspect to a Christian identity and lifestyle is membership to a community. A Christian identity is therefore usually a social construct, meaning that it is not only formed through the Bible and the church authorities, but also through fellow members. In the communities I visited there is great emphasis on the community as a social network. Several participants explained that the church even forms (or formed) their primary social network. They feel connected to one another, because they share a fundamental aspect of their being; their faith. Chris, the evangelical vicar, explained the role of members as a "common priesthood" (*algemeen priesterschap*), meaning that "all Christians have a function in building their home". That is, they all construct the church and the community through activities, as "one body, one people". According to Chris, this involvement creates a certain solidarity and togetherness, which he finds special and intriguing. Maria, an ex-member, explained that the longer she was involved in the community, the more she became absorbed by it. She filled her days with activities

related to church, together with other church members. And when she was not in or around the church building, she visited friends whom she knew from church. Even when cycling around she found herself singing songs from church. She really enjoyed this life, as she felt so strongly connected to other members. Several other participants told comparable stories. In all these stories it became clear to me that evangelicals usually pursue a Christian identity as described above, and that they strengthen each other in accomplishing the traits that belong to this identity. As they all agree on the basics of this lifestyle, there is a rather normative common sense notion about how one should behave to live in accordance to the Bible and God's will. And members not only seem to stimulate one another to grow in this identity, they also seem to control each other whether they do it correctly. And if one wanders off from the thin line of correct behavior, they are encouraged to confess their 'sins' to God and to the community so that they can be forgiven. Dieuwke for example, who is now an ex-member, confessed her lesbian feelings to the youth leader in her church when she first discovered these feelings at the age of thirteen. The youth leader appraised her honesty, and offered his help in praying these feelings away so that she would not engage in sinful homosexual behavior. Another example of the support and guarding of desired behavior was given by Hilde, who was an enthusiastic Christian during her teens. She had her misgivings about other members' sincerity, and started publishing articles in the church magazine about how a true Christian ought to behave. Both examples illustrate the strong normativity of evangelical communities which is affirmed by both fellow members and people in a formal leadership position. This guarding of the self and each other, and ultimately by the all-seeing God resembles a micro-version of the panopticon as Foucault (1975) theorized. Although Foucault focuses on macro-level societies, evangelical communities can be seen as a micro-level society because there are people in positions of power who have a certain control over the members, they have rather clear and strict policies of in- and exclusion, and these communities are often the only, or primary, social network of its members. These churches are, as many participants emphasized, a "*wereldje*"; which means as much as a 'small world', or a subculture. The panopticon as designed by Jeremy Bentham assumes that people behave differently when they know that they may be watched. He designed a round prison model with a tower in the center where only one guard is necessary to observe all inmates. Knowing that they are, or might be, watched would determine their behavior, and make them act in accordance with the rules. Behavior is then conditioned by the awareness of the possibility of control. Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) expanded this theory to the concept of 'panopticism', and included the 'public servant' into surveillance, making the mechanism of

observation and control even more efficient. Foucault referred to macro society-level structures, but clearly, the guarding and controlling of behavior by fellow community members, church leaders, and God himself illustrates this theory on a small scale. It shows that discipline is not only the top-down enactment of coercion, but that power is also held by those who are considered equals. Because evangelicals believe that God knows about their thoughts and behaviors, and because of the surveillance of fellow community members, they regulate themselves in accordance to the rules. Power is then applied in a way that makes the individual self-regulate (Foucault 1975). Dieuwke for example explained that she always questioned herself what she, *as a Christian*, should do, think or feel because she was taught that she should behave, think and believe in a certain way. She now refers to this as indoctrination. Other evangelicals explained that they did not feel restricted by their faith, but rather feel free within these boundaries. Anna, to whom I referred in the introduction, called herself the happiest woman alive because she knew Jesus. She said that she didn't follow all kinds of laws, but that she had a personal relation to God, wherein love, rather than rules, is decisive. When I asked her about what it meant for her to be a Christian, she explained all traits of the Christian identity as described above. This points to how the normative set of beliefs and behaviors is internalized through involvement in a community, regular visits to service and the fundamental faith in the authority of the Bible as Gods word, to the extent that it feels natural.

This mechanism of staging, repeating and internalizing behaviors points to the Christian identity as a performative construct. Performativity has been conceptualized by Judith Butler (1999) as the reiterative power of discourse which produces the phenomena that it regulates and constraints. Butler's main focus is on gender and sex, but the idea that a social construct is experienced as real through reiteration is relevant in analyzing the Christian identity. This identity is produced by the articulation of its traits through various channels, and it is through the power of reiteration that this identity is internalized and feels natural for those who adopt it. It is thus constructed through being acted out. And, moreover, Butler adds that gender is in principle a strategy of cultural survival. For that reason, non-compliance to this construct has punitive consequences (1988, 522). The same can be said about the evangelical identity. This identity is constructed and upheld in such a way that it guarantees its own survival, and, hence, the survival of the evangelical community/culture. And those who do not comply to the (implicit) rules and regulations of this construct are indeed punished. This can either be through loss of respect from fellow members, or through exclusion from formal tasks. It is however possible to be forgiven under God's mercy,

through confession of 'sins' or misbehaviors. If one chooses this path, and does not persist in his/her sins, this process can become a testimony which confirms God's forgiveness and power to change people's lives. There are, for example, many YouTube videos of ex-gay or ex-lesbian testimonies, wherein people explain how God intervened in their lives and changed their sexual orientation. Yet if one does persist in behaviors which are condemned by the evangelical community, punitive consequences may follow. As such, punishment is legitimized; there has been a chance to be forgiven. Persisting, then, is a matter of choice. The signaling of wrongful behavior is ensured by the dispersed and panoptic web of power relations within the community. This web assures the surveillance of desired behavior, and, if necessary, punishment of wanderers. Within the realm of desired behavior, sexuality is an issue of weight.

2.2 Spectacular heteronormativity

During the first two services that I visited for my fieldwork I ran into an interesting ritual, namely the blessing of newborns. I was instructed by the vicar to visit the early Sunday service rather than the later service, as this service is visited by most members and would therefore give me the most representative image of the atmosphere of the church. When entering the building I immediately noticed how crowded it was. Many people, of all ages, were packed together in the entrance hall. After a while, people steadily entered the room where service is held. This room reminded me of a concert venue; it was a large area with dimmed daylight and a large projection screen above a stage where colored lights shone upon a band that was playing music reminiscent of pop music, which I later learned is called worship music, or Contemporary Christian Music (CCM). As the room filled and visitors took to their seats, the band continued to play. I noticed that many people sang along with the band while raising one hand and hold it opened before their chest. After two or three songs, the vicar appeared on stage and started praying, supported by calm keyboard tunes. After he finished his prayers, he asked several families to enter the stage with their newborn babies. He explained that today he would ask God for His love and blessings over these children. The family, he said, is the cornerstone of both society and the community. Alternately, he held each baby in his hands to pray for them. He expressed his hope that God will take care of them, and that they will once be baptized. During this ritual, which lasted for around twenty minutes, photos of the babies and their parents and (if any) siblings were shown on the screen behind the stage. I noticed people praying along, and other people taking pictures of the ritual.

Steadily it became clear to me why it was so crowded that morning. By coincidence, during the next service I visited in another church, there was again a ritual of blessing newborns. It was pretty much the same, and the vicar strongly emphasized what a blessing it was to have so many children and young families in their community.

This ritual is intriguing because the message of heteronormativity is conveyed through a spectacular performance. By the staging of heterosexual couples and their product (babies), and the emphasis on the desirability of starting a family, this ritual confirms the dominant discourse on sexuality. That is, the two sexes are ought to form a balance in their dichotomy, have a mutual desire for each other, and they should reproduce themselves. This heterosexual norm is substantiated by the truth-based power of the Bible, where the reproductive traits and the dichotomy of male and female, as represented in Adam and Eve, is substantiated as the way God intended humans to be and to behave. Sexuality is then seen as a gift that may only be enjoyed between two persons of the opposite sex, within a formal marriage. This normative measure is reinforced through rituals like blessing babies and through various other channels. The communities I visited offer for example (pre-) marriage courses and child care during Sunday service, and the heterosexual norm is often emphasized during service. Also during an interview with church officials, the believed importance of the family norm, and the perceived balance between men and women was repeatedly emphasized. This repetitive framework confirms the performative character of heteronormativity; it needs to be reiterated in order to be powerful and accepted for true (Butler 1999). Yet the spectacular performance of blessing babies makes obedience to this norm desirable and attractive. Spectacle is then not a method of discipline through punishment, but rather through rewarding. Members are rewarded when they get married and when they have babies. Both implicitly through being 'normal' and explicitly through taking part in rituals as these. As the evangelical community is rather homogenous, in the sense that members share an identity to which they all ascribe the same characteristics, obeying to the (hetero)sexual norm is for most people a matter of course. This illustrates the power of dominant discourse; heterosexuality is experienced as something that belongs naturally to their Christian convictions. Adding up the panoptic surveillance of and amongst members, the heterosexual norm remains dominant and guarded by all involved. Therefore Butler (1991, 24) states that because of the effort this takes, it becomes ironically clear that heterosexuality is "an identity permanently at risk". One obvious 'risk' to heteronormativity, wherein the complexity and ambivalence of both the Christian identity and the sexuality discourse becomes visible, is homosexuality.

