

Analyzing LGBTQ+ Acceptance in The Netherlands: Perspectives from inside the community

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Abstract

Acceptance towards LGBTQ+ individuals is stagnating. Quantitative data shows that less people are accepting towards the LGBTQ+ movement. Theory suggests that politics and power mechanisms are responsible for this phenomenon. However, qualitative research exploring perspectives from within the community to confirm this is lacking. Therefore this study aims to shed light on how different identities within the LGBTQ+ community look at this phenomenon. A qualitative analysis of eighteen semi-structured interviews was conducted to gain insight on how these changes are experienced by the LGBTQ+ community itself, how it should be solved, and whether the discourse of the 2023 dutch elections had a significant impact on the experience on acceptance from the perspective of the LGBTQ+ community. The main outcome of this study was that LGBTQ+ individuals experience a significant stagnation in societal acceptance, which is particularly pronounced among gender diverse individuals compared to sexually diverse individuals. This stagnation is attributed to negative political discourse, particularly from right-wing parties, and systemic issues within healthcare and education.

Keywords

LGBTQ+ Acceptance, Netherlands, Same-sex Marriage, Political discourse, Transgender rights, Public Opinion, Emancipation.

Ethical statement

Study: Analyzing LGBTQ+ Acceptance: Perspectives from inside the community

Principal investigator: D. Brokke

Supervisor: Paulina Pankowska

The study is approved by the Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University. The approval is based on the documents sent by the researchers as requested in the form of the Ethics committee and filed under number 24-1797. The approval is valid through 30 June 2024. The approval of the Ethical Review Board concerns ethical aspects, as well as data management and privacy issues (including the GDPR). It should be noticed that any changes in the research design oblige a renewed review by the Ethical Review Board.

Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	2
Keywords.....	2
<i>Ethical statement</i>	2
<i>Introduction</i>	5
Frontrunner.....	5
The current state of LGBTQ+ acceptance.....	5
Relevance	7
Scientific.....	7
Societal	8
<i>2. Theoretical framework</i>	10
2.1 Social Constructionism.....	10
2.2 Critical theory.....	11
2.2.1 The weaponization of gender	11
2.2.3 The Discourse as Knowledge and Power theory	12
2.3. Social Conflict Theory	14
<i>4. Methodology</i>	15
4.1 Qualitative research methods	15
4.2 Semi-structured interview	15
4.3 Participants and accessibility.....	17
Data-Analysis	18
Ethics.....	19
<i>5. Results</i>	20
5.1 Describing acceptance towards LGBTQ+ individuals in the Netherlands.....	20
5.1.1 The experienced state of LGBTQ+ acceptance in The Netherlands	20
5.1.2 The experienced difference in acceptance towards sexually diverse and gender diverse individuals	21
5.1.3 Geographical differences	23
5.1.4 Religion	24
5.2 Emancipation regarding LGBTQ+ individuals	25
5.2.1 Ideal form of emancipation regarding the LGBTQ+ individuals.....	25
5.2.2 The current state of emancipation regarding LGBTQ+ individuals.....	26

5.3 Political influence.....	27
5.3.1 Political influence in general.....	27
5.3.2 The influence of the 2023 Dutch elections.....	28
5.4 Policy.....	28
5.4.1 What could be better?.....	28
5.4.2 policy in education.....	29
5.4.3 policy regarding gender affirming healthcare.....	30
<i>Discussion</i>	32
Conclusion.....	32
Limitations.....	33
<i>Policy advice</i>	34
Healthcare.....	35
Education.....	36
<i>References</i>	38
<i>Appendix 1: Code Book</i>	46
<i>Appendix 2: Questionnaire</i>	47
<i>Appendix 3: Ethical considerations</i>	49

Introduction

Frontrunner

Ever since the legalization of same-sex marriages in 2001, the Netherlands have been known as a country tolerant and accepting to individuals who can be categorized as LGBTQ+.¹ (EqualDex, 2023) Since January 1998, the Dutch law has been granting registered partnerships to same-sex couples as an alternative to marriage. Not long after, on April 1st, 2001, the Netherlands was the first country in the world to acknowledge same-sex marriages (Pew Research Center, 2023). On the same date the Netherlands was quoted by the BBC as: *“Having a traditionally liberal attitude towards gays”* (BBC, 2001). Since the legalization of same-sex marriages in Netherlands other, mostly European and American, countries have followed in the footsteps of the Netherlands (Pew Research Center, 2023).

The current state of LGBTQ+ acceptance

Research done focused on whether people around the world think that homosexuality should be accepted by society or not. This question, which has been a long-term trend, was first asked in the U.S. in 1994 and globally in 2002. The full question wording was, *“And which one of these comes closer to your opinion? Homosexuality should be accepted by society or Homosexuality should not be accepted by society”*. Overall, in the last few decades we see a rise in acceptance of homosexuality by people in many countries across the world. Findings from a survey conducted among 38,426 people in 34 countries note a double digit increase in acceptance between 2002 and 2019 for: the United Kingdom, Canada, Argentina, the United States, Mexico, Japan, South Africa, South Korea, India and Kenya.

While we see an increase in acceptance, it should also be noted that a great global divide persists. The rapport noted that acceptance is influenced by age, education, income and, in some instances, gender. In addition, religion and its importance to people’s lives shape opinions on acceptance. The rapport also noted the role of political ideology in shaping opinions. In many countries, people on the political right are less accepting than those on the left and are therefore less accepting of homosexuality than people on the left. Attitudes on this issue are also correlated with the wealth of a country. Generally speaking, people in

¹ According to the University of Oxford Medical Sciences Divisions, the abbreviation LGBTQ+ is an umbrella term for individuals identifying as: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual and pansexual. (University of Oxford Medical Sciences Divisions, n.d.)

wealthier and more developed countries are more accepting of homosexuality than those in countries that are less developed. (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Even though acceptance levels seem to be on the rise, the feelings of acceptance among people who identify as LGBTQ+ are stagnating. A report by the Dutch Social and Cultural plan bureau (SCP) has noticed a stagnation of feelings of acceptance in the LGBTQ+ community. The media has also been increasingly covering this issue since 2020 with headlines such as: “*This is why LGBTQ hate is growing in the Netherlands*”, (NPO 3FM, 2023) “*Acceptance of the LGBTQ stagnates*” (RTL Nieuws, 2022) and “*Dutch people have become more positive about LGBT individuals, but acceptance is stagnating*” (NOS, 2022). More specifically, while the population’s views on various LGBTQ+ themes have been increasingly positive in recent years, there is at the same time, limited acceptance concerning the more visual forms of homo- and bisexuality, for example: holding hands or kissing in public. Adding to this, we see that the Netherlands has dropped in the world ranking that rates the legal and policy aspects of LGBTQ+ emancipation worldwide. This ranking, called the “rainbox” index, measures European countries according to law and policies focused on issues such as equality and non-discrimination of LGBTQ+ people (ILGA-Europe, 2021). Thus, while the Netherlands was once a pioneer, and the first country to open marriage to same-sex couples, it no longer ranks among the international leaders regarding LGBTQ+ rights, falling to twelfth place (ILGA-Europe 2021). This mainly has to do with the fact that transgender and intersex individuals have less established rights than homo- and bisexual individuals. One of the main examples for this is the fact the Dutch law lacks an explicit ban on discrimination against this group (ILGA-Europe, 2024).

