



Universiteit Utrecht

# **The influence of religious background on moral attitudes towards homosexuals**

*An interdisciplinary study about the  
difference in moral attitudes between  
Dutch Roman Catholics, Dutch  
Protestants, Dutch Muslims and non-  
religious Dutch.*

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## **Abstract**

Negative attitudes towards homosexuals are still present. A quarter of the homosexual men and lesbian women experienced negatively treatment(s) in public spaces. Besides, the American Nashville statement got support from some Dutch citizens and political parties. Researches discovered a relationship between intolerant behaviour towards homosexuals and their religion. The current thesis focuses on what extent religious background affects attitudes towards homosexuals. To explore this, literature research has been conducted. The background of Christianity and Islam and their views on homosexuality were investigated. As a theoretical base of this study, the Identity theory and the Social Identity theory were applied. The role of identity on religious behaviour is studied and the influence of religion on peoples' moral attitudes. The quantitative research data, from the European Value Study 2017, was analysed using SPSS, to answer the research question. According to the results, both religion as the importance of religion affects people's moral attitude towards homosexuals. However, people's attitudes turned out not to be as negative as expected. Depillarization and modernization are processes that possibly can explain these positive attitudes. Extensive research is recommended to provide more knowledge about the role of modernization. Also including attitudes towards transgenders and non-binary people in the research would be useful to create a more inclusive society.

## **Keywords**

religion, homosexuality, moral attitudes, identity, social identity.

## **Introduction**

George Weinberg's introduction of the term homophobia in the late 1960s challenged traditional thinking about homosexuality and helped focus society's attention on the problem of antigay prejudice and stigma (Herek, 2004). Homophobia is less visible nowadays, but negative attitudes towards homosexuals are present (Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018). A study of International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association Europe [ILGA] about experienced discrimination of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals [LGB] stated that 75% of their participants has experienced discrimination because of their sexuality (Takács, 2006). In comparison to other European countries, the Netherlands is a very tolerant country, but still 10% of the population disapproves homosexuality (Keuzenkamp & Kuyper, 2013). For example, the Nashville statement came out in America in 2017, a document from the city of Nashville about Christianity, marriage and sexuality, which disapproves homosexuality and same-sex marriage (Sondermeijer, 2019). Some Dutch citizens and Dutch political parties, like the Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij [SGP], are supporting this statement and even want a similar statement in the Netherlands as well (Sondermeijer, 2019).

Certain groups see homosexuals as different and deviated from the norm, causing social exclusion of gays and lesbians (Takács, 2006). Keuzenkamp (2010) stated that accepting homosexuality is getting more common, but never will be seen the same as heterosexuality. Negative attitudes towards homosexuality flows from this distinction (Kuyper, 2016). These attitudes can express themselves in discriminative behaviour. Some people who identify themselves as LGB feel that they are treated differently, for example, some have the feeling that they have to be aware of how they express themselves in public spaces (Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018). A quarter of the homosexual men and lesbian women experienced negatively treatment(s) in public spaces (Kooiman & Keuzenkamp, 2012).

Psychological research established that religion is an important factor regarding (prejudiced) moral attitudes towards homosexuals (Allport & Ross, 1967). This may be rooted in religious books, such as the Bible and the Koran, as these holy books form a, mostly negative, image of homosexuals. Holy Books are a hold to a lot of people's lifestyles, and therefore it also influences their moral values (Fritzsche & Os, 2007; Diehl, Koenig & Ruckdeschel, 2014).

The Netherlands is one of the most secularized countries in the world (Huijnk, 2014). In the contemporary multicultural society, homo tolerance became an important topic again, as the acceptance of homosexuality appears to be more difficult for certain migrant and religious groups. Migrants, in particular of Moroccan origin, are overrepresented in the perpetrators of anti-gay violence. There are also certain groups within the indigenous population for whom homosexuality is a tricky issue. Orthodox Protestants are often mentioned in this context (Huijnk, 2014).

Religion is often used to distinguish attitudes, which is often copied and possibly magnified in the media (Huijnk, 2014). Dutch media mainly focus on religion when it comes to Muslims, but being a Muslim does not have to be the reason for intolerance behaviour, factors as demographics or socioeconomic background can also play a role (Huijnk, 2014).

The question that arises from these statements is whether religion is really important in forming moral attitudes or whether people have other motives for being intolerant. This study should expand the knowledge of the relevance of the religious motive on negative moral attitudes towards homosexuals in the Dutch case. Earlier studies only showed European cases, and not specifically the Dutch case. As the Netherlands is a tolerant country, a difference can be revealed between the Dutch case and European case.