2.2.1 Homosexuality

Although the evangelical sexuality discourse may seem rather clear, evangelical members do not exactly agree about how to deal with homosexuality. It forms the place where dominant discourse 'cracks' as it is unable to formulate set answers. The problem lies in the following paradox: on one hand, evangelical faith is directed towards evangelism and an inclusive church where all 'children of God' should feel welcomed and appreciated. Being kind to other people and carry out the love of God are therefore important assignments to evangelical Christians. This makes excluding certain people contra intuitive. But on the other hand, the authority of the Bible is of major importance, and most evangelicals read from the Bible that homosexuality is not how God intended humans to be and to behave. Including people who persist in behavior that counters God's intentions is then equally controversial. The result of this paradox is a conflict in two fundamental aspects of the evangelical Christian identity.

Yet different people consider the issue in different ways. Some evangelicals think of homosexual feelings as a result of the Devil's interventions. This represents the "Devil discourse," wherein there is a constant "cosmic battle" between good and evil powers, which is characteristic to evangelical faith (Ganzevoort 2011, 213). Homosexual feelings then, are believed to be convertible to a heterosexual orientation through prayer. This view is however not the most common, and only two participants explained that they had been confronted with this line of thought (one of them currently believes this). A more common belief is that homosexuality is a result of the fall of men. It can, some believe, therefore be an inborn imperfection. But it can also be acquired during childhood, and be a result of personal trauma (such as sexual abuse) or of a dominant mother and/or an absent father. Also, some people think that the growing number of homosexuals who are 'out' is an effect of a society and culture wherein homosexual behavior is normalized. In other words, homosexuality is often believed to not always be one's 'true' sexual orientation. Truth, after all, is found in the Bible which is, to most evangelicals, rather clear that heterosexual life is God's intention for humanity. Conversion to heterosexuality through prayer and pastoral help is then widely accepted as a fair option for those of whom it is believed that their homosexual urges can be ascribed to life events. Another widely stimulated option is to not bring homosexual feelings into practice and remain celibate.

Justin, an evangelical pastor, gave me a book about homosexuality called *"Homoseksualiteit: Bijbels-pastorale overwegingen in de 21e eeuw"*[6], written by Philipp Nunn (2012). The aim of the book is to shed light on the different views on homosexuality from a Biblical point of view. (Hetero) normative measures become rather clear in this book. In the first chapter Nunn explains arguments of Christians who do not condemn same-sex intercourse, and then argues why he thinks that God would disagree. His response to the idea that discrimination of homosexuals is unjust, is interesting and reflects the performative character of heteronormativity, including punitive consequences:

> "The Bible doesn't set homosexuals apart. God loves every sinner intensely, but strongly condemns their sinful lifestyle. Every Christian should do the same. (…) When God reveals his will for marriage, we may not approve alternative social forms. Some shall choose to not follow God's path. Whenever they do this, they shouldn't expect God's approval and approval from the Christian church. Such a path is not an expression of Christian freedom. True freedom is found in subjugation to Christ and carrying of His yoke" (Nunn 2012, 40. My own translation).

Obviously, Nunn sees a homosexual 'lifestyle' as incommensurable with a Christian identity and full respect from the Christian church. Homosexuals should in his view not 'practice' their sexual preferences, because only a life path that is in accordance with the heterosexual norm of the Bible is believed to be the right path that brings 'freedom'. This theory points to the often made distinction between 'being' gay and 'doing' gay; a distinction that is crucial in understanding churches' practice. The bottom line in such thought is that one can 'be' gay, but not 'do' gay. A consequence of this distinction is that it is assumed that homosexual behavior is a matter of choice, for one can also choose to not 'behave' gay. Loss of respect from fellow Christians is then seen as a result of peoples' own choice, and is therefore one's own responsibility. One church I visited implemented policy that represents this idea. In short, this policy entails that homosexuals who 'do not accept authority', and instead 'seek provocation'[7] (meaning that they engage in a same-sex relationship) are not allowed to perform any formal and visible task within the church. Heteronormativity shows itself here as an exclusive and contingent ideology. Evangelicals who share these ideas thus seem to prioritize a lifestyle that is in accordance to God's word above the inclusion of all individuals,

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[6] Translation: "homosexuality: Biblical-pastoral considerations in the 21st century"

[7] Literally copied and translated from the policy of this church

independent of how they shape their sexual life. Punishment of deviant sexual behavior is legitimate in their view. In the next chapter I will discuss the consequences of such a discourse.

However, not all evangelicals agree to this line of thought, as there seems to be a considerable group that thinks differently. In chapter four I will pay close attention to the changes and developments in sexual discourse, but for now I will shortly summarize this tendency. Basically, the evangelicals who widen their perspective on homosexual lifestyles base their views on another typical aspect of evangelical faith, namely the idea of a personal relation to God. This belief entails that all Christians are responsible for their own behavior towards God. Sierd, a vicar with a rather liberal view on homosexuality, explained his view as following: “I just think: it is Your child, go Your way with him”. Individuals who belong to this category seem to place more emphasis on the social inclusionary aspect of faith, and avoid judgment of other people’s behavior. Judgment is, according to them, up to God.

All evangelicals would argue that the Bible forms their primary guidebook, yet the different ways of dealing with sexual diversity indicates their individuality within interpreting this guide. This individuality is also visible in the emphasis on a personal relation to God. Thus although there is certain consensus about the characteristics of an evangelical Christian identity, which is guarded by several means of control, the personal relation to God illustrates that evangelicals are still individuals with their personal preferences and their personal faith. From this notion, one sees that there is a certain resistance against dominant discourses as soon as they do no longer seem fit for social reality. Yet this resistance takes place from within the boundaries of evangelical church. This reflects Foucault’s theory on power and resistance, for he argues that “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.” (1978, 95). In chapter four I will explain this in more depth. Again, the evangelical community is a micro version of the macro systems Foucault theorized about. But because heteronormativity is so prevalent in these communities, a homosexual orientation per definition resists the dominant discourse. It challenges the order of God’s creation and the forthcoming ideas about a sexual orientation that is deemed ‘natural’. And because there is this normative idea, there is resistance. Whether the paradox, as described above, is experienced as problematic is determined by a personal strategy to cope with the power relations. And although the Christian identity may seem clear-cut, dealing with issues that contradict desirable behavior, shows the ambivalence of this identity.

2.3 Conclusive remarks

To summarize the above, it can be remarked that within evangelical communities there is a normative set of beliefs about identity and sexuality. A condition to become an involved member, is to adopt the characteristics of what is framed as the Christian identity. The norms are constructed and upheld by those in positions of authority and by all community members. Therefore Foucault (1978) his notion of power as being dispersed is instructive to explain the multidimensionality of the power relations within these communities. All individuals involved within the community have power over others, and thereby guard the survival of the Christian identity. This shows two theories. Firstly, it resembles the panopticon as Foucault (1975) theorized it, wherein all evangelicals feel observed by those in positions of formal authority, as well as by fellow community members. Secondly, the Christian identity can be conceptualized as a performative identity (Butler 1999), as it is through the reiteration of its traits that it becomes real and feels natural for those who adopt it. An implication of a performative construct is that there are punitive consequences for those who do not follow the rules. This is clearly prevalent in evangelical communities. One important trait of the Christian identity is the heterosexual ideal. This ideal is made desirable through spectacular performances such as the blessing of newborns. In the next chapter I will discuss the consequences of discovering a sexual orientation that resists dominant discourse. I will show that people always have power over themselves; agency. In the next chapter I will show how their agency interacts with the structure of church.

Chapter three – negotiating faith and sexuality

"Sometimes it feels as if I'm in the closet as a Christian in the gay community, and as gay in Christian communities."

(Interview Bob, March 13, 2017)

Whereas the previous chapter mainly focuses on the workings of power and authority in evangelical communities, this chapter shows what the effects of these mechanisms are when people's sexual orientation is considered to fundamentally challenge the dominant sexual discourse. That is, in this chapter I will describe the life histories of the homosexual research participants, as a way to discuss the strategies whereby evangelical homosexuals negotiate their faith and their sexuality in the heteronormative environment of evangelical community. These strategies can be divided into the following three categories: 1) Christian, not gay, 2) gay, not Christian, and 3) Christian and gay. These categories are somewhat obvious and have been analyzed by other social science researchers (e.g. Ganzevoort e.a. 2010). Interesting then is that all strategies indicate the subjectivity of these individuals. The theoretical framework of this chapter is therefore strongly influenced by Rosi Braidotti's (2011) work on nomadic subjectivity. Braidotti sees subjectivity as a "socially mediated process of entitlements to and negotiations with power relations" (2011, 18). Subjectivity thus indicates a social process of relating to different levels and instances of power. Braidotti's approach towards power and subjectivity follows the legacy of Foucault's philosophy, as she agrees that power is both restrictive and empowering. She sees subjectivity as both active and reactive, and both conscious and unconscious. In other words, subjectivity is formed by both structure *and* agency. And, moreover, the concept of 'nomadic' subjectivity describes the fiction of the unitary self, while it indicates the reality of the "operational self" (Braidotti 2011, 18). Notable here is the influence of post-structuralist thought; neither the self is seen as unitary, nor power is seen as one-directional. Personhood and power can both be seen as containing endless complexities and nuances. For Braidotti, adding the notion of nomadism to subjectivity means that one is not 'frozen' in his state of being. It refers to shifts, negotiations and changes in personhood. Nomadism is thus not always a physical travel, but rather a fictional 'choreography' in personhood. As Braidotti describes it: "not all nomads are world travelers; some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one's habitat. Consciousness-raising and the subversion of set conventions define the nomadic state,

not the literal act of traveling" (2011, 25). Thus rather than a movement of the body, nomadic subjectivity is a movement of the mind and the social context. Many participants, however, did physically move from one town or city to another after their coming out. Physical movement can then be supportive in anchoring in a new social environment, but is not necessary. Taking the concept of nomadic subjectivity as a point of departure, this chapter is directed towards the sketching of a "cartography" (Braidotti 2011) of the negotiation processes of the research participants. A cartography is a "theoretically based and politically informed reading of the present" (Braidotti 2011, 4). Thus in outlining the life histories of these individuals I aim to explain and foreground the underlying structures and relations that shape their trajectories and current subject position. Braidotti sums it up as following:

> "The cartographic approach of philosophical nomadism requires that we think of power relations simultaneously as the most "external," collective, social phenomena and also as the most intimate or "internal." Or rather, power is the process that flows incessantly in between the inner and the outer. As Foucault taught us, power is a strategic situation, a position, not an object or an essence. Subjectivity is the effect of the constant flows of in-between interconnections." (Braidotti 2011, 17-18)

The term nomadic thus indicates a process, and a continuous development in relation to authority and power. Furthermore, the concept rests on the idea that individuals are "non-unitary, multi-layered, [and] dynamic" (2014, 7). That is, each subject is consisting of different fragments, which can for example relate to sexual orientation, gender, race or religion. The negotiation of these aspects in relation to power, and the ability to emphasize and shift between different aspects according to the social environment, shows people to be nomadic subjects. Noteworthy is the parallel with Butler's thoughts on identity. Butler (1999, 23) states that "the 'coherence' and 'continuity' of 'the person' are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility". Both authors then point to the multidimensionality and situatedness of personhood, and argue that personhood, or subjectivity, is fluid rather than static, and shifts or changes according to social reality and the corresponding power mechanisms. The homosexual participants whose narratives form the main data of this thesis confirm this theory, as they negotiate and shift between different aspects of their personhood, because these aspects are often deemed incommensurable by their religious community. They often tried different strategies before they ended up in their current lifestyle. Some think that this lifestyle will be permanent, while

others are not quite sure what the future will bring in this respect. All thereby show their ability to negotiate life worlds, and to (temporarily) anchor in different aspects of their being and the corresponding social reality. This chapter primarily discusses the narratives of the homosexuals I interviewed, ordered along the subject positions as described above. The aim of this chapter is then to illustrate how these nomadic subjects navigate through life and how they relate to normative measures of sexuality and faith as instructed by their (former) community.

3.1 Christian, not gay

While this position is considered the most desired strategy by many evangelicals, it was difficult to find people who identity as Christian and for that reason, do not bring their homosexual preferences into practice. This group of people is rather invisible as they structure their sexual life in accordance with the heteronormative discourse. I noticed that there seemed to buzz stories about people from this category, and it was spoken about in a respectful way, for they 'carry their cross' while staying true to God. The options for people in this category are either to convert their sexual orientation and to find a partner of the opposite sex, or to live a life in celibacy. All people I spoke to think of the latter as a very difficult option, also because getting married and starting a family is such a strong ideal. Celibacy then excludes them from living up to this ideal and, hence, from normalcy. Several people who are now openly gay and open for a same-sex relationship tried celibacy or conversion, but it didn't have the desired outcome. As they expressed it, it didn't make then "happy". They considered this an important argument to abandon this strategy. Maria for example expressed that she desperately prayed for her lesbian feelings to leave, but it didn't work. She then chose for a lifestyle she thought would bring her more satisfaction, together with a female partner. And Dieuwke prayed for ten years that her lesbian feelings would leave. She now states that this was "hell" for her, and ever since she permits herself to engage in a lesbian relationship, she feels much happier. These individuals will agree that for them, a life in celibacy or converting homosexual feelings to a heterosexual orientation in order to sustain a heteronormative discourse did not contribute to emotional wellbeing. Changing their lifestyle and resisting heteronormativity then shows their subjectivity to be nomadic, as they navigate towards a strategy that is more satisfying for them and where they feel less restriction from religious authorities. Jildou's story, however, shows equal agency, while the outcome is quite different.

3.1.1 Jildou

Jildou is the only person I found who was willing to talk about her choice to no longer engage in same-sex relationships. Jildou doesn't ascribe negative feelings to this choice. She was raised in a protestant Christian family, and faith has always played a role in her life. She showed me her diary, wherein she, as a seven-year-old kid repeatedly wrote how much she loved "Lord Jesus." And although she didn't think of her family as orthodox, she always used to structure her life according to Christian norms; she preferred to not have sex before marriage, she was monogamous, and she prayed regularly. Somehow her faith weakened for a period of four years. She had a growing interest in other religions, such as Buddhism, and she cared less about Christian beliefs. She partied every weekend, got drunk regularly and experimented with everything God forbids. In this period Jildou fell in love with a woman with whom she started a relationship. But she cheated on her girlfriend, both with other men and other women. This pattern became normal for her, as she behaved the same in a relationship with another woman. Jildou therefore relates this period of her life, and thereby homosexuality, to "perversion" and "unclean thoughts". At some point in her life, when she reflected on her behaviors, she concluded that this was no longer the life she wanted to live. She wanted to be true to her girlfriend and stop partying so regularly. Recommended by her sister, she consulted a Christian pastor. This lady helped her grow into her faith again, and guided her into her born-again experience. After a while Jildou broke up with her girlfriend, as she did no longer think of this relation as the right option, because, as she expressed it, "[being gay] doesn't fit with being Christian". She now believes that it was the "angel of light" (demons/the Devil) that wanted to guide her away from God by making her think and behave the way she did. She is now sending these demons away in Jesus' name (through praying) and she feels that her thoughts become increasingly "clean". Jildou says that she is happier nowadays. She feels stronger, and she can pass all her worries onto God. She is not sure if she will find the right man, but she will definitely not start a relationship with a woman again. Jildou is now fully absorbed in her church community and she broke all contacts with former friends whose lifestyle is now very different from hers. Thus along with Maria and Dieuwke, Jildou sought emotional wellbeing. The decisive difference is that Jildou found this in a trajectory that sustains dominant discourses on identity and sexuality as found in evangelical communities. This does not mean that she is not showing agency or subjectivity; she willfully agrees to the terms and conditions of an evangelical Christian identity, and shows herself to be nomadic through her consciously shifting life course. This position can be seen as leading to the opposite subject position compared to the people in the next paragraph.

3.2 Gay, not Christian

People who identify as gay and no longer as Christian were considerably easier to find than the previous group. While Jildou blends in to the community by internalizing dominant measures about personhood, these people resist such ideas and thereby become more visible. Furthermore, the individuals from this category often feel hurt and/or discriminated against by their former community and some therefore felt an urge to express their misgivings about church. I interviewed four people from this position, namely Maria, Dieuwke, Hilde and Wouter. All of them have tried to remain celibate or engaged in heterosexual relationships, but they didn't feel apt for such a lifestyle. Also, all went through periods of depression, which they in greater or lesser extent ascribe to the suppression of homosexual feelings and the way their former church dealt with their sexual orientation. Allowing themselves to engage in a homosexual relationship gives them feelings of freedom and increased their emotional wellbeing. The realization that they wouldn't find this state of mind within the boundaries of their community, made them resist heteronormative discourse. Choosing this path made them spiral away from church and their faith, until the point that they (almost) completely lost it. Maria, Hilde and Dieuwke are rather sure that they will never get engaged with church again. Wouter is less certain about this for he really misses the social network and the mental support from church. And as Jildou's narrative shows, this subject position can also be of temporary nature.

3.2.1 Dieuwke

As mentioned, Dieuwke tried to convert her sexual orientation during a stretch of ten years. Church leaders made her believe that her lesbian feelings were instructed by demons who told her lies in order to keep her away from God.

> "We had to pray this [demons] away in Jesus' name. I was shaking heavily, and they said it were the demons. So I was fucking scared… So much fear. I thought there were demons inside me, or that I was possessed. I was only thirteen years old!"

Dieuwke endured this situation until five years ago, when she was twenty-three and fell hopelessly in love with Petra, the woman who is now her fiancé. At first she was afraid of the consequences of her coming out because her parents and all of her friends were Christian. And when she was younger, her parents had expressed their disdain about homosexuality.

Dieuwke was therefore quite sure that they wouldn't accept her. And indeed, since her coming out, her life has dramatically changed, both in social and in spiritual sense. She now says that she wasn't 'in touch with herself' during these ten years that she suppressed her homosexual feelings. She didn't feel allowed to express herself and to experience her emotions. She sought relief in God and prayed desperately to feel better, but it didn't work. This made her feel more depressed and made her doubt God's authority. When Dieuwke fell in love with Petra, who was a silver lining in her frustrated state of being, she felt she was in a "twilight zone" between God (and the church community) and Petra. And while there was only silence and disappointment from God, this woman gave her support and warmth. In the end she chose for Petra and drifted away from church, and ultimately lost her faith in God. Leaving church was hard and painful. Dieuwke lost all her Christian friends, who didn't approve her 'new lifestyle'. And although Dieuwke is consulting a psychologist since her coming out, who learns her deal with the psychological damage she incurred in church, she now feels more emotionally stable and free.