According to the 2022 LGBTQ+ monitor report by the SCP, a negative pattern can be seen concerning the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ individuals between 15 and 34 years old. The report states that youth who can be classified under the LGBTQ+ umbrella are three times more likely to feel unhappy and experience more psychosomatic complaints and are about twice as likely to experience some sort of mental health problems than their heterosexual and cisgender peers (42% and 18%). Especially for people who identify as transgender, this also leads to worse socio-economic position in society. This group falls into a lower income group, has less wealth, and less often are homeowners (Huijnk, 2022). This decline is problematic as there is a link between wellbeing of LGBTQ+ individuals and acceptance. The lower the stigma, prejudice and/or discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in a country, the higher the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ individuals (Camp et al., 2020).

These insights underscore the importance of targeted research into how the LGBTQ+ community experiences these trends, particularly the factors contributing to a perceived stagnation in acceptance. This leads to the following research question.

***Descriptive:** What socio-cultural, political, and institutional factors contribute to the observed stagnation in feelings of acceptance among LGBTQ individuals within the Dutch population?*

Relevance

Scientific

In previous research mainly quantitative data analyses were conducted. The SCP report mentioned above was based on periodic opinion-based research, which is a good basis for a trustworthy way to look at how the public thinks about certain subjects. However, as noted in the report itself, the barriers of quantitative research, and thus this report, is the absence of an answer to the ‘why’ question. This leaves a scientific gap for a qualitative research approaches on this subject. The SCP report also noted that there is a difference in the availability of data and research done on the acceptance of homo- and bisexuality vs. gender diversity. While research on homo- and bisexuality has a long history, research on transgender and gender diversity is scarce (Huijink, 2022) The few qualitative studies done often focus on specific subjects, for example: feelings of discrimination in context of the workplace (Gacilo et al., 2018) and LGBTQ perspectives during Trump’s presidency (Worthen, 2019). While useful, these studies do not provide a general, subjective perspective on the recent stagnation in acceptance in the Netherlands which could unlock valuable insights that could help promoting emancipation of the LGBTQ+ community in The Netherlands.

Concluding, most research papers focus on quantitative research regarding the feelings of acceptance in the community, but the reason ‘why’ often gets left behind. Without focusing on why the feelings of emancipation is stagnating (using qualitative approaches), the writing of decent policy to encourage feelings of emancipation is less likely to happen.

Addressing this gap through qualitative approaches can provide a deeper understanding of the underlying factors affecting feelings of emancipation. Understanding the ‘why’ behind the stagnation will provide insights valuable for developing policy initiatives.

By exploring these perspectives, this study aims to develop a understanding that can inform policy initiatives targeting the systemic barriers and social attitudes perpetuating this stagnation, leading to the following research question.

***Policy Research question:** How can policy initiatives effectively target and mitigate the systemic barriers and social attitudes that perpetuate the stagnation in feelings of emancipation among LGBTQ individuals within the Dutch population*

Societal

In recent years, the political landscape in the Netherlands has seen intensified debates surrounding LGBTQ+ topics. These discussions have become particularly prominent during election periods, with various political parties expressing differing views on the matter. According to research by the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill we see a connection between representation of the LGBTQ+ in politics and public acceptance of the LGBTQ+ individuals. In their research, Reynolds (2013) found that the presence of LGBTQ+ legislators is associated with greater public acceptance of gay individuals. This representation leads to increased acceptance, which in turn predicts the enactment of more progressive laws. This indicates that governments respond to shifts in public opinion. Given the outspoken stance of, arguably extreme, right-wing parties like Forum for Democracy and Partij voor de Vrijheid against what they term as “woke’ and ‘LGBTQ+ propaganda”, one might anticipate that a prominent presence of conservative right-wing parties among legislators could negatively affect the discourse on LGBTQ+ issues.

In 2023, during the Dutch House of Representatives elections, a pre-election debate gained media attention when a non-binary individual confronted Thierry Baudet, leader of the right-wing FVD party, about his stance on LGBTQ+ issues. Baudet claimed not to remember what ‘non-binary’ means and concluded that non-binary individuals do not exist. This incident went viral, sparking various opinions on social media (NOS, 2023).

Other political parties have also shown negative attitudes towards the LGBTI+ community during the 2023 election campaigns. For example: the political party DENK made a campaign poster featuring various illustrations featuring rainbow covered services and a drag queen with the Dutch slogan “Zullen we weer gewoon doen?” (RTL Nieuws, 2023) which translates to: Is it time to act normal again? Political party Forum voor

Democratie (FVD) called out so called: “Woke and LGBTQI propaganda” on their campaign website. FVD calls for preventing the promotion of transgender propaganda to youth and opposes subsidies for LGBTQ+ education.

Human rights organization COC Nederland (Cultuur- en Ontspannings Centrum) has expressed their concern about the election results in 2023. Their main concern is the negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community recently. The organization points out that the PVV recently voted against measures to address violence against the rainbow community, against measures to combat bullying in schools, and against embedding our human rights in the Constitution. (COC, 2023)

Focusing on the 2023 Dutch House of Representatives elections, unique insights can be gathered on evolving societal attitudes towards acceptance towards the LGBTQ+ community. By examining this specific election cycle, this study aims to uncover how political party elections influence discourse on LGBTQ+ topics

These findings lead to the following explanatory research question.

Explanatory Research question: *To what extent did the messaging and discourse of the 2023 Dutch election campaigns influence the perceptions and experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals regarding societal acceptance and emancipation in the Netherlands?*

2. Theoretical framework

In this chapter we will look at scientific theories which will give us insights into certain theoretical mechanisms that could influence the feelings of acceptance among LGBTQ+ individuals.

In doing so, this chapter will examine three different theories: social constructionism, Critical Theory, and Conflict Theory.

2.1 Social Constructionism

In 1966 Peter L., Berger and Thomas Luckman introduced the theory of Social Constructionism. In sociological context the theory posits that the facet of our social reality, for example: concepts, beliefs, norms, and values, are constructed through a number of interactions between society's members, rather than there being an empirical or physical reality. The theory proposes that social reality is merely an outcome of different processes that are influenced by social structures (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Identifying as someone part the LGBTQ+ community can be seen as a social construct. The identification of, for example being gay, lesbian or transgender, is according to this theory a social construct. Looking at the identification of gender diverse individuals, West and Zimmerman (1987) see gender as an emerging of social situations as both an outcome and rationale for various social arrangements, and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society. The same can be said for individuals who are attracted to the same sex and who society classifies as 'homosexual'.