### **Religion and homosexuality**

A clear definition of religion is debatable according to Dobbelaere and Lauwer (1973). The diversity of different religions makes it hard to put all religions in one definition. Monotheism is the most common type of religion in western society as it is the foundation of Christianity, Judaism and Islam (Clarfield, Gordon, Markwell & Alibhai, 2003). In 2014 the three most common religions in the Netherlands were Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam (Huijnk, 2014). The definition on which religion in this study is based is: a system of beliefs and practices, where the followers can lean on, when their having ultimate problems of human life (Dobbelaere & Lauwer, 1973), as this is consistent with the three biggest religions in the Netherlands.

A lot of theorists state that a fundamental function of religion is helping individuals to fulfil their yearning for meaning and purpose in life (Galek, Flannelly, Ellison & Siltan, 2015). Clark states that “*religion is more than any other human function satisfies the need for meaning*” (Clark, 1958, p. 419).

As religion gives meaning to a lot of peoples life, it influences their moral attitudes as well on quite a high level. Personal and religious beliefs, and affiliation are seen as important predictors of moral attitudes towards LGBs (Yip, 2005).

### *Christianity: Catholicism and Protestantism*

The Bible remains one of the central documents of western civilization. It has inspired literature, art and music, and it has shaped people's understandings of themselves, society and morality (Locke, 2005). A long tradition of banning homosexuality was normal within Christianity. The original Bible prohibits the practice of homosexual feelings; therefore homosexuality can be seen as a sin (Viefhues-Bailey, 2010). Christians can feel compelled to act on what the Bible says, although they might not agree with it in the first place. The Bible is a hold to a lot of Christians, in difficult times when they have to make a decision they rely on what the Bible conveys (Locke, 2005). Also within the debate on homosexuality, many Christians will consult the Bible on this matter. Noted by Locke (2005) only a few clauses appear to address the issue of homosexuality directly, namely the story of the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 19:1-11) and statements by the Apostle Paul (Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10). According to Locke (2005) the negative tone in these texts is seen as proof by some Christians that God entirely decry homosexuality, or at least homosexual behaviour. Nevertheless, it is important to know that these biblical clauses were written in a world that is very different from now, with different values, norms and traditions. The term 'homosexual' did not even exist in that time (Locke, 2005), only same-sex erotic encounters are mentioned in the Bible, and same-sex love is not mentioned at all (Nissinen, 1998).

The Christian Church traditionally had two main streams in the Netherlands: Roman Catholicism and Protestantism (Huijnk, 2014). Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are often separated in studies because of their differences. One of the biggest differences between Catholicism and Protestantism is the question of the adequacy and authority of the Bible, the role of the Priest and the meaning of the Church.

Catholics do not believe that the Bible on itself is sufficient. Catholics believe that the Bible as well as Roman Catholic traditions are binding, such as the purgatory or the worship of Maria. Both traditions do not have a basis in the Bible, but are based on Roman Catholic traditions (Grasso, Bradley & Hunt, 1995). Roman Catholics see the church as the voice of God, instead of the Bible (Grasso, Bradley & Hunt, 1995). They also see the Pope as a deputy of God, whereby the position of the Bible becomes less important (Ganzevoort,

2001). As Roman Catholics rely on the pope, a living being, it is likely that they develop overtime and not hang on to old standards (Ganzevoort, 2001). Besides, Roman Catholics believe that Priests can forgive sins (Ganzevoort, 2001).

The basis of Protestantism is the belief that the Bible is the only source of Gods word for humanity. McKinney (1998) noted that the Bible teaches everything humanity needs to know in life, according to the Protestants religion. Many Protestants see the Bible as the only will of God, against which all Christian behaviour should be measured (McKinney, 1998). The sins of Christians can only be delivered by the faith in God according to the Protestants belief (McKinney, 2007).

As the Bible itself gives no room for homosexuality, some Protestants and Catholics also carry this vision, although (Locke, 2005). A study of Siebert, Chonody, Rutledge and Killian (2009) shows that Protestants have more negative feelings towards homosexuals than Catholics, which can be linked to the fact that the Bible forbids homosexuality, and that is their main handhold in life.