> "In church they always said that there is no greater freedom than the freedom in Christ. But it is freedom from Christ, that is freedom. Christians think that this means that you can do or leave whatever you want, but that is not true. You are free in here [points to her head]. It is now that I realize that I never was free."

Leaving church meant that Dieuwke had to let go of the anchor and guidance that had given her support for the last ten years. But after a difficult period it improved her mental condition. Dieuwke thus first started to doubt her faith and then admitted that she was still gay. These processes strengthened one another, and in tandem with losing her faith, she came out as gay. Maria and Wouter experienced it in reverse; they were fully convinced and absorbed Christians at the moment that they came out and they lost their faith after their coming out.

3.2.2 Maria and Wouter

Wouter was aware of his homosexuality from his early teens, but he only dared to tell others when he was twenty-seven because he was afraid of the social consequences. His mother had expressed that she didn't think homosexuality was right and 'natural', and he knew that his church would judge him. Wouter was rather insecure and depressed during his youth. This was partially influenced by his insecurity about his physical condition; he used to be overweight. But also by the fact that he felt restricted to express his true sexual orientation.

After Wouter lost weight and acquired more self-esteem he found the courage for his coming out. Despite the fact that his church excluded him from active involvement, he first wanted to remain member because he liked his life as Christian so dearly; he had many close friends in church, and he enjoyed his position in the church band. But after he considered the policy of his church more closely, and moved to the other side of the country, he steadily lost his interest in church and his faith decreased.

Maria also struggled with her lesbian feelings for years before she dared to express it to others. Maria prayed for it to leave, and during her teens she tried several heterosexual relationships, but they all stagnated quickly as she didn't have comparable feelings as her boyfriend. And after years of trying to convert or ignore her lesbian feelings, she acknowledged that it didn't work for her. When she fell in love with a girl she was certain about her true sexual orientation, and found that she had to deal with it. Maria then told her parents, her friends and her church. The exclusion and judgments she suffered there were harsh for her. She left church, and after several years of trying to remain Christian without her church community, she lost her faith.

Until their coming out, both Maria and Wouter were active and exemplary evangelicals. They performed official tasks in their church, but after they came out they were no longer allowed to proceed in these positions. They were only allowed to visit service as a spectator, and to watch from the sideline to all church activities. They both expressed that this exclusion made them feel discriminated against. Wouter's church implemented official policy to substantiate such exclusion because in their view, members in a leadership position fulfill an exemplary role. If their lifestyle does then not reflect an exemplary Christian lifestyle, and hence if they do not "accept authority" and instead "seek provocation"[8], they may not execute visible tasks and leadership positions. Decisive for gay members is then again the separation between 'being' gay and 'doing' gay, and the forthcoming question whether homosexuals bring their sexual preferences into practice. Wouter finds this policy contingent; he would be allowed to continue his job in the church band if he is single, but has to quit if he has a boyfriend, and is allowed start again if they break up. Maria expressed similar discontent about such policy. According to her, it wouldn't make her less gay if she doesn't engage in a lesbian relationship. She would still have these feelings that shape her behavior, whether or not in a sexual sense. Both Wouter and Maria therefore expressed to their church and their friends that they didn't agree to this notion, and that they were open for a same-sex

[8] Literally copied and translated from policy documents of this church. Anonymous source.

relationship. As Maria explained it, the forthcoming exclusion made her feel as if she was a "second-class Christian" because her sexual orientation subverted her to the lower ranks of membership. For the active member she was, passive membership was not an option. And after she also experienced great rejection from her Christian friends, she felt she could no longer be engaged with this church. Wouter however didn't experience much rejection from his Christian friends, nor from his family. It were mainly formal policies that discriminated against his sexual orientation. This is interesting because it illustrates that formal church policies are not always supported by all members. In the next chapter I will discuss this issue in more depth. Because Wouter and Maria still believed in God at the time they left church, they tried to be Christian without church, or to look for a church where they would be accepted. But believing in God without a community of fellow Christians turned out to be difficult, and the churches that accept homosexuals were not the kind of church they prefer. These churches explain the Bible in another way, and the experience of visiting their service does not resemble the experience in an evangelical community. Adding up the rejection they suffered, and for Maria the loss of friends, they grew disappointed in faith in general and after a while they lost their faith (almost) completely.

Dieuwke, Maria and Wouter their parents had all expressed their disdain of homosexuality when they were younger. But luckily for them, their parents gradually came to accept their sexual orientation. Dieuwke's mother is now even campaigning against homophobia in evangelical churches. The fact that their parents do not condemn their sexuality is a big support for them. Wouter doesn't hold much of a grudge against his former community. He is disappointed though, for his image about the church that was first such a warm environment to him, has completely changed after it didn't accept him for who he is. All three have been victims of bullying at their high schools. Church was therefore a safe environment. Losing this again made them feel betrayed and damaged. Dieuwke and Maria spoke fiercely about church. Maria expressed that she feels ashamed of the evangelical community to which she once belonged, and Dieuwke was full of resentment about her former community. Both expressed that they were indoctrinated, and that this is no doubt a bad thing. Also Hilde feels comparable aversion from faith in general. In their opinion, homosexuality and a Christian identity are absolutely incommensurable. But for Hilde, things worked out slightly different.

3.2.3 Hilde

Hilde is now forty years old, and left church around her 19th. She didn't leave because of her sexual orientation or her gender identity (she is not very heterosexual, neither very female, nor does she identify as lesbian or transgender), but because she had her troubles with the church members, who she didn't find sincere and honest. After she left church, she remained Christian for a while, but her faith steadily decreased, and is now completely gone. Concerning her sexual orientation, Hilde experienced the biggest problems with her family, whom she considers "arrogant fundamentalists". Her parents simply wouldn't accept the fact that she loved women. They ignored and denied it, as they said it wasn't true. They believed it was just a phase that would wither away: God, after all, doesn't create homosexuals. And when Hilde married a transgender person, they expressed the same denial towards the gender identity of her partner. Nowadays all contacts between Hilde and her family are broken. Hilde is clearly troubled about this, and she became emotional during our first interview when she told her life history. Hilde sees her family as an extension of church morale, and therefore has equally negative feelings about faith. She showed me pictures from her teens in her photo album. There were mostly photos from her family and from excursions with her church community. To me it seemed as if she had close friends there, with whom she made music and had fun. She indeed had positive memories about this period, but these are ruined for her by the fact that all these people abandoned her because of who she is. She therefore connects a feeling of suppressing her true self to both her family and church. When looking at the pictures in her photo album she said that she could see how troubled and depressed she was back then, at such a young age. She remembered that she didn't feel free and 'real', and was always putting on a show of a happy, pious, outgoing, straight and feminine girl. Now, at the cost of her family, friends and faith, she feels more free to be herself. She went through severe depressions, and she has felt as if she was in a social desert, with nobody there who accepted her. Realizing how blessed she is with her spouse made her cry again. The decisive difference with Maria, Dieuwke and Wouter is thus that Hilde also had to abandon her family in order to express herself the way she wants.

The above described narratives show how profound the consequences of coming out as gay, and consequently resisting dominant ideas about sexuality, can be for evangelical homosexuals. For a certain period, Wouter, Maria, Hilde and Dieuwke tried to not actively resist authority, and to obey to widely accepted strategies such as conversion or celibacy, thereby keeping in place the heteronormative sexual discourse. This confirms Foucault's (1978) theory about "polymorphous" power, for it shows how powerful the dispersed

authority of the community and religious convictions can be, as these make the individual self-regulate to construct their lifestyle and personhood in accordance with dominant discourses. Yet their sexual orientation, which feels so deeply inherent to themselves, makes them resist this discourse. And as a consequence, they navigate towards a new construction of their identity. This shows them to be nomadic subjects; different fragments of their personality are restructured as a result of the normative measures of church, in which they no longer fit. And while anchoring in a new aspect of themselves is a difficult process for them, they express that it ultimately gives them more happiness and freedom. Their main drive to negotiate their sexuality and faith is thus their desire for a more satisfying state of being. This resonates with Braidotti, who states that this "situates sensuality, affectivity, empathy, and desire as core values in the discussion about the politics of contemporary non-unitary subjects" (2011, 88). In other words, Braidotti sees a desire for happiness as a core value in nomadic subjects to change their social context.

3.3 Gay and Christian

This last category is interesting because the individuals who identify as gay and Christian challenge the idea that these identities are incommensurable. They show that nuances need to be made in the presumed incompatibility, and they demonstrate current developments in evangelical communities. Furthermore, this subject position indicates that the people in this category both adhere to measures of a Christian identity, but at the same time resist the heteronormative conditions. They thus resist dominant discourse from within the power structures where it is constituted. This category can be divided into two sub-strategies: those who remain church member, and those who leave church but keep their faith.