According to social constructionism, sexuality and gender are created by society itself. While looking at gender, some think gender and biological sex are one in the same. However, West and Zimmerman (1987) claim that gender is not a personal trait, but an emergent of social situations used to construct perceived reality. Therefore gender is not real, but a performance of sociale constructed norms.

Social constructionism may help understand certain norms and beliefs in society that could negatively affect groups in society. Foucault states, institutions like religion, education and medical institutions can influence the norms, values and beliefs in society about sexuality and gender(Foucault, 1969).

The LGBTQ+ community, and especially individuals who fall under the transgender umbrella, have been a scapegoat for some rightwing dutch parties such as the PVV and FVD and religion oriented parties like the SGP and Christenunie. With LGBTQ+ identities being social constructs according to this theory, politics are able to shape opinions on the subject, which may be adopted by the public.

Social constructionism suggests that gender identities and sexual orientations are products of social interactions and institutions. Therefore, individuals whose gender identity challenges traditional norms may face greater societal resistance and stigma compared to those whose sexual orientation diverges from heterosexuality but aligns with their assigned sex. While sexual diversity also challenges societal norms, it often does not challenge the binary framework of gender itself. As such, assumptions can be made that societal acceptance and support for sexual diversity have shown more improvements in many societies due to emancipation efforts, legal reforms, and shifting cultural attitudes. Therefore, drawing from social constructionism, we hypothesize that individuals whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex may experience lower levels of acceptance compared to individuals whose sexual orientation differs from heterosexuality but aligns with their assigned sex. This leads into the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex experience lower levels of acceptance compared to individuals with sexual attractions differing from heterosexuality.

2.2 Critical theory

In 1937 the essay “Traditional and Critical Theory” was published. The essay coined a then new social theory which puts its focus on society and culture to look at certain power structures. Social problems therefore do not stem from individuals, but from social structures and cultural assumptions (Horkheimer, 1937). Multiple sociologists and philosophers have used this theory as the basis for explaining sexuality and gender.

2.2.1 The weaponization of gender

American philosopher and gender studies scholar Judith Butler wrote about factors influencing the perception of gender and sexuality. She argues that class, ethnicity and sexuality are factors that influence what the terms “men” and “woman” mean. Through this

idea she argues that gender is performative, which means being born male or female does not determine behavior, but people learn to behave in a certain way that fits into society. People will argue that the difference between man and woman is biological, and due to these biological differences, their different sexes should fall into certain social roles. This is called naturalisation, and the act of making something appear natural. If one falls into the correct roles they will be praised, but if not, they will be punished (Butler, 1988). This in turn creates another layer of control exerted by dominant societal structures. By defining rigid gender roles, those in power maintain control over individuals. This control extends beyond gender, as similar processes of naturalization have been used to justify racial hierarchies and discrimination (Wittig, 1980). Scientific racism was the pseudoscientific belief that human species can be biologically divided into distinct races, which in turn was used to justify social hierarchies and discrimination (Garrod, 2020). This concept of using supposedly biological differences to create and maintain power structures can be seen as analogous to how gender has been historically constructed.

In their book "Gender Trouble," Butler describes a historically epistemic regime, arguing that language and discourse create a framework through which sex and gender are understood. This often reinforces a binary view of gender and can lead to the marginalization of those who do not conform to traditional norms. They argue that sex and gender can only be seen as one and that sex, can only be seen through the lens of gender. Looking at transgender individuals and the idea of naturalization, according to Butler, people will have trouble accepting and or give equal rights because they fall outside the norm and are thus not natural. This could also be applied to the other labels of the LGBTQ+ community. Identifying as homosexual for example also falls outside the idea of the norm of society, and people will often see relationship between the same gender as not natural. There is a discongruence in our culture in which makes people in power determine what is natural and not.

2.2.3 The Discourse as Knowledge and Power theory

Michel Foucault used critical theory for his own theory on the link between knowledge and power. According to Foucault, power is based on knowledge and how one uses knowledge. When one has the power over knowledge, one can shape the meaning of this knowledge for one's own intentions. In other words, Foucault suggests that the truths of our lives do in fact not exist and are purely created through discourse (Foucault, 1969).

In an Foucauldian analysis of homosexuality, Drazenovich proposes that sexuality can be seen as a discourse. Discourses are social, political, and cultural arrangements of ideas and concepts through which the world is communicated and constructed. Sexuality and gender, is something that is spoken about and thus, becomes a discourse according to Foucault. The norms of sexuality are thus shaped by institutions, which themselves are governed by anonymous and historical rules influenced by the specific time and place of a given period (Drazenovich, 2012). For instance, marriage has been defined as a union between a man and a woman, reinforced by religious teachings and law. These institutions, influenced by specific cultural and historical contexts, create norms regarding acceptable sexual behaviors and identities within society. For example, until recently, in many countries same-sex relationships were criminalized under colonial-era laws influenced by European norms of the time.

Considering LGBTQ+ topics as discourse, rather than focusing on sexual or gender identification, shifts discussions into political, medical, and judicial contexts, potentially hindering acceptance. This shift can depersonalize LGBTQ+ individuals, politicize their identities, pathologize their experiences, and create a bureaucratic approach to their needs, ultimately decreasing acceptance.

As for the 2023 Dutch national elections. According to this vision, one could argue that right wing politics created a negative discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ topics. For example, the political party FVD says: *"It should be over with the nauseating sexualization of youth. No more transgender propaganda in schools."* The party tries to make a connection between sexualization of the youth and transgenderism which one could argue creates a negative discourse surrounding the topic of transgender rights (Forum voor Democratie, n.d.).

This theory not only works when applied to politics, but more recently, also education and digital sphere. Rhoades argues that current dominant discourses maintain an anti LGBTQ+ bias that contributes to, and reinforces the denial of full, equal LGBTQ+ rights. Educational environments can promote this denial, to the point of implicitly sanctioning harassment and physical human rights abuses. Rhoades proposes different online outlets to change the discourse on the LGBTQ+ community. It enables much more democratic access to the means of cultural consumption, organization, production and distribution. Where mainstream media is pre-censored, online spaces are often free to use and promote the outing of one's own opinion (Rhoades, 2011).

Critical theory illuminates how power structures and societal discourse shape the experiences of marginalized groups, including the LGBTQ+ community. Butler's concept of gender performativity and Foucault's theory of knowledge and power highlight societal norms and institutional discourses create discriminatory practices.