### *Islam*

In recent decades, migration has led to more and more supporters of non-Christian religions. The labour migration of Moroccans and Turks in the 1960s and the subsequent family migration meant a sharp increase in the number of Muslims in the Netherlands. Islam is now the largest religion in the Netherlands after Christianity (Huijnk, 2014)

In mainstream Islam homosexuality remains highly stigmatized and forbidden (Jaspal, 2016). The Islamic teachings oppose homosexuality, like most religions. This stance is ingrained in the major ideological channels of communication, such as Islamic Holy Scripture (the *Koran*), Islamic law (*Shariah*), and the verbal teachings of the Prophet Mohammed (*Ahadith*), all of which appear to outlaw homosexuality (Bouhdiba, 1998). The same as in the Bible, the term 'homosexual' is not used, and only same-sex sexuality between men is mentioned. Yet this is interpreted nowadays as homosexuality in all kinds, so also lesbians and bisexuals (Jaspal, 2016). The Koran legislates all aspects of Islamic life, but there is a lot of room for interpretation. Some interpretations are favoured above others by particular denominations of Islam (Jaspal, 2016). The story of Lot, a story which is in all the Holy Books and thus in the Koran as well, is seen as evidence of Gods disapproval of homosexuality. In addition to the story of Lot, one clause in the Koran clearly demonstrates the illegality of homosexuality: '*And as for the two of you who are*

*guilty thereof [of homosexuality], punish them both. And if they repent and improve, then let them be. Lo! Allah is ever relenting, Merciful (4.16)*' (Jaspal, 2016). Nevertheless, there is also variation in interpretation of the Story of Lot and other clauses of the Koran, which can lead to many different attitudes (Kugle, 2010).

### **Identity and the importance of religion**

Religion can play a central social role in individuals' life (Silton, Flannelly, Ellison, Galek, Jacobs, Marcum & Silton, 2011). According to the Identity Theory, individuals shape personal identities largely based on the roles they fulfil in life (Burke, 1991; Thoits, 1991). These roles exist in hierarchies, where some (social) roles are more central to someone's identity than others. (Silton, Flannelly, Ellison, Galek, Jacobs, Marcum & Silton, 2011). As Park and Edmondson (2012, p. 150) put it: *"Religion is the core of many individuals' identities, affecting how they understand themselves as religious or spiritual beings, as well as determining their social identification with a particular religious group"*.

Giddens (1991) considers identity in postmodern time as fragmented, complex, dynamic and intersectional. Identity is not fixed, but is a subject to change and is mainly formed by contact with others and reflexivity of the individual (Giddens, 1991). The concept of identity is scientifically and analytically approached as dynamic, but still people have a sense of identity as determined and definitive (Nagel, 2003). Different factors, such as religion or gender, are playing a role in the identity construction (Butler, 1990; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

Some people are more religious than others (Allport & Ross, 1967). According to Allport and Ross (1967) the reason for this can be explained on the basis of motivation and religious orientation, which is rooted in people's identity. Allport and Ross (1967) stated that some people have an intrinsic motivation; these people live for their religion. Extrinsic motivated people use their religion for other purposes. Religious orientation of people can also be divided in intrinsic and extrinsic. People with a highly intrinsic orientation find their master motive in religion. Religion is the most important thing in their life and other needs are less strong. Persons with extrinsic orientation use religion for there own ends and other interests are more important. They can use religion for safety, comfort, sociability or distraction. Status and self-justification are also extrinsic values. People with high intrinsic motivation and orientation are therefor more likely to be strong believers (Allport & Ross, 1967).

In addition to the theory of Allport and Ross, Pargament stated that religious coping mechanisms are also important in the search for meaning (Pieper, 2012). Coping is a process of cognitive and behavioural processing of problem situations and expresses the purpose of human action. Coping is about maximizing central values and not only leads to the removal of the stressor, but also the growth of the "coper" (Pieper, 2012). There are two different ways of religious coping, vertical and horizontal; vertical coping means that the person turns directly to god, and when using horizontal coping people are turning to fellow believers or spiritual caretakers or pastors. Religious coping can be used to deal with moral issues or dilemmas. The manner of coping is woven into people's identity (Pieper, 2012).

### **Moral attitudes and religion**

A part of someone's identity is his or hers moral attitudes. Moral attitudes can be defined as attitudes based on moral convictions, which means that a particular attitude is a reflection of fundamental beliefs about right and wrong (Alston, 1968). According to different studies, religious characteristics and religious involvement are very strong predictors of people's moral attitudes (Ebaugh and Haney 1978; Jelen 1984; Woodrum 1988). Especially important is that people who identify themselves as religious and having strong commitment to their belief are feeling more in-group respect and therefore base their behaviour rather on the shared values (Ellemers, Pagliaro & Barreto, 2013), in contrast to non-believers, who are more likely to make individual choices (Terpstra, Rozell & Robinson, 1993). In addition to the Identity Theory, Tajfels (1979) Social Identity Theory refers to social identity as someone's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s). Being able to associate yourself with a group gives people a sense of social identity; that they belong to a social world. People enhance the status of the group in order to increase our self-image (Tajfel, 1979). In line with the Social Identity Theory, Pagliaro, Ellemers and Barreto (2011) stated that in-group respect is a determinant factor for people's moral behaviour. Shared ideas about what is 'right' or 'wrong' are very depending on the cultural, religious and political context of the group (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Most groups or communities have important goals and values that may function as a moral standard (Giner-Sorolla, 2012). Acting according to these moral standards can be used to judge individuals whether they are suitable as a group member or not (Tooby & Cosmides, 2010). Religious affiliations therefore have strong effects on one's everyday attitudes and behaviour (Scheepers & van der Slik, 1998). Moral attitudes are influenced by religion because people take roles in a community, (re-) define social situations, deliberate upon