3.3.1 Bob and Victor

Bob and Victor belong to the category of those who individualize their faith, and are no longer member of a community. Their stories show many parallels, with the biggest difference being that Bob didn't grow up religious, while Victor did. Bob became acquainted with Christianity during his teens, through a teacher on his high-school. His interest for faith grew and for years he was a convinced Christian without membership to a community, and with only a few pals who were fellow Christians. When Bob came out as gay, he wasn't an official member of a community, but he did visit service in one particular church every now and then. In this church he also attended a Bible study group and a special group for

homosexual Christians, wherein they studied the Bible together with a pastor to find answers to the homosexuality issue. Bob found great support in this group, wherein he didn't experience heteronormative conditions. Here he learned that he feels perfectly able to combine his faith with a homosexual relationship. For, as he stated it: "God and I can figure things out". When Bob started attending another church, which was closer to his home and which content-wise made a perfect match to his own convictions, he found that not all members agreed with his sexual orientation. He had to explain himself continuously and he experienced rejection. This resulted in him not attending this church anymore. For a while he became more absorbed in the gay scene; he visited gay bars and parties, had many gay friends and he had changing sexual contacts. But he didn't feel accepted as a Christian in this scene, and he often didn't tell that he believed in God, for he was afraid that people would criticize or judge him. Hence, the quote at the start of this chapter: "sometimes it feels as if I'm in the closet as a Christian in the gay community, and as gay in Christian communities." Nowadays Bob has a same-sex relationship and would like to fire up his Christian belief, but he finds this difficult without the support of a community. He is not sure if he will once become involved with a church again, though he would like to. A condition for him would then be that he feels stronger and more confident in defending and explaining his position as a homosexual Christian.

Victor on the other hand grew up in a religious family and their church community. He is not involved in this community anymore for comparable reasons as Bob; he doesn't always want to explain himself. He is also afraid that the discussion it might lead to will hurt him. And although he thinks that only through discussion things may change, he doesn't want to be the main subject of this discussion. He said: "maybe I am lazy, but I just don't feel the urge to start that discussion. I'm afraid it may hurt me, because it is a topic that has already hurt so many people." Another reason for him to not visit service anymore is that he finds it difficult to deal with the heteronormative family ideal that is so prevalent in his former community. Everybody else of around his age (thirty) is married and has children. He feels lonely when he sees this, as it points out for him that he is so different in that respect. Victor suffered from depressions, which he fully relates to the difficult combination of his faith and his sexual orientation.

Bob and Victor thus resist normative sexual measures, but do not, as a consequence, lose their faith. They see the community and faith as separate aspects. Both however expressed that without a community they find it difficult to remain as dedicated as they once were. This is not because of their sexual orientation, but because they miss spiritual support.

Maria, Hilde and Wouter tried this subject position, but it didn't work out for them. Involvement in a community thus again shows itself to be a very important aspect of being Christian. Both Bob and Victor emphasized that they have a personal relation with God, and that they will figure things out with Him. This gave them the freedom to form their own position. I found the same emphasis on the individuality of faith in the next sub-category.

3.3.2 Frank, Erwin and Niels

Whereas Bob and Victor resist dominant sexual discourse from outside the church walls, Frank, Erwin and Niels resist it from within. Their narratives are quite different, and I will shortly explain them.

The church where Frank (52) is member of is quite different from most evangelical churches. Frank describes their views on sexuality as "progressive" for they do not see any problem in Frank performing formal tasks in visible leadership positions while he has a homosexual relationship. When Frank was younger he was less connected to church, and he used to attend demonstrations for gay emancipation. He characterizes himself as "progressive, left-winged, and religious, *evangelical* religious". He sometimes finds the evangelical churches suppressive and narrow-minded, while theologically seen he agrees with their explanation of faith and he loves the "fire" and "passion" he experiences in service. He would encourage evangelical communities to "break down their walls"; to open up their minds and to discuss difficult issues instead of implementing policies that discriminate against all homosexuals (or any other individual that does not adhere to evangelical norms). He thereby resembles Erwin's view.

Until Erwin came out as gay, he performed a paid leadership position in his church. His coming out hampered the continuation of this job. He therefore dropped his task by his own choice, as a way to be ahead of others giving him this painful message. For a certain period Erwin lived in another city, where he visited another evangelical church, but now that he is back in Friesland he is back in his old church. He doesn't perform his former job, or any other formal task, but he is involved in church life. Erwin doesn't have a partner, but he is open for a same-sex relationship, and he has many friends in church who don't reject this position. Erwin is in favor of open discussions. He would like to see churches giving more space for people to come out and take their time to form their own position and to "investigate it together with God". Erwin sees himself as an advocate for the position of homosexuals in his church. And although this may result in painful situations, he is convinced of the importance of this and sacrifices his own continuous wellbeing for the cause.

At last Niels. Niels is an aspirant member of an evangelical community. He usually visits service together with his boyfriend, where they often hold hands. Niels has never experienced any negative comments on his sexual orientation, and he feels strongly supported by fellow members. I visited service together with him, and I noticed how many friends he has in church, who all greeted him enthusiastically. Niels is not yet baptized, and although he hasn't discussed this with the church leadership, he does not expect any difficulties when he wants to.

All individuals who are both gay and Christian referred to their individuality within their faith. This is a typically charismatic notion which is spreading towards other denominations (Hunt 2003). This personal relation entails that people have their own responsibility towards God, and that they are able to arrange matters with Him. I noticed that not only amongst homosexuals this created space to challenge (hetero)normativity, for also straight evangelicals found freedom herein to seek their own path in being obedient to God. Furthermore, people from this category do experience heteronormativity in their community, to which they obviously don't adhere, and which they see as a very exclusive idea. Not only for themselves, but also for others who cannot live up to this ideal. These individuals therefore resemble an interesting combination of obedience and resistance. They obey to evangelical theology and they apply most lifestyle notions as described in the previous chapter. But the decisive difference is that they disagree about heteronormativity. Yet the freedom to disagree is found in distinctive evangelical theology; the personal relation to God.

3.4 Conclusive remarks

The narratives as described above illustrate how these individuals negotiate their faith and their sexuality within a context that often sees these fundamental aspects of their personhood as incommensurable. While Jildou blends in to dominant discourse and is therefore quite invisible, those who resist dominant discourse are considered more provoking and thereby become more visible. Those who lost their faith have suffered great rejection, and for them, this was a reason to doubt and ultimately lose their faith. The social aspect of being evangelical was thus of major importance for them. Some incurred social and psychological damage after being rejected by their community with whom they shared their new Christian life. For some, the consequence is to construct another 'new life', without church, while others aim to challenge and change the churches' discourse. All individuals can therefore be described as nomadic subjects, since their narratives as characterized by changing social

contexts as a result of power relations. Their processes are determined by both agency and structure, and function on the blurry boundaries of both. Specifically the people in the last category, who integrate both their sexuality and their faith into their personhood, interrelate structure and agency. All participants identify the desire for emotional wellbeing or happiness as their drive to start their trajectory and shift their subject position. From the sexual orientation that is given to them, and the faith that feels so inherent to them, they seek for a life course that provides them with a positive or satisfactory state of being. Interesting is that Braidotti (2011, 88) emphasizes that she sees this as an empowering and crucial feature of the post-structuralist approach: subjectivity is activated by desire.

Chapter four – Change

Before we start the interview, I want to say that my position is dynamic. That means that there is movement, it is not a rigid thing. If I look at twenty years ago, or maybe thirty or forty, then people didn't talk about this theme. That is already a big change now, and therefore I think it is important to emphasize that it is dynamic, because you have to anticipate on what is going on in the rest of society.

Interview Sophia, may 1, 2017

Things change, also in church. While doing my fieldwork, I learned that there are many initiatives and individuals that resist heteronormativity within the Christian (evangelical) world. One such initiative is '*de roze dienst*' (pink service) and, also, the pink *evangelical* service. These services are inclusive for all Christians, as it is a celebration where LGBTQI's are explicitly welcome. I also had an interesting acquaintance with Miranda, a heterosexual woman in her forties, who is a passionate advocate for the position of LGBTQI's in church. She is the author of the book '*Hartenvrouw*'; a collection of narratives from lesbian Christians, and she is the initiator of 'Wijdekerk.nl', a website that presents LGBTQI related stories to achieve a broader understanding and acceptance of LGBTQI's within all church denominations. Miranda touched me deeply with her personal campaign, Gay Pride Huggers, where she visits gay prides to give free hugs as a means to share God's love with everybody and to apologize for the exclusion LGBTQI's often suffer in church. Her personal goal is to "break down the walls of judgment" within church. According to her, things are changing, but not as much as she would like to see. Miranda introduced me to several other individuals with comparable ideas, amongst whom Eus and Sierd. Eus often preaches about this theme and has been rejected in several communities because of her position. But also during other interviews and conversations it was mentioned that things have changed in the past decades, as a result of societal changes. See for example the quote above. The aim of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate the various ways wherein church authority is contested and to show how alternative discourses increasingly gain influence. I will use Foucault's theory on resistance, and Tsing's concept of 'friction' to show how the liberal, secular and homonationalist Dutch context intersects with evangelical churches. I will first discuss the Dutch society, and then zoom in to the effects this has on evangelical communities. In the last paragraph I present a

matrix, wherein most research participants are scaled on the aspects of faith and gay acceptance. This matrix shows how diverse and diffuse the views on homosexuality are.