***Hypothesis 2:** Power structures within Dutch society, reinforced by institutional norms, contribute to the marginalization and stigmatization of LGBTQ individuals, thereby hindering their feelings of emancipation.*

2.3. Social Conflict Theory

Social conflict theory, based on Marxist principles, posits that interactions between groups or social classes within a society are primarily driven by conflict rather than consensus (Marx, 1932).

Conflict theory in this context can be used to explain certain power differentials in society. In the case of this thesis, we can observe acceptance, and the observed stagnation in this acceptance, of the LGBTQ+ community as class struggle. The dominant group could be classified as cis-gendered and straight identifying individuals. In Dutch politics, only 4 individuals in The Netherlands who are holders of political offices identify as LGBTQ+ (Wikipedia contributors, 2023). These are the controlling class. This observation also goes for society as a whole. According Knapp (1994) the controlling class owns resources and power. In this case the resource power also leads to rights and certain entitlements, for example legal marriage. Therefore, when the controlling group exclusively consists of the dominant group, emancipation for the oppressed becomes more difficult.

When stagnation of acceptance regarding the LGBTQ+ community is perceived through the lens of conflict theory, it is suggested that stagnation is a consequence of power struggles, which leads to class division. In this case, the dominant group actively resists changes that could potentially limit or diminish their control of their held values. This can be seen in the use of divisive language, the dissemination of misinformation, and the promotion of policies that discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals (Kitzinger, 2005).

In the 2023 dutch elections, some conservatinv right wing parties in the netherlands utilized campaign strategies that emphasized traditional family values and heteronormative worldviews. According to conflict theory, these campaigns promotie social conflict and deepen societal divisions. Language such as: “*Zullen we weer gewoon doen?*” which

translates to: Is it time to act normal again? And the usage of terms such as “woke propaganda” are often used to weaponize LGBTQ+ topics and use it as a threat to societal norms and values, which leads to the reinforcement of marginalization among LGBTQ+ individuals. According to conflict theory, such strategies are employed by the dominant group to maintain their power and control over societal resources and cultural narratives which leads into the following hypothesis.

***Hypothesis 3:** The election campaign strategies of right-wing political parties exacerbated social conflicts and deepened divisions, contributing to the stagnation in feelings of emancipation and societal acceptance among LGBTQ+ individuals.*

4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the thesis' methodological approach, focusing on the qualitative data collection and analysis framework, specifically semi-structured interviews, and concludes with a discussion of ethical considerations.

4.1 Qualitative research methods

In this thesis the goal is to gain insights on why members of the LGBTQ+ community feel less accepted. Data shows that even though acceptance levels seem to be heading in a positive direction, feelings of acceptance among people who identify as LGBTQ+ are stagnating.

The reasons behind these feelings are not discussed in detail, as the results are derived from quantitative data. By conducting interviews, this study aims to explore the reasons why individuals in the LGBTQ+ community feel less accepted. Such qualitative insights can provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind these feelings and help develop policy recommendations to address this issue.

4.2 Semi-structured interview

This thesis wants to shed light on the reasons why the LGBTQ+ community feels less accepted. As the goal is to gather specific information on why members of the LGBTQ+ community feel less accepted, qualitative data was collected and the interview method chosen

is a semi-structured interview. Arguments for this decision are as follows. To get into an answer of why, in-depth analysis is necessary to understand the emotions of participants in context of the research question. The aim is to find a pattern in the views on these stagnating feelings of acceptance. Quantitative research, while useful for measuring the extent of an issue, often falls short in exploring the underlying reasons behind individuals' feelings and experiences. By conducting semi-structured interviews, this study aims to uncover the perspectives of different identities within the LGBTQ+ community, providing detailed, insights into how LGBTQ+ individuals experience and interpret changes in discourse, the impact of political rhetoric and systemic issues, which you cannot extract with quantitative research

This interview is divided into several parts. The interview starts with an introduction part where the researcher introduces themselves and explains the purpose of the interview. Assurance of confidentiality and anonymity is addressed and consent for the recording of the interview is asked. After the introduction of the project, questions are asked to sketch a picture of the participants' background which can help to consider various demographic factors that can influence individuals' experiences and perspectives. These include age, gender identity, sexual orientation, current place of residence, and hometown.

After the introduction, the topic of general emancipation of LGBTQ+ individuals will be addressed. One of the questions focuses on what the term emancipation means to the respondent. To prevent misinterpretation of key terms, the interviewer will also address the definition that this thesis uses so both the respondent, and the interviewer are on the same line definition wise. After the respondent will be asked about their global perspective on the current emancipation of the LGBTQ+ community. Based on their answer the respondent will be asked what factors, according to them, influence these feelings of acceptance.

The participants are also asked about the general political discourse in the last elections, they are encouraged to share their view of this election in relation to LGBTQ+ emancipation.

Lastly, the participants are asked about potential solutions to create more feelings of acceptance in the LGBTQ+ community. The participants are asked about policies that they know of that are in place, and whether they think they can work in creating more feelings of acceptance. The participants are also asked whether they have any policies in mind that would increase the feelings of acceptance and what potential challenges can they see to successfully incorporating these policies.

4.3 Participants and accessibility

For this thesis we interviewed 18 individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. The individuals were sampled in three ways. One method involved having a personal connection at the COC, a Dutch LGBTQ+ rights group founded in 1946, sent out a call for volunteers willing to be interviewed.. The second method relied on the researcher's personal network, using his social media platforms to gather participants.

Given that different individuals within the LGBTQ+ community may have varying perspectives and experiences of acceptance, the sample intentionally included diverse representation. Nine individuals identified as lesbian, while three identified as gay. The transgender community was represented by three transgender women and two transgender men. Additionally, one person identified as bisexual, and four individuals identified as non-binary. It's important to note that some participants identified with multiple categories. Interviews averaged fortyfive minutes in length, ranging from a thirty minutes to a more in-depth seventy minutes. Table 1 offers a detailed overview of the participants, who have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy and ensure confidentiality.

Table 1

Background information participants

Respondent	Label	Residence	Hometown
1	Gay	Zwolle	Almelo
2	Non-Binary	Delft	Delft
3	Lesbian	Zwolle	Goor
4	Lesbian	Zwolle	Wierden
5	Transman	Drijber	Drijber
6	Non-Binary	Nijmegen	Dedemsvaart
7	Bisexual and non-binary	Espel	Espel
8	Gay	Amersfoort	Amersfoort
9	Bisexual	Zwolle	Helmond
10	Transwoman	Almere	Dronten

11	Transman	Hilversum	Enter
12	Lesbian	Zwolle	Zwolle
13	Transwoman	Epe	Epe
14	Homosexual	Zwolle	Zwolle
15	Lesbian	Zwolle	Assen
16	Bisexual	Eemnes	Zwolle
17	Non-Binary	Breda	France
18	Transwoman Lesbian	Zwolle	Zwolle

Data-Analysis

When choosing a form of data-analysis, this study opted for deductive methods. Using deductive research, one tests theories and hypotheses. Using the theoretical framework as a basis, different hypotheses were formulated. With these hypotheses or expectations in mind individuals were interviewed. With the data gathered, hypotheses can be either confirmed or rejected. Thus, the deductive method was chosen due to the existence of relevant theories and literature. With the issue of LGBTQ+ acceptance having roots in conflict theory, critical theory and social constructionism, expectations can be set relying on these theories (Van Staa & Evers, 2010).