specific issues, and adjust their responses to each other, which results into specific values, norms and behaviour (Ebaugh and Haney 1978; Jelen 1984; Woodrum 1988). Empirical evidence of these theories is shown by a study of Gay, Ellison and Powers (1996).

As personal and religious beliefs and affiliation are typically seen as predictors of moral attitudes; this also is the case in their attitudes towards LGB (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) noted that religious people have more negative attitudes towards LGB than non-religious people, but this also varies hugely per religion and the extent to which they systematically criticize homosexuality.

Research typically points to religion as one of the strongest predictors of attitudes about homosexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Siebert, Chonody, Rutledge & Killian, 2009; Balkin, Schlosser & Levitt, 2009). Multiple studies compare different religions and peoples attitude towards homosexuals, mostly also in comparison between countries (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Siebert, Chonody, Rutledge & Killian, 2009). The study of Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) showed that Protestants and Muslims are the two religious groups with the least accepting attitudes towards homosexuality. According to their study Roman Catholics approve homosexuality more than Protestants and Muslims, and are mostly in line with people that do not identify as religious. The study of Siebert, Chonody, Rutledge & Killian (2009) also noted that Protestants scored highest on negative attitudes towards homosexuals, but they did not involve all religions, such as Islam, in their study.

The study of Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) also included the importance of religion and noted that people that are finding their religion very important are more likely to have negative and disapproval attitudes towards LGB's, than people that are religious but not finding their religion that important.

Based on the empirical research, the following question is stated: *To what extent does religion and the importance of religion influence people's' moral attitudes towards LGB?*

To answer the question, three hypotheses are formulated. '*Religious people have more negative moral attitudes towards homosexuals than non-religious*', is the first hypothesis and is based on the studies that stated that religious people have more disapproval of homosexuality, and thus are more negative towards them, than people who are not religious.

The second hypothesis is '*The importance of religion affects peoples moral attitudes towards homosexuals*'. This hypothesis is based on the studies that have shown

that people who are more religious seem to have more negative attitudes than people who find their religion less important.

As it is still unclear which religious denomination, Protestants or Muslims, have more negative moral attitudes towards homosexuals an explorative question is formulated: *'People from which religion have the most negative moral attitudes towards LGB's?'*

## **Methods**

### *Procedure and participants*

This study investigated the influence of religion on moral attitude towards LGB's. The research question stated above is answered using survey data from the European Value Study [EVS]. The design of this study was quantitative and based on existing data of the EVS2017. The dataset included cross-sectional data gathered from 31.07.2017 until 28.02.2018. The dataset was suitable for this research, because in addition to information about the religion and importance of the respondent's religion, the dataset also contains information about the attitudes towards homosexuals.

The aim of the EVS2017 was to explore the underlying moral and social values of European citizens. To reach this aim the EVS2017 contained 250 questions. EVS 2017 included seven topics, but this study will focus on three topics; perceptions of life (1), religion (2) and morale (3). All the described topics were chosen because together they could give an answer to the main question, hypotheses and explorative question.

The EVS left the recruitment of participants in the Netherlands to I&O research BV. They have their own recruitment and selection agency, but how I&O research BV recruit their participants is not available on their website, and therefore not transparent. The interviews were taken face-to-face and took about an hour. Participants were given a participant information sheet explaining the study and informing them that participation was voluntary and that responses would be treated anonymously. Participants were asked to provide written consent.

The sample size of the EVS in the Netherlands in 2017 consisted of 686 participants, where all participants were above 18. From the participants 348 were male (50,7%) and 339 were female (49,3%). Of the 686 participants, 345 (50,3%) do not identify themselves as a part of a religion. Of the respondents who identify themselves as a part of a religious denomination (n=341), 28 were Muslim (4,1%), 113 were Roman Catholic (16,5%) and 103 identify themselves Protestant (15%). Of the religious people, only participants who identified themselves as Christian (Catholic or Protestant), Muslim or

non-religious are part of the research population, which is filtered with SPSS. Respondents are a good reflection of the population in terms of gender and age (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2019). Also the size of the participants contributes to a representative sample size. However, the amounts of Roman Catholics and Muslims in the sample were not equal to percentage they fill in the population, which influences the representativeness.