4.1 The 'un-modern other'

In the introduction I showed that the Netherlands is a considerably secular nation, wherein the gay rights discourse has become a national attitude which is often related to 'modernity'. I therefore referred to the concept of homonationalism as a tendency that sets religious groups (both Islamic and orthodox Christian) apart as forming a threshold to full emancipation of sexual minorities. Clearly, evangelical ideas about (homo) sexuality do not run parallel with secular ideas about the topic; there is a certain tension between them. During my fieldwork I found that the effects of homonationalism and the forthcoming tendencies are two-fold. It seems to create hesitance in Christian communities to share their views, while at the same time, broader societal developments create a productive friction in evangelical thought that sometimes results in a re-evaluation of individual positions.

It occurred to me that Christian views are in liberal discourse often labeled as 'un-modern' for they are linked to tradition and the past. For example, when explaining my research topic to non-Christian people, some were startled that exclusion based on sexual orientation 'still' happens in the Netherlands. Underlying such indignation is the assumption that the Netherlands is a country where nowadays sexual diversity should not be an issue anymore. Although the perceived egalitarian character of society is an illusion, this is a strong sentiment amongst many secular Dutch individuals. Also Wouter stressed that while the church might look modern because of the spectacular performance of service, their views on homosexuality are very un-modern. Evangelical church policies that discriminate against LGBTQI's are then seen as contradicting the expectations of a modern society. Hence, homophobia is viewed as an issue of the past, and of other countries. This clearly resonates with Puar (2007) her conceptualization of homonationalism as LGBTQI acceptance is used to promote a unified identity of a tolerant Dutch society. Although there is truth underlying the assumption that religious groups are generally seen less tolerant than secular society (SCP 2010, 45), the result is that orthodox Christian communities become the 'un-modern other' in the national gay rights discourse. I found that some churches and individuals were therefore hesitant to discuss their views. I approached four churches of which one was willing to schedule an interview (one of these churches was open for an interview during my last research on this theme, three years ago, but now gave a negative response. Despite the good

relation with the person I interviewed back then, the church leaders disapproved). During this interview, the vicar and pastor, Chris and Justin, who I have mentioned before, expressed that they find it difficult to discuss homosexuality and to be explicit about it. They said it is a very "sensitive" topic, and that they fear judgment. Chris therefore mentioned the following:

> "If we are very explicit about this, we notice from civil society that we are being judged as intolerant and discriminating. That is what we are confronted with. While I think that we are allowed to have our own opinion, and our own convictions. So that can be at odds in our society. Especially concerning this position in which there is a tension between church and society."

Chris and Justin thus feel that they have every right to express their Christian disapproval about same sex intercourse, but that judgment from civil society hampers them to be explicit about it. Shortly after this statement they call this the "intolerance of the tolerant"; they feel as if their view is not tolerated by those who claim to be tolerant. Also other evangelicals expressed comparable feelings, and were therefore hesitant to talk with me. Remarkable here is that the 'out and proud' tendencies of a liberal and homonationalist society somewhat paradoxically silence the institutions and individuals that contrast liberal thought. This silencing effect is also recognized amongst queer Muslims by Jivraj and De Jong (2011) for comparable reasons: religious groups are framed as 'the other' in the homonationalist sentiments of Dutch society. This creates a tension between liberal society and orthodox churches, which can be an incentive for churches and evangelicals to remain immutable in their ideas about sexuality. According to Miranda, the LGBTQI advocate, some churches "hide" behind the dictum that church should not become alike the world, providing them a justification to remain rigid. At the same time, Sophia, amongst others, expressed that church has to change in accordance with the rest of society. Thus the awareness that Christian views are controversial in what is framed as civil society, may be an incentive to entrench deeper in fundamental thinking, while it can also be a reason to re-evaluate heteronormativity.

4.2 Productive Friction

Friction, as conceptualized by Tsing, refers to encounters where difference can "lead to new arrangements of culture and power" (2005, 5). Friction is not only a mechanism or encounter that lays bare disagreements, but also shows itself as an incentive to rearrange

culture. Friction then becomes productive, for it indicates where dominant discourse cracks, and has the ability to change this discourse or produce alternative discourses. Therefore, according to Tsing, "speaking of friction is a reminder of the importance of interaction in defining movement, cultural form, and agency" (2005, 6). This notion of friction is helpful in analyzing the two-sided effects of liberal, homonationalist ideas on evangelical thought. In contrast to the 'silencing' effect of homonationalism, I will here analyze how the friction between civil society and evangelical communities can also be productive.

Homonationalism and evangelicalism differ widely. Yet because the churches I researched are embedded in the Dutch society, they cannot be contemplated as completely distinctive realms. For example, many references have been made to the US, where, according to these participants, society in general is less liberal on the gay rights discourse than the Netherlands. They state that churches in the Netherlands inherently adapt to the conditions in the rest of society, albeit only slightly. The friction between those realms can be productive when it affects sexual discourse in church. Sophia, the woman from the quote at the start of this chapter, is a (heterosexual) church member who is part of the church council. She referred explicitly to changes in church and society, and, accordingly, in her own position. Sophia was not the only one who referred to such developments, for others expressed comparable tendencies, which they also connected to societal changes. Erwin for example, who I have mentioned in the previous chapter, stated that "church cannot fall too far behind" on the rest of society. He finds that in a society where homosexuality is increasingly normalized, the church cannot ignore the topic and remain as orthodox and rigid as they were before. Also Sierd, a vicar with a considerably liberal view on homosexuality, referred to this logic, and he named the Evangelical Broadcasting Company as a catalyzer of change. He expressed the following:

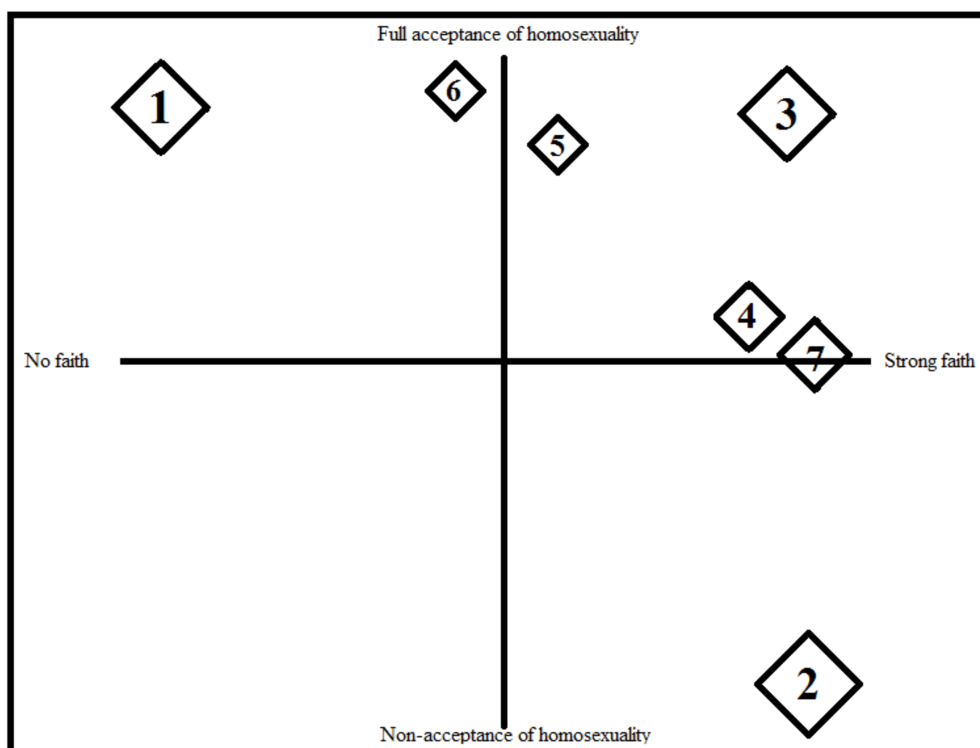
> "Although there are still some who believe in curing and liberating people from homosexuality, people are increasingly confronted with reality. And I think that the EO [Evangelical Broadcasting Company] has done a positive contribution there. They have had the courage in the past few years to be bold about it. That has cost them members, but opened other people's eyes."

The EO thus developed towards a more culturally relevant repertoire, one that represents more secular values. And according to Sierd, they have contributed to a broader acceptance of homosexuality in the Christian world. Thus through popular media, which is influenced by

liberal and homonationalist sentiments, sexual discourse in evangelical communities is affected. The above mentioned individuals explicitly resist heteronormativity in evangelical communities, and thereby demonstrate Foucault (1978, 95) his theory that resistance, being the effort to rebel against authority, "is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power." Their resistance takes place from within the church walls and by using Christian concepts and language. This is a consequence of friction between church and society, and it results in another layer of productive friction; between Christians. In the next paragraph I will pay more attention to such interactions.

4.3 visualization of positions

Although homosexuality and faith are seen as incommensurable identities by several participants, there seems to be a growing tendency towards more acceptance. To visualize the broad range of subject positions and opinions, I copied Serpell's (2004, 3) method to illustrate how these identities relate to one another. This method entails that most participants are scaled on the aspect of faith ("how would you grade the strength of your faith?") and on the aspect of gay acceptance ("to what extent do you accept same-sex relationships?"). This resulted in a matrix which indicates that while heteronormativity remains prevalent in these churches, nuances need to be made about the presumed incommensurability of a Christian identity and a homosexual relationship.