For coding, three phases of coding were done. Open coding, axial coding and selective coding. After transcription, interviews were coded using the open coding method using the A.I. in the qualitative research software package Atlasti. In the first step, each transcribed interview was analyzed by A.I. which created codes based on the research questions. The feature can automatically perform open and descriptive coding of the text. The feature is described as a research assistant for coding and should not be used as a replacement for the full coding process. (Atlasti, 2024).

After the A.I. model created the codes, the codes were manually checked on quality. Labels were assigned to specific text fragments. For instance, if an interviewee discussed difference of acceptance in different parts of The Netherlands the label “coming out experience” could be assigned.

The next step in this process is axial coding. This process was done manually. Codes made during open coding were connected, organized and identified into broader categories.

For example, codes like "positive family reactions" and "supportive friend networks" can be coded under the overarching category of "social support for LGBTQ+ individuals. This systematic approach helps in identifying patterns and themes within the data, contributing to a comprehensive analysis.

Although A.I. can make the process of coding more efficient, recent studies have been published that analyze the limitations of the use of A.I such as. ChatGPT. In data-analysis in qualitative research. Research explored the potential of utilizing artificial intelligence, such as ChatGPT, for qualitative data analysis, questioning its ability to replicate manual coding results. By employing ChatGPT to re-examine two qualitative datasets previously analyzed using traditional methods, the study investigates its capacity to recreate original themes. Findings suggest ChatGPT's effectiveness in reproducing descriptive themes, but with less success in interpretive ones. While the program offers user-friendly operation and efficiency, it underscores that both manual coding and AI approaches are components within a broader analytic framework (Morgan, 2023). Knowing this, a second scan through the next will be necessary to ensure a precise analysis.

Ethics

According to a report by the COC (2013), LGBTQ+ children and youth face increased vulnerability, experiencing negative situations at school, home, sports clubs, and work due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics. This study adheres to ethical guidelines set forth by the LGBTQ+ Foundation, based on the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics (2015).

Ethical considerations include ensuring integrity and quality in research, transparent communication with participants about risks and methods, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity to protect identities, obtaining voluntary and informed consent, and avoiding harm by respecting participants' emotional and physical well-being. For further details on the ethics of this thesis, please refer to Appendix 3.

5. Results

The goal of this thesis was to draw a perspective on stagnation, acceptance and emancipation from the perspective of the LGBTQ+ community. The primary focus is on understanding the participants perceptions and experiences concerning the stagnation or decline in acceptance over recent years. The main themes include the general acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, the nuanced differences in acceptance between sexually diverse and gender diverse individuals, and the influence of geographical, political, and religious factors on these attitudes. Each. These themes are the based on the theoretical framework.

5.1 Describing acceptance towards LGBTQ+ individuals in the Netherlands

Participants were asked if the measured stagnation in acceptance in the Netherlands could also be observed in daily live. This claim was experienced by most of the participants. The were multiple ways the participants experienced this stagnation.

5.1.1 The experienced state of LGBTQ+ acceptance in The Netherlands

All participants noted some form stagnation of acceptance or a drop in acceptance in the Netherlands. While most participants noted an increase in acceptance in the last ten years (2014 – 2024), they did notice a form of stagnation or decline in the last five years (2019 – 2024). The question on LGBTQ+ acceptance is very complicated according to the participants. This is due to the nature of the problem or the lack of understanding of the problem. The general notion is that acceptance for sexually diverse individuals is good, but not perfect.

“Complicated, indeed. I find there are places where I'm completely okay and can truly be myself, but these places aren't always easy to come by. For instance, I have a few sports activities each week, like synchronized swimming, where I'm part of a group of people who accept me fully. I'm also accepted in my studies, which I'm really grateful for. However, when I'm out on the street or in certain environments, I have to be more cautious. For example, around my parents or their friends. I'm trying to avoid those places more and more because they're not healthy for me. But when it comes to being out in public, you can't always avoid them entirely.” (Respondent 1 – Homosexual male)

participants seem to notice a backlash on issues such as same-sex marriage, transgender rights, and LGBTQ+ representation in media being more openly discussed. The general notion is that society still finds confrontation with openly LGBTQ+ individuals difficult. While pro-LGBTQ+ campaigns in any form seem to create awareness, participants believe that these campaigns can also provoke harsher opinions and comments. This discrepancy suggests that, while there has been progression in legal frameworks and visibility, societal attitudes and everyday interactions may not have progressed at the same pace.

"It's openly discussed, which aids acceptance but also strengthens extreme opinions. We're both progressing and regressing. Public reactions are stronger, and social media makes it easier to ridicule or hurt others. It goes both ways." (Respondent 8 – homosexual male)

5.1.2 The experienced difference in acceptance towards sexually diverse and gender diverse individuals

A strong finding is the difference in acceptance towards gender diverse individuals and sexually diverse individuals. All participants noticed a difference in this regard. While individuals who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual experienced a rise in acceptance, individuals who identified as transgender or non-binary experienced a decline or stagnation in acceptance. This was not only noted from by transgender and non-binary individuals themselves, but also by people who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

"Yes, I think people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual are more accepted than those dealing with gender issues, like non-binary or transgender individuals. For example, media portrayals, like Anouk's comment about menstruation, show that gender issues are less accepted than being gay." (Respondent 9 – Bisexual woman)

There is a consensus that society is outspoken on LGBTQ+ topics, yet gender diverse individuals often face discrimination despite perceptions of acceptance for sexually diverse groups. Participants stress the need for accountability. The longer history of advocacy for gay, lesbian, and bisexual rights has garnered more societal support."

"I thought society was moving in the right direction, but since COVID-19, there seems to be more resistance, especially against LGBTQ people, particularly transgender individuals. Being gay has been more accepted for a long time, but now that transgender issues and treatments are more discussed, there's increased resistance, even in my own environment." (Respondent 1 – Homosexual male)

All participants noticed some form of intersectional theory. Intersectional theory views the categories of intersecting relations such as race, gender, social class, sexuality, ability, and age as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Taking these intersecting factors into consideration paves the way for understanding and explaining complexity in individuals, the world, and the human experience. (Simply Psychology, 2023) Intersectionality within LGBTQ+ issues recognizes how multiple aspects of identity (like race, gender, and class) intersect to shape experiences of discrimination and privilege. It shows that these identities are not separate but interconnected, affecting people's lives in complex ways. While only one respondent used the specific word "intersectionality".