#### *Attitudes towards homosexuals*

The dependent variable in this study is ‘attitudes towards homosexuals’. Two items were used to measure this variable. The used items are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

*Dependent variable: Attitudes towards homosexuals*

Item 1.	<i>How would you feel about the following statements?</i>
Labelled as Attitude – Parents	Statement: ‘homosexuals are as good as parents as other couples’.
Answers ranged from	1 - disagree strongly to 5 - agree strongly
Item 2.	<i>Please tell me for each of the following whether you</i>
Labelled as Attitude – Justified	<i>think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card’</i>
	Statement: ‘homosexuality’
Answers ranged from	1- never justified to 10 - always justified

To be able to compare the answers of the items, the Likert-scale of Attitude-Justified was recoded. Code 1 and 2 were recoded to 1 ‘very negative’, 3 and 4 were recoded to ‘negative’, 5 and 6 were recoded as ‘neutral’, 7 and 8 were recoded as ‘positive’ and 9 and 10 were recoded as ‘very positive’.

To have a clearer view on the answers, the answering options were renamed. Answer category 1 got valued as ‘very positive’ and answer category 5 was valued as ‘very negative’. Missing values were imputed to mean-answers of the concerned item.

To be able to include the variables in an ANOVA, a new variable was created. The means of items 1 and 2 were computed into one variable named ‘Attitudes’. The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale that measures the construct is .50. The scale is inadequate,

but is still used because no other questions that measure this construct were included in the survey. The explained variance of the scale is 37%.

### *Religion*

An independent variable in the study is religion. The item that was used to measure religion was 1. 'Independently of whether you go to church or not, would you say you are ...' and was labelled as 'Religious Person'. Item 'Religious Person' had three options: 'a religious person', 'not a religious person' or 'a convinced atheist'. This item was recoded; the first option was named 'religious' and the other two options named 'non-religious'. This was chosen because it was necessary to know if people identify as religious or not, and being atheistic or not was not relevant. Therefore atheists were defined as non-religious in this study. The scale of religion had a Cronbach's Alpha of .79 and 81% variance is explained. The recoding was based on face-validity (Neuman, 2016).

### *Type of religion*

Type of religion is measured with one question where people filled in to what religion they belong to. This is a categorical variable and is used to explore the differences between religions and their behaviour.

### *Importance of religion*

Importance of religion is involved in the analysis as an independent variable. The variable of importance of religion is based on one item; Item 1. 'Please say, for each of the following, how important it is in your life', where a sub question was religion (Religion Importance). To answer the question a 4-point Likert-scale from 'very important' to 'not at all important' is used.

### *Control variables*

While gender, age and educational level are not central factors to the analysis they might still play a role in predicting attitudes towards homosexuals, hence they were included in the analysis as control variables.

### *Analysis*

At first, descriptive analyses were conducted to get an overview of the attitudes of the participants in combination with the independent variables.

For all analysis an  $\alpha$  of .05 has been used. A one-way ANOVA is conducted to measure the effect of religion on attitudes. The control variables, gender, age and education, are entered in an ANCOVA to test if they have an effect on attitudes towards homosexuals. Another one-way ANOVA is conducted to measure the effect of importance of religion on attitudes. In addition, if significant effects were found, a post-hoc test measures the differences between the categories of importance of religion on attitudes.

The explorative question, which explores the differences between the type of religions and their moral attitudes, is answered with an ANOVA. If significant effects were found, post-hoc tests were conducted.

The last analysis measured the interaction between importance of religion and type of religion on moral attitudes, and is conducted with an ANOVA.

## Results

### *Descriptive statistics*

Table 2 shows all the means of the variables religion, type of religion and importance of religion relative to attitudes towards homosexuals. The higher the mean, the more positive the attitudes are.

**Table 2.** *Descriptive statistics*

Independent Variable	N	Mean	SD
Religious Person			
Religious	341	3,68	1,17
Non-religious	345	4,34	0,75
Type of religion			
Roman Catholic	113	3,93	1,02
Protestant	103	3,75	1,17
Muslim	28	2,84	1,42
Importance of religion			
Not at all important	169	4,30	0,86
Not important	275	4,33	0,55
Quite important	136	4,00	0,99
Very important	106	3,10	1,27

### *Religious versus non-religious*

A factorial between groups analysis of variance [ANOVA] was used to investigate the effect of religion on attitudes. Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's test were used to evaluate the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance respectively. Both of the assumptions were violated, but an ANOVA was still conducted. Therefore results were interpreted with caution.