1: Dieuwke, Maria and Hilde completely lost their faith and engaged in a homosexual relationship. They agree with each other that a homosexual relationship is incompatible with a Christian identity.
2: Jildou, Chris, Justin, Anna and Geert are very religious and therefore condemn the combination of a Christian identity with a homosexual relationship. Only Jildou has dealt with homosexual feelings, the others are heterosexual.
3: Frank, Victor, Erwin, Sierd, Miranda and Eus are also very religious but do not think that a Christian identity is incompatible with a homosexual relationship. Sierd, Eus and Miranda are not homosexual themselves.
4: Niels is quite religious (he gave himself an eight out of ten), but he is not fully absorbed in a community and not yet baptized. Although he sees no problem in a homosexual relationship, he still finds it difficult to deal with his own homosexuality. Hendrik is heterosexual and a quite active community member (also eight out of ten). He does not condemn homosexual relationships, but he is hesitant to fully support it.
5: Bob allows himself to engage in a homosexual relationship, also from a religious point of view. He is pretty sure that he will once attend church again, but is not yet ready for it. Not having a community weakens his faith.
6: Wouter sees absolutely no problem in a homosexual relationship. Although in the previous chapter I classified him under the category of gay and not religious, he expressed that he misses his old community, mainly for social reasons. He expressed that while he still believes that there is some kind of God, he sometimes wanders if he still has faith.
7: Sophia and Johan are strongly religious heterosexual church members. Johan was very unclear about whether he accepted homosexual relations or not. I found it difficult to scale him, and therefore designated him to a position in the middle. Sophia explicitly stated that she didn’t want to scale herself on the aspect of homosexuality because it is dynamic and contingent for her. I depicted her in the middle to illustrate that she has not formulated a position.

> For composing this matrix I have asked most participants to scale themselves between one and ten (one is low score, ten is high score). However, I didn’t always find an opportunity to ask people about it, mostly when we only held informal conversations. These individuals are therefore scaled by me. The original matrix is designed by Serpell (2003), who used it to visualize the way participants thought about animals, looking at the variables of affection and utility. With my adjustments it is very useful to visualize the relation between other aspects which are often deemed incompatible. This matrix shows the high variety in positions and views about the issue. An important remark is that religious participants who support homosexual relationships would still apply Biblical norms to such relationships. This means that it should be a homosexual relationship “in love and trust.” Changing sexual contacts and

non-monogamy is still condemned. Heteronormativity then shifts to sexual normativity in general. The matrix is not intended to capture and represent the positions of all individuals within the field. It solely demonstrates the diversity in positions.

In chapter two I argued that the evangelical community functions as a panopticon, wherein members not only feel observed by God and church officials, but also by each other. Yet now that I have shown that there is a large diversity in opinions about homosexuality, it can be said that there is considerable, and growing, resistance within this framework of surveillance. This creates alternative discourses, such as the idea that relationships should be monogamous, independent of the sexes of those involved. Surveillance then shifts towards a re-evaluated sexual norm. Furthermore, organizations such as 'Wijdekerk' and '*de roze (evangelische) viering*' increase the visibility of sexual minorities in these churches. They actively resist heteronormativity and advocate for broader acceptance by using visibility as a strategy. Dieuwke also argued in favor of such a strategy. She stated that homosexuals who remain church member can have an exemplary function, both for other LGBTQI's who struggle with their coming out, as well as for members to see that homosexuals can be 'normal' people (in contrast to the image many seem to have about flamboyant gay pride visitors). Wilcox therefore argues that much of the mistreatment, inequity and non-acceptance of LGBTQI lifestyles stems from the "all-too-human fear of the unknown" (2003, IX), also in church. And indeed, several homosexuals confirmed that some of their friends and relatives who are still church member have nuanced their views about homosexuality after their coming out. They now acknowledge that homosexuality is inborn, and hence not convertible, and some accept homosexual relationships in love and trust. Visibility as a method of resistance thus contributes to a productive friction in the heteronormative discourse of church. Erwin, Niels and Frank, through their very presence, cause this friction. And Miranda, Eus, Sierd, Maria and Dieuwke their mothers, and several others, use the same strategy. They advocate for the position of LGBTQI's and thereby use their agency to resist heteronormativity. Thus there are multiple resistances: the LGBTQI's who remain member, heterosexual LGBTQI advocates, civil society, and several more. Their resistance takes many forms and produces multiple alternative discourses. One is for example the idea that homosexual relationships are allowed, as long as they are monogamous. Others think that people should decide for themselves whether they want a monogamous relationship, and again others have no clear opinion but emphasize that they do not want to judge others upon the way they design their sexual life. For this reason Foucault (1978, 96) also emphasizes that there is a "plurality of resistances,

each of them a special case”. Thus just like power, resistance is equally dispersed and fragmented. Yet all ‘rebels’ emphasize that changes occur slowly, and with baby steps. They often suffer rejection and judgment, but they believe in God’s inclusive love, and are willing to spread it. Even if they are rejected for it. Important is that these people are able to make such changes because they are Christians. They all emphasize their personal relation to God, and their individual path in following Jesus’ footsteps. Thus by deploying such an evangelical Christian notion, they make changes from within the framework they resist. They challenge heteronormativity not by leaving the structure of their community, but, rather, aim to challenge and change it from within. And by their embeddedness in these communities, or to the Christian community in general, they cause a productive friction which has the potential to rearrange culture. Hence, Foucault his observation that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault 1978, 95). Only through being interior to the Christian community, resistance can take place. That is however not to say that there is a major change in the dominant discourse, but rather, that alternative discourses gain influence. However, as the matrix shows, these changes are still marginal. Many Christians indeed condemn homosexual relationships, and, as a result, many homosexuals leave church disappointed and lose their faith.

4.4 Conclusive remarks

Throughout this chapter I have illustrated the diverse effects of the liberal and homonationalist Dutch context on evangelical communities. Firstly I showed that religious communities become the ‘un-modern other’ through the emphasis on the Dutch society as tolerant towards sexual diversity. This can be a reason for evangelical individuals and communities to isolate further from society. On the other hand, it creates a friction with the potential to rearrange culture and produce alternative discourses. Some evangelicals actively aim to change sexual discourse in their community, or the Christian world in general. They thereby show that the structure/agency debate is not an either/or question, as their resistance shows agency within structure. This conclusion demonstrates the relevance of post-structuralism, as it emphasizes the ambiguous, paradoxical, complex and messy nature of reality.

Chapter five – Conclusion

I started this thesis with describing Anna, who made an interesting statement which captured the argument that two people of the same sex are not apt for each other because they cannot reproduce, and which formed a strong contrast with secular ideas about homosexuality. Therefore, throughout this thesis I have developed an answer to the question how evangelical homosexuals within the liberal and secular Dutch society negotiate their faith and their sexuality. In order to answer this question, two topics needed clarification. Firstly, an investigation into the implications of membership to an evangelical community is necessary to understand the background of these individuals. And secondly, the implications of the liberal and secular Dutch context have been scrutinized to indicate the broader context wherein evangelical churches and members are embedded. Furthermore, as I stated in the introduction, I have focused on micro realities of lived experience, as a way to deploy a post-structuralist approach, and to substantiate post-structuralist conceptualizations of power and personhood. As such I have been able to transcend the structure/agency debate, and to show the ambiguous and messy nature of reality. I found that there is no single and coherent answer to the research question, as any attempt to formulate such an answer falls short in covering the entire field and all complexities and ambivalences that are there to discover.

5.1.1 A new life

I collected the data for the first chapter from interviews with evangelical church members, church leaders, former members and through participant observations. This chapter focuses mainly on the structures of evangelical communities, through an analysis of power mechanisms and its effects on evangelical discourses on identity and sexuality. I showed that the notion of a born-again experience and the resulting new life amongst like-minded Christians is of major importance to comprehend the profound impact of discovering a homosexual orientation. Evangelical church communities are often the primary, and sometimes sole, social network of its members. Membership to these communities requires commitment to God's word and to other evangelicals, and members are expected to adhere to certain lifestyle norms before they become a baptized or active member. In other words, obedience to rules and regulations is required. The result of such expectations is that the community is a rather homogenous group of people with comparable ideas about the characteristics of their Christian identity. I used Butler's (1999) concept of performativity to

argue that the Christian identity needs a repetitive framework in order to be upheld and accepted for true and natural. This reiteration is assured by spectacular performances, and via both authoritarian and communitarian power mechanisms. Crucial is that non-compliance to these norms is punishable by exclusion from formal tasks and loss of respect from fellow members.

Furthermore, by providing an insight into evangelical life, I have showed how authority works in these communities, and how the power mechanisms construct and uphold discourses on identity and sexuality. Power runs through all evangelical members and is exemplary for Foucault (1978) his notion of power as being polymorphous. Authoritarian structures, meaning God and persons in a leadership positions, produce a truth about a sound identity and lifestyle. The community, by its close-knit structure, functions as a micro-panopticon (Foucault 1975) that controls members upon obedience to these lifestyle norms. Also, through the protestant notion of religion, meaning that all Christians have direct access to God (Van Klinken 2015, 10), members and leaders are in fact equal in their relation to God. Yet through the belief that the vicar is consumed by the Holy Spirit during service, he holds a frontrunner position in the production of truth and the construction of discourse. There are many life style norms, but the most important for the scope of this research is the heterosexual norm.