"In essence, cisgender white gay men generally experience less discrimination than transgender individuals. This highlights intersectionality: the more one deviates from societal norms, the greater the challenges. For instance, those who are transgender, women, people of color, disabled, and low-income face even greater obstacles." (Respondent 10 – Transwoman)

A notion that was unanimous among transgender individuals was the notion that being able to pass as the gender you want to be perceived has influence on the amount of acceptance individuals receive. Firstly we see the phenomenon that people who do not pass. In context of gender, passing means when someone, normally a transgender person, is perceived as the gender they want to identify with instead of the sex they were assigned at birth. (NeuroTribe UK, 2022) All transgender participants identified more discrimination early in their transition, than later.

"As a transwoman, the experience varied depending on my stage. Initially, during my social transition with shorter hair and without makeup, I stood out noticeably. People often stared and questioned my appearance." (Respondent 10 – Transwoman)

An unexpected finding regarding transgender acceptance lies in the healthcare system. While the term acceptance was used as society respecting identify, rights and treatment with dignity

and equality, results show that acceptance for transgender individuals also entails the amount of support they get from healthcare institutions such as genderclinics. All transgender participants noted that transgender healthcare in The Netherlands is flawed. Year long waitinglists and outdated diagnosis terms regarding the prescription of hormone replacement therapy² seem to greatly contribute to the amount of acceptance experienced by transgender individuals. The notion is that the group does not feel taken seriously by government, thus not accepted.

"When I came out at 18 or 19, I registered with Stepwork through my GP, but they went bankrupt. They promised to put me on another waiting list, but that never happened. Depressed, I turned to the VU but never heard back. Why are transgender care wait times so long? Why do I need court involvement to change an X in my passport? And why is it such a hassle to change passport letters?" (Respondent 2 – Trans non-binary)

5.1.3 Geographical differences

All participants who grew up in smaller cities or villages, who later in life moved to bigger cities noticed a difference in the acceptance between the two locations. Namely, all noticed more acceptance in the larger city. The reasons for this are apparent in the examples participants gave. For some participants who were still closeted in their hometown, the move to a new location gave them the opportunity to come out of the closet.

"When I arrived in Leiden, I felt like I was in a whole new world, prompting me to come out. However, I didn't come out to everyone until I was 23." (Respondent 1 – Homosexual male)

The difference in acceptance regarding sexual diversity and gender diversity is also linked to geographical location. Smaller villages are on average more conservative regarding gender diverse individuals, while sexually diverse individuals seem to be more accepted.

"In my hometown of Wierden, there's decent acceptance for homosexuality, but gender identity is more sensitive. Zwolle, being a city, has more visibility and acceptance, though it's less open than Utrecht or

² Transgender hormone therapy, also called hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or gender-affirming hormone therapy (GAHT), is a form of hormone therapy in which sex hormones and other hormonal medications are administered to transgender or gender nonconforming individuals for the purpose of more closely aligning their secondary sexual characteristics with their gender identity. (Wikipedia contributors, 2024)

Amsterdam due to its Christian influence. People here tend to conform, uniqueness isn't embraced. Personally, I've been fortunate not to face extreme hostility, but I wouldn't be surprised if it happened."

(Respondent 4 – Lesbian woman)

5.1.4 Religion

Due to the religious backgrounds of surrounding family or friends, participants who grew up in a religious household all experienced stagnation. This impacted their possibility to express their sexuality or gender. This was mostly due to the Christian background of the parents or guardians of the participants. All participants who grew up in a strict religious household noted repression of their identity due to the religious beliefs of their parents. One respondent voiced their experience of being an outcast of the church due to their homosexuality.

"I love making music, so I played in a church band. When I came out as gay, I had to quit because they felt someone like me shouldn't be a church leader."– (Respondent 1, homosexual)

This is phenomenon in not only experienced by sexually diverse individuals, but also by people who are gender diverse. One participant noted how religion was the foundation of their parents' argument regarding why being trans non-binary is wrong. In the case of this individual, they were born being assigned female at birth, but later in live felt they didn't feel comfortable in their body which resulted in the decision to have a mastectomy³. Noteworthy is the fact that the participant says that their parents disapproved of this change on a personal level, but they used religion to support this argument.

"I think they personally believe that, but there is a basis in religion.

Like, your body is given to you, so you shouldn't want to change it. It is given by God." (Respondent 2 – Trans non-binary)

³ A mastectomy is surgery to remove a breast. Sometimes other tissues near the breast, such as lymph nodes, are also removed. This surgery is most often used to treat breast cancer. In some cases, a mastectomy is done to help prevent breast cancer in women who have a high risk for it (hopkinsmedicine, 2021).

In all cases this religious repression resulted in participants moving out of their parental home earlier than they would have liked. A transgender woman noted she fled her parental home due to religious repression by her father.

"At 14, I realized I was transgender, but living in a strict Christian household with a domineering father was challenging. He had negative views on LGBTQ+ people, even suggesting harmful actions. I hinted to my uncle, aunt, and grandparents about my struggles and suicidal thoughts. Two weeks after high school graduation, they called offering help. I got in the car, and that was nearly two years ago." (Respondent 10 – Transwoman)

5.2 Emancipation regarding LGBTQ+ individuals

5.2.1 Ideal form of emancipation regarding the LGBTQ+ individuals

Participants were asked what the ideal form of emancipation was in context of the LGBTQ+ community. All participants were unanimous that emancipation meant that everyone, no matter their gender or sexuality would be treated equally. Treated equally in the eyes of the law and equally by society.

Emancipation for me is as follows. when people are judged, there are no differences based on sexual preference, orientation, or gender. It doesn't matter how you identify in these respects. (respondent 1 – homosexual male)

After analyzing the interviews, it becomes evident that the notion is that the LGBTQ+ group does not want to be an exception and does not want to be treated as one. While gender diverse participants generally do not expect society to always ask for everyone's pronouns, they believe true emancipation would mean that if someone requests the use of specific pronouns, it would be accepted without issue.