An ANOVA is conducted to find an effect from religion on moral attitudes towards homosexuals. A significant main effect has been found  $F(1, 678) = 31.40, p < .00$ , which indicates that there is a difference in attitudes towards homosexuals between religious and non-religious people.

Another ANOVA is conducted to find an effect of gender, educational level and/or age on moral attitudes towards homosexuals. No significant effect was found for age ( $F(5, 680) = 2.12, p = .62$ ). As a significant effect was found for gender and educational level, an ANCOVA was used to control for the confounding factors, gender and educational level. The ANCOVA showed that gender significantly predicts the values on attitudes towards homosexuals ( $F(1, 684) = 24.52, p < .00, \eta_p^2 = .04$ ). However, no interaction has been found between gender and religion,  $F(1, 684) = 1.34, p = .25, \eta_p^2 = .00$ , which means that the effect of gender on moral attitudes does not depend on religion. The ANCOVA also showed that educational level significantly predicts the values on attitudes towards homosexuals ( $F(1, 684) = 20.43, p < .00, \eta_p^2 = .03$ ). Although a significant effect has been found, there is no interaction ascertained between educational level and religion,  $F(1, 684) = 2.55, p = .11, \eta_p^2 = .00$ , which means that the effect of educational level on moral attitudes does not depend on religion.

### *Importance of religion*

An ANOVA was used to investigate the effect of religion and importance of religion on attitudes. Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's test were used to evaluate the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance respectively. Both assumptions were violated, but an ANOVA was still conducted. Therefore results were interpreted with caution.

The ANOVA revealed a statistically main effect for importance of religion on attitudes towards homosexuals,  $F(3, 682) = 41.18, p < .00$ . In addition to the main effect of importance of religion, a statistically significant difference between groups was determined by a one-way ANOVA ( $F(10, 233) = 11.80, p < .00, \eta_p^2 = .13$ ). A Tukey post-hoc test

revealed that attitudes were significantly more negative for people who found religion very important compared to people of the other groups, which is shown in detail in Table 3.

**Table 3.** *Tukey post-hoc of importance of religion on attitudes towards homosexuals*

Importance of religion	M	SD	p
Not at all important	4,30	1,18	1.00
Not important	4,38	0,53	1.00
Quite important	4,00	0.99	.41
Very important	3,12	0,86	.00

An ANCOVA was used to control for the confounding factors, gender and educational level in a model with the independent variable importance of religion. The ANCOVA showed that gender significantly predicts the values on attitudes towards homosexuals ( $F(3, 682) = 26.23, p < .00, \eta_p^2 = .04$ ). However, no interaction has been found between gender and importance of religion,  $F(3, 682) = .19, p = .25, \eta_p^2 = .01$ , which means that the effect of gender on moral attitudes does not depends on the importance of religion. The ANCOVA also showed that educational level significantly predicts the values on attitudes towards homosexuals ( $F(3, 682) = 22.84, p < .00, \eta_p^2 = .03$ ). Although a significant effect has been found, there is no interaction ascertained between educational level and importance of religion,  $F(3, 682) = .68, p = .56, \eta_p^2 = .00$ , which means that the effect of educational level on moral attitudes does not depends on importance of religion.

#### *Type of religion*

In a one-way ANOVA with a post-hoc the different religions were compared on their moral attitudes towards homosexuals. Levene's test was used to evaluate the assumptions of homogeneity of variance respectively and was found significant ( $F = 6,01, p < .00$ ), therefor interpretation is done with caution.

The ANOVA was statistically significant, indicating that attitudes towards homosexuals differ per type of religion,  $F(4,258) = 5,46, p < .00, \eta^2 = 0.08$ . Besides, post-hoc analyses with Bonferroni revealed that Muslims had significantly more negative attitudes towards homosexuals than Roman Catholics and Protestants, which is shown in more detail in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Post-hoc with Bonferroni of type of religion on attitudes towards homosexuals*

Type of religion	M	SD
Roman Catholics	3,94	1,02
Protestant	3,75	1,17
Muslim	2,85	1,42

*Interaction importance of religion and type of religion*

The average importance of religion has been calculated per religion. Catholics had an average of 2,79 out of 4 on importance of religion ( $N = 113$ ). The mean of Protestants ( $N = 103$ ,  $M = 3,44$ ) and Muslims ( $N = 28$ ,  $M = 3,61$ ) is higher.