Heterosexuality is often perceived as 'natural': God created a dichotomy between men and women, made them have a mutual desire for each other, and assigned them to reproduce. This heteronormative ideal is rather strong in evangelical communities. Yet, just as the identity construct, it needs to be reiterated in order to be accepted for true and natural, and non-compliance has punitive consequences. Heterosexuality is thus also a performative construct which is not self-evident. And, in other words, heterosexuality is "an identity permanently at risk" (Butler 1991, 24). I therefore argued that it is made desirable by conveying it through spectacle, and through the construction of a community wherein deviation of the norm is deemed undesirable. Homosexuality is seen as deviant: it resists the order of God's creation and it resists heteronormativity. The impact of discovering a homosexual orientation is severe for evangelicals because it contradicts fundamental beliefs, it is disfavored by many community members and by leaders, and, as a consequence, it affects the social belonging to a community of fellow born-again Christians.

5.1.2 Negotiating faith and sexuality

The chapter in which I discuss the negotiation process of homosexual participants rests mainly on life history interviews. This method enables me to look at the full process and major influences on their life path and their current subject position. As I explained in the previous chapter, a homosexual orientation is usually not perceived as favorable, and deviation of lifestyle norms may have punitive consequences. Homosexual evangelicals therefore come to negotiate their faith and their sexuality. This leads to three subject positions: Christian, not gay; gay, not Christian; and gay and Christian. The last category consists of two sub-positions: gay with individualized faith, or gay and community member. I argue that the first two categories do not actively resist or change the sexual discourse. They either blend in to it, or they leave. The last category is different in that respect, for they actively challenge and resist dominant discourse from within the boundaries that construct it.

From these positions one can draw the conclusion that all participants, independent of their current subject position, use their agency in relating to the power mechanisms of their community. Some participants experienced rejection and judgments after their coming out, while others felt more accepted by their community members. This has been of major influence in their process of negotiation. I use Braidotti (2011) her concept of nomadic subjects to show that these individuals are not frozen in their position, but rather shift and individually construct their lifestyle according to their own preference. Important is that their drive to shift their position is a result of a normative environment and is initiated by their sexual orientation and the desire for a satisfactory state of being.

This analysis shows that through a post-structuralist approach towards personhood, which explores the fragmented nature of being through a focus on lived experience, this analysis shows that the drive to shape one’s lifestyle is both an individual and a social process. The individuals from the narratives presented in this thesis negotiate their sexual orientation with their community and their personal faith, and construct a position that feels right for them. Although the outcomes can be very different, they all show their agency within the structure of evangelical faith. Foucault, in his notion of power as being dispersed shows that power is distributed amongst all members of a given community. The result is that the evangelical community functions as a panopticon (Foucault 1975) wherein all involved have a function of guarding others. In addition to this notion, I would propose to add the individual who has control over him/herself into this framework of surveillance. That is, people internalize desired behaviors and control themselves upon obedience. Think for example about Dieuwke who used to ask herself what she, as a Christian, should do, think or feel. As

such, the power mechanisms from the community and the resulting dominant discourses, gain an internalized power over the evangelical members. This power can be seen as agency; they *willfully* obey to norms and regulations. Jildou for example made a personal choice to no longer engage in lesbian relationships. Although she blends in to dominant discourse, she sacrificed a lot, as a personal and conscious choice. But it could also be seen as a result of structure, because Jildou, and many others, blend in to evangelical structures. Arguing that their choices are purely a result of how structures would undermine the notion of them being a sovereign and rational subject. I would therefore rather assert that agency can be applied in a way that is in accordance with the structure. People often make the conscious choice to be part of a structure and apply discourses and lifestyle norms in their own personal way. Think for example about Erwin and Niels, who are part of a church community and adhere to many of the lifestyle norms, but apply the sexuality discourse in their own way. Framing structure and agency as oppositional or mutually exclusionary realms of influence here shows itself to be irrelevant. I would argue that there is structure *and* agency, as there is agency *within* structures, and structure *within* agency.

5.1.3 Alternative discourses

There seems to be a growing number of evangelicals who do not disapprove homosexual relationships *per se*. In the last chapter I discuss this tendency and relate it to societal changes. The data of this chapter rests on online data collecting from websites, online interviews, and on real life ethnographic interviews (members and former members, homosexuals and heterosexuals). The theoretical framework is mainly influenced by Foucault's notions of power and Tsing (2003) her concept of friction. In my central research question I mentioned the Dutch context as a realm of inquiry. In the introduction I discussed secularization and modernity as two tendencies that are often expected to come along with each other. Evangelical communities contradict the expectations of both; they have growing membership rates and require obedience rather than individuality. I argued that these liberal and homonationalist sentiments and policies in the Netherlands have a two-sided effect on evangelical communities. First, it seems to create hesitance in some churches to discuss their views on homosexuality with outsiders. They become the 'un-modern other' and express fear of rejection. The out and proud homonationalist tendencies of the Dutch context somewhat paradoxically silence those who contradict the expectations of modernity and secularization. On the other hand, several participants expressed that churches are changing, which they see as an effect of societal changes. I used Tsing (2003) her concept of friction to argue that the

tension between church and society then turns out to be productive, as it is able to rearrange culture or produce alternative discourses.

The individuals who widen their perspective apply a typically evangelical notion to substantiate their position, namely the personal relation with God. As such they emphasize their individuality within faith. Some have the ambition to change discourse, while others sense a change and therefore re-evaluate their perspective. Either way, it shows that alternative discourses are produced and gain influence. The matrix I present illustrates the diverse and diffuse perspectives of the research participants, and challenges the idea that church members form a completely unitary and homogenous group of people. Although they agree on certain lifestyle norms, and, most fundamentally, on their evangelical Christian identity, they all search for ways to apply these norms in a personal and authentic way. The individuals who actively rebel against heteronormativity resist this discourse from within the boundaries of their faith. This demonstrates again Foucault his theory that resistance is fragmented and takes place from within the structure it challenges. Again, also these individuals go beyond the oppositional framing of structure and agency because they use their agency within the structures of their faith. And from that position they are able to produce alternative discourses which have an influence on the positions of their fellow members.

5.2 How do evangelical homosexuals in the liberal and secular Dutch society negotiate their sexuality and their faith?

As a final conclusion one can say that heteronormativity as found in evangelical communities problematizes self-acceptance of homosexual members. As a result, evangelical homosexuals find different ways to negotiate their faith and their sexuality. Their processes are driven by a desire for emotional wellbeing, or happiness. Some evangelical homosexuals find ways to integrate both faith and a homosexual relationship into their identity, while others reject either their faith or their homosexuality. Those who reject one aspect thereby uphold heteronormativity within evangelical communities, while those who integrate both aspects resist dominant evangelical discourse. Their personhood thereby shows to be fluid and changeable, rather than rigid or fixed. In other words, they are nomadic subjects (Braidotti 2011). Their different subject positions are influenced by both their social network and their personal convictions. And seen from a broader perspective, their negotiation can be influenced by a society wherein homosexuality is increasingly normalized. Thus also sexual discourse and the power mechanisms that create and uphold this discourse are in fact

changeable. Yet changes are marginal, and many evangelical homosexuals do not find the opportunity to integrate both identities, but rather sacrifice either one. By embedding a post-structuralist approach into an ethnographic research, I have been able to find and demonstrate the complexity and ambivalence of this lived reality.

5.3 Discussion of relevance

The argument I have developed in this thesis has both societal and theoretical implications. The theoretical repercussion is that it contributes to the structure/agency debate and offers a way out of this conundrum. Furthermore, much research into this topic focuses more exclusively on the LGBTQI's and (their) religious convictions (see for example Ganzevoort e.a. 2011, Wilcox 2006, Walton 2006, Barton 2010). By adding the evangelical community and the Dutch society into the investigation, I have showed the relation between these realms. Church practice is not fixed, but changes. This fact is overlooked by many social science researchers, while it is an important finding to be able to establish a comprehensive understanding of church practice. Again, the ethnographic method is very suitable for this conclusion. Therefore, the contribution of anthropology to this research is that it provides an insight into the effects of power and authority, and underwrites a post-structuralist approach towards identity and power. This method is able to identify the nuances, the ambivalences and the complexness through description of the ethnographic details. Because through an investigation of ambiguities and paradoxes, the shattered nature of reality can be understood and analyzed.

The societal contribution of this thesis is that it will be published with a gay rights NGO. The implication for this NGO and others concerned, is that I have shown that structures can be challenged from within its own boundaries, through the production of alternative discourses. Outsiders, being for example COC Friesland, should therefore not aim to actively influence church practices. Rather, they can support Christian initiatives that challenge heteronormativity and resist discriminative practices. A way to apply this recommendation is to seek collaboration with such individuals and organizations. Furthermore, what non-religious gay rights organizations should keep in mind is that their very presence in society and the work they have done to normalize sexual diversity, already has its effects on church communities.

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