"In my view, being LGBTQ+ should be seen as normal, not exceptional. Pronouns should be accepted without hesitation, embracing differences. This acceptance would help me feel less like an outlier; true emancipation would mean shedding that feeling." (Respondent 3 – Lesbian)

5.2.2 The current state of emancipation regarding LGBTQ+ individuals

The current state of emancipation regarding LGBTQ+ is not at the point participants want it to be. Participants gave various examples of why they feel that the Netherlands has not achieved emancipation yet regarding LGBTQ+ individuals. They observed a notable divergence in societal attitudes toward LGBTQ+ acceptance, contributing to polarization in discussions surrounding their emancipation. This polarization reflects varying levels of support and resistance within society, impacting equality and inclusion. For example, an individual who lives in a large city like Amsterdam, might have a different experience regarding emancipation to someone who lives in a small village in the east of the Netherlands. A participant working for the COC⁴ and who gives presentations about the LGBTQ+ community at schools demonstrates how this polarization can be noticed in The Netherlands:

"In larger cities and certain schools, I often sense acceptance, particularly from children and parents. However, in some schools, there's still progress to be made, especially where strong religious influences may lower LGBTQ+ acceptance. Respect is important, even amid differing beliefs. For instance, in an Islamic school, openly stating I'm lesbian should ideally receive mutual respect, fostering an environment of acceptance. Yet, when homophobia arises from the environment itself, it's particularly challenging, and I find this distinction puzzling." (Respondent 3 – Lesbian)

This notion regarding polarization is noticed by all participants. While polarization is seen between different geographical locations, it is also noticed in politics, which directly reflects on society. Participants expressed the sentiment that LGBTQ+ individuals are often exploited by extreme right-wing ideologies. Including polarizing debates and diverse opinions within political discourse. For instance, LGBTQ+ issues may be used as wedge issues to mobilize support or opposition, sometimes overshadowing genuine dialogue and understanding. On the other side of the spectrum, progressive parties actively put a lot of emphasis on promoting inclusivity and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, countering the polarizing effects of extreme viewpoints. This dynamic can lead to tensions and divisions within society, impacting how LGBTQ+ rights and concerns are perceived and addressed

⁴ COC Nederland (officieel: Federatie COC Nederland) of kortweg COC, is een Nederlandse belangenorganisatie van homoseksuelen, lesbiennes, biseksuelen, transgenders en mensen met een intersekse-conditie. (COC, 2023)

"The growing polarization and shift towards the right can be a real threat. Many exploit this for power, fueling nationalist sentiments and ignoring genuine dialogue. Populists often sideline LGBTQ+ acceptance, which is concerning." (Respondent 13 – Lesbian)

Regarding feelings of emancipation among transgender individuals, all participants noted that true emancipation would involve resolving all practical issues. For all participants who identified as transgender, this meant the ease of how one could change their identity on their passport, for example for a transgender woman this means having a V, for female on their passport, instead of their birth assigned M.

It should be much easier to change your sex on passports and other legal documents. This would greatly enhance emancipation. It's puzzling why it's so difficult when it brings so much happiness to people..
(Respondent 6 – non-binary)

5.3 Political influence

5.3.1 Political influence in general

There was a consensus among participants that contemporary politics have influence on LGBTQ+ acceptance to some degree. Participants had the impression that contemporary politics has negative influence on the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. This shift was likely caused by the emergence of right-wing Dutch parties that increasingly employ populist rhetoric concerning LGBTQ+ and gender issues, regarding the LGBTQ+ community as predatory. The common sentiment among participants is the idea that politics shape what is normal in society, and thus what should be accepted.

"In politics, role models represent the Dutch people. Acceptance there would be a significant step forward, in my opinion." (respondent 3 – lesbian woman)

Although not all participants observed this trend, some noted a transfer of American political sentiment to the Netherlands.

"It's incredibly unfair and problematic. In America, school shootings happen often, but when a transgender person is involved, it gets disproportionate media attention. This unfairly tarnishes all transgender individuals. Addressing this issue is challenging without clear solutions." (Respondent 11 – Transman)

5.3.2 The influence of the 2023 Dutch elections

A small percentage of the participants experienced that the 2023 national Dutch election for the House of Representatives had influence on acceptance. While most acknowledged that politics in general did have some kind of influence, only a small percentage of participants noticed negative discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ topics specifically during the 2023 elections.

I really didn't get the impression that it's about standpoint during the 2023 elections had much influence on the acceptance regarding LGBTQ+ issues. (respondent 4 – lesbian woman)

Participants mainly observed incidents that were widely covered by the media, notably one involving faction leader Thierry Baudet and a non-binary individual, where Baudet denied the existence of non-binary identities. Those who noted negative political discourse during this time were typically politically engaged or personally interested in politics.

One vivid memory stands out: watching Nos op 3, where politicians faced live questions for an hour. Though I can't recall the exact name, I distinctly remember Thierry from FVD being mentioned. Now, driven by your actions, I find myself rushing again, facing a flood of hateful comments and death threats.
(respondent 2 – non-binary)

5.4 Policy

5.4.1 What could be better?

To create perspective on what LGBTQ+ individuals would change policy wise in the Netherlands, the participants were asked what changes to policy they would implement to heighten acceptance regarding LGBTQ+ individuals in the Netherlands. There were two main aspects all participants agreed on: improving or changing policy regarding educating, and the reparation of the gender healthcare system.

5.4.2 policy in education

All participants had the common idea that some education on LGBTQ+ topics is necessary. How this should be done and at what age, were the factors that differ mostly between participants.

The first thing we see is the difference in how LGBTQ+ topics should be treated in schools. Some participants experienced that mandatory implementation of readings or informational sessions by external parties or by teachers who are well read on the subject would bring more acceptance. Those participants argued that if readings and informational sessions on LGBTQ+ topics are not mandatory, they will not be executed in their full potential. According to participants who supported this option, these readings and informational sessions, when executed correctly, can offer valuable discussions that can lead to more acceptance.

"In education today, LGBTQI+ themes are often treated as optional. Many schools, both primary and secondary, merely fulfill the requirement without fully integrating LGBTQI+ education into their curriculum. This superficial approach hinders meaningful discussions, as I've seen firsthand during the COC informational sessions I lead." (respondent 1 – homosexual male)

Another common argument among participants is that individuals are unaccepting due to lack of knowledge. Participants who were in favor of readings and informational sessions see ignorance as the main barrier for achieving acceptance. Familiarization is the key to a more accepting society.

Yes, education is primarily about becoming familiar with the topic. People are often afraid of things they don't understand. Once you're exposed to it, it becomes familiar. (respondent 2 – non-binary)

However, not all participants believed that more readings and informational sessions are key to more acceptance. Some thought this may have a countering effect regarding acceptance due to the idea that excessive information and education about LGBTQ+ topics may inadvertently contribute to polarization rather than creating acceptance. This can create a sense of threat or defensiveness among individuals, leading to further division instead of unity.

"It's not just about campaigns in general, but when there are too many of them, it can become overwhelming. People might start thinking, "This is too much," which can increase aversion and influence others negatively." (respondent 11 – transgender man)

Among the participants who were hesitant to suggest more information sessions and knowledge, there was a sentiment regarding the potential drawbacks of overwhelming individuals with too much information, which would in their opinions, lead to more backlash.