An ANOVA was used as well to investigate the effects of type of religion and importance of religion on attitudes towards homosexuals. To evaluate the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance, a Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's test were used, but both violated the assumption. Interpretation of the results is done carefully.

A main effect of importance of religion is revealed by an ANOVA  $F(10, 233) = 11,80$ ,  $p < .00$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .13$ . No interaction effect between type of religion and importance of religion has been revealed ( $F(10, 233) = 0,49$ ,  $p = .79$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ), which means that the effect of type of religion on moral attitudes does not depend on importance of religion.

## **Discussion**

Homosexuals are a vulnerable group in society and still get discriminated despite the gay emancipation. Even in the Netherlands, which is one of the most tolerant countries in the world, discrimination towards homosexuals still exists. The goal of this study is to find out what the relevance of the religious motive is on negative attitudes towards homosexuals. To expand this knowledge an answer on the following research question is given: *To what extent does religion and the importance of religion influence the moral attitude towards LGB?*

The expectation was that religious people had negative moral attitudes towards homosexuals, arising from the idea that religion influences moral attitudes. In addition, expected was that importance of religion affects peoples' moral attitudes towards



homosexuals, which means that if a religious person found religion more important, they would have more negative attitudes than people who found their religion less important. Furthermore, there was an idea that moral attitudes towards homosexuals differ per type of religion.

The results of this study show that as well being religious as importance of religion leads to more negative attitudes, but that most people did not even have negative attitudes towards homosexuals. According to the results, the type of religion appeared to influence peoples' moral attitudes towards homosexuals. Muslims had more negative attitudes towards homosexuals than Roman Catholics and Protestants. In short, the findings of this study were mostly confirmed, which means that as well religion, importance of religion and type of religion affects peoples' moral attitudes, although most attitudes were positive instead of negative.

Even though being religious seemed to predict more negative attitudes; there was no group of participants who had an average of negative attitudes at all. These results arises a question if there still are (many) negative attitudes towards homosexuals, or that groups mostly have neutral or positive attitudes. This points at the issue, if it is necessary to attach so much value to religion as a predictor of attitudes if these mainly positive. Traditional religious barriers in the Netherlands have broken down, which is called depillarization (*ontzuiling*) and people are making more decisions based on their own values instead on the values of their religious denomination (Thurlings, 1979). The arrival of the depillarization showed that religion also has a social dimension, and that individual beliefs and values also have a social impact. These individual values can influence the acceptance of homosexuality in the Netherlands (Bijsterveld, 2013). Depillarization is a part of the modernization. Modernization theorists, such as Karl Marx and Daniel Bell, actually argue that modernization nowadays strongly influences people's values and attitudes towards homosexuality (Gerhards, 2010). Modernization is expressed by multiple factors, like economic welfare and educational levels. A study of Gerhards (2010) showed that modernization has an equally strong effect on moral attitudes towards homosexuals as religion. The Netherlands is seen as a highly modernised country that also is economically successful (Versteeg, 2012), and has a high support for non-discrimination towards homosexuals (Gerhard, 2010). These theories can explain why religion still influence moral attitudes, but that the moral attitudes overall were more positive than expected.

As mentioned before, an effect of religion on moral attitudes was found, which means in this case that religious people are more likely to have negative attitudes than

positive attitudes towards homosexuals. This finding was in line with the studies of Ebaugh and Haney (1978), Jelen (1984) and Woodrum (1988) who stated that religion is a predictor of negative moral attitudes towards homosexuals. This can be explained by the Identity theory (Burke, 1991; Thoits, 1991) and Social Identity theory (Tajfel, 1979). Burke (1991) and Thoits (1991) stated that religion is rooted in people's identity, causing that their moral attitudes can be based on goals and values of their religious denomination (Giner-Sorolla, 2012) or on in-group respect (Pagliaro, Ellemers and Barreto, 2011). Most holy books, such as the Bible and the Koran, do not accept homosexual behaviour completely; which is resulting in the disapproval of homosexuality in some religious denominations (Yip, 2005). As people are tending to base their attitudes on the moral values of their social group, in this case religion, religious' probably have negative attitudes towards homosexuals as well.

Based on earlier empirical researches, the effect of importance of religion on moral attitudes was predicted (Ebaugh and Haney 1978; Jelen 1984; Woodrum 1988). An effect of religious involvement on negative moral attitude was found, what suggests that highly involved religious people have more negative moral attitudes (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009). The importance of religion therefore may play a role in the emergence of negative moral attitudes (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009). Previous research showed that people who find their religion more important probably have high intrinsic motivation and orientation (Allport & Ross, 1967), or using (more) frequently religious coping mechanism than others (Pieper, 2012).

An exploratory examination showed whether there are differences between various religions. There was no empirical proof which type of religion had the most negative attitudes towards homosexuals, but expected was that both Protestants as Muslims had the most negative attitudes (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Siebert, Chonody, Rutledge & Killian, 2009). A distinguish between religions could have been made based on the results of this study. Muslims seemed to have more negative attitudes towards homosexuals than Protestants and Roman Catholics. Muslims also find their religion most important of all groups. Although no significant interaction has been found between type of religion and importance of religion, presumably Muslims are likely to have more negative attitudes because they find their religion quite important. A logical conclusion would be that Muslims have the most negative attitudes towards homosexuals, because they find their religion most important of all tested religious denominations.

In summary, it can be said that religion, and mainly importance of religion, still are important factors in developing moral attitudes towards homosexuals, despite that depillarization and thereby modernization also affects moral attitudes.

Although this thesis aimed to produce reliable information some limitations have to be discussed. The nature of the EVS survey arises a limitation, since only differences were made between Christians, but no differences were made between the different movements within the Islam. There are big differences between the practices and values of Shiites, Sunnis, and other movements. If this was taken into account, a more valid dataset could have been provided.

The reliability of the research is not guaranteed, due to a non-representative amount of Roman Catholics and Muslims in the dataset. Also the low amount of Muslims caused violated assumptions of homogeneity of normality. This indicates that there were too many differences within groups, and certainly with the group of Muslims as only 28 people had to represent the whole population of Dutch Muslims.

Moreover, some theories that were used to generate the research question were dated. It is possible that some theories were as relevant as conceived in advance. Society has changed a lot, and so does peoples' moral attitudes (Gerhard, 2010).

Despite of these limitations, the focus on the Dutch case is relevant. The Dutch population is seen as one of the most tolerant countries of Europe (Gerhard, 2010), but also the Netherlands has complex societal issues. As a multicultural society, a lot of opinions, religions and values have to be represented by policies. The Netherlands is one of the most modernized countries in Europe, which causes a lot of changes over time (Gerhard, 2010). An explanation of the positive attitudes can be the '*ontzuiling*' and with that the importance of religion (Pieper, 2012). However, further research would be needed to have better explanations. My recommendation would be to add the modernization into the study to explore what the relevance of religion is in forming moral attitudes. Additionally I would recommend to also taking actual behaviour into account by doing an experiment. All the results were quite positive, which can have to do with socially desirable behaviour. An experiment makes it possible to filter for socially desirable behaviour (Neuman, 2012). Including attitudes and behaviour towards transgenders and non-binary people would be useful as well, as they are becoming a bigger part of our society. To avoid exclusion and to many prejudices, it is necessary to base anti-discrimination policies towards LGBT+ on research results.

This study contributed to the knowledge about the relevance of religious background on moral attitudes towards homosexuals. The positive attitudes of people showed that the Netherlands actually is a tolerant country, what can be explained by modernization and depillarization. A social policy recommendation what follows from this positive sound is to continue the equal rights and diversity policies and do not distinguish based on sexual preference. Extra information on (religious) primary or secondary schools can be provided to broaden the frame of reference of the Dutch youth. This ensures that children are not only relying on the norms and values of their parents. Dignified information contributes to positive attitudes towards homosexuals (Dankmeier, 2017). That things are now going well in the Netherlands could be used as an example. To make Europe more inclusive, the Dutch government could share their policies with other countries to increase European tolerance. It should not be forgotten that other countries and populations could react differently to various policies, and that the Dutch policies not immediately will be seen as the answer of the anti-gay discrimination.

Research has shown that a quarter of the homosexuals feel that they cannot show their homosexuals feelings in public spaces (Kooiman & Keuzenkamp, 2012). The results showed that people actually have (quite) positive attitudes towards homosexuals, and therefore it might not be necessary to hold back anymore. Therefore a recommendation would be to the whole LGB community to open up and let people get used to same-sex love within this modernized society, to combat negative attitudes even more.

The Netherlands is one of the most tolerant countries in Europe (Gerhard 2010) and also this study has shown that most Dutch people, religious or not, have positive attitudes towards homosexuals. Modernization and depillarization probably contributed to these positive attitudes, as they are two big developments in which the Netherlands is a precursor (Versteeg 2012; Bijsterveld, 2013). The Dutch case seemed more positive towards homosexuals than expected, with that they can be seen as an example for other, less tolerant, countries.

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## **Appendix: Syntax**

Syntax file has been sent by email.