You can't simply overwhelm people with a rainbow bombardment and expect universal appreciation. Understanding its purpose is crucial. Just as with learning math, grasping its relevance makes a difference in acceptance. (respondent 13 – lesbian woman)

Participants who were hesitant of the idea of more readings and informational sessions instead opted for a more interwoven variant of LGBTQ+ integration in the curriculum. For instance, many participants encouraged the idea of incorporating LGBTQ+ topics in “mentoruren”⁵ social sciences, biology or history. Participants argue that LGBTQ+ topics can be incorporated into subjects taught in secondary school. The sentiment is that different LGBTQ+ topics can be seamlessly integrated into various subjects taught in secondary school, fostering a more holistic understanding and acceptance of diversity.

"I think schools should revise their curriculum and teaching methods. Subjects like citizenship, social studies, biology, and history touch on these issues, but they aren't thoroughly discussed and need to be reviewed." (respondent 4 – lesbian woman)

5.4.3 policy regarding gender affirming healthcare.

All transgender participants noted they would change policy regarding gender affirming healthcare. There is a common sentiment that the system regarding transgender healthcare is convoluted and creates more harm than good. Participants experienced that the system related to gender affirming healthcare was bureaucratic, and they experienced pushback whenever they tried to take the next step. Every transgender respondent noticed this flaw in the system and that this flaw has had some kind of effect on mental wellbeing of transgender individuals.

⁵ “Mentoruur” is a subject in Dutch secondary school. During this hour, the entire class gathers together to discuss things with their mentor. In secondary school, each class has a mentor.

Participants who have not personally experienced gender affirming healthcare but know individuals who have reported hearing about the system's flaws and the impacts these flaws had on those individuals.

"Address the healthcare backlog by making the transition process faster and more comprehensive, and by opening more specialized institutions to reduce long waiting lists." (respondent 7 – transwoman)

"Ensuring no budget cuts in healthcare, especially for trans care and mental health services like psychology, is crucial. As a nurse, I see cost-saving measures affecting healthcare." (respondent 10 – transwoman)

"I would streamline the medical process, balancing regulation to avoid impulsivity while ensuring accessibility. Everyone should be able to change their name, including those leaving their religion or wanting their common name on official documents like passports." (respondent 11 – transman)

Discussion

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to gather perspectives on LGBTQ+ acceptance and its stagnation in the Netherlands from inside the LGBTQ+ community. This was achieved by exploring the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in the Netherlands regarding acceptance and analyzing these experiences. This study concludes that the observed stagnation in acceptance towards LGBTQ+ individuals from the 2022 SCP report is also experienced as stagnating from the perspectives of LGBTQ+ individuals. It should be noted that there is a difference between the observed stagnation from the perspectives of gender diverse individuals and sexually diverse individuals. (Kuyper, 2018)

This thesis concluded that LGBTQ+ individuals noted difference in acceptance between the different identities. This leads to the confirmation of the first expectation. According to the results, a divide can be seen between the perspectives on acceptance between gender diverse and sexually diverse individuals. Homosexual, lesbian and bisexual individuals experienced more acceptance than transgender and non-binary individuals. Gender diverse individuals experienced more distance to the norm due to the feeling that being gender diverse is experienced as relatively new to the public, thus resulting in a lessened feeling of societal acceptance. The striving for equality for sexually diverse individuals has been going on longer, which resulted in homosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals feeling that they experienced more acceptance from society than transgender and non-binary individual.

This thesis also concludes that the experienced acceptance is influenced by power structures in society. The power structures that influence acceptance according to perspectives from within the LGBTQ+ community are politics, healthcare and education. According to conflict theory, politics influence certain discourse in society. Critical theory suggests that power structures, which is in this case political discourse, shape public opinion. The theory puts its focus on society and culture to look at certain power structures, proposing that social problems therefore do not stem from individuals, but from social structures and cultural assumptions (Horkheimer, 1937). This is in line-with the results of this study. LGBTQ+ individuals experience negative discourse surrounding LGBTQ+ issues, most notably within right wing ideology. Especially gender diverse individuals experienced they were a scapegoat for right wing parties with more radical and/or populist ideas, feeling that their identity is being denounced.

Although this thesis did find a link between general political discourse and the experience of acceptance, I did not find a link between the 2023 Dutch elections and the decline in feelings of acceptance. While it was expected that political discourse during election campaigns would negatively impact feelings of acceptance among LGBTQ+ individuals, this thesis found that only a small minority of participants experienced any negative discourse they felt could have impacted acceptance regarding the LGBTQ+ topics. Individuals who did recognize negative discourse were already involved or interested in politics. However, this thesis did find a link between overall negative political discourse and feelings of acceptance. Political discourse is experienced as influencing the overall norms around LGBTQ+ topics, which has direct effect on the feelings of acceptance.

This thesis reveals that acceptance is not only affected by the public's attitude towards LGBTQ+ topics, but also highlights how the current state of the Dutch healthcare system influences the acceptance experienced by gender diverse individuals. This thesis shows that the Dutch healthcare system is seen as heavily flawed according to gender diverse individuals, which directly impacts their feelings of acceptance. This confirms the theory that due to long waiting lists and gender healthcare diagnosis criteria that are experienced as outdated, gender diverse individuals do not feel taken seriously by government. The lack of action taken to resolve these experienced systematic problems gives the negative implication that gender issues are not deemed urgent enough to act on. This results in the lowered experienced acceptance by members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Lastly, this study saw that the lack of proper LGBTQ+ education is causing society to be partly ignorant towards LGBTQ+ individuals. While government introduced a law in 2020 obliging schools to give education about LGBTQ+ identities, this study noticed that in practice proper education on LGBTQ+ issues is still lacking and that not all schools are experienced in delivering coherent and quality education on LGBTQ+ topics.

Limitations

The current thesis is subject to several limitations. First, it should be noted that due to these time restrictions, this thesis is limited regarding the diversity within the group sampled. While the thesis covered a wide spectrum of the LGBTQ+ community, it failed to include individuals who identify outside of the terms lesbian, gay, transgender or non-binary. This could have also affected the results regarding sexually diverse individuals. While this study concluded that sexually diverse individuals experienced more acceptance, the study failed to

include asexual and pansexual individuals, which are newer identities and can therefore be less accepted due to misalignment with societal norms. Including these identities in the interview process could negatively impact the average experience of acceptance among sexually diverse individuals. Besides the lack of diversity in sexual diversity and gender diversity, the sample also consisted of only caucasian individuals, which created a lack of ethnic diversity. One could argue that being non-caucasian can impact feelings of acceptance among LGBTQ+ individuals. This suggests the need for further research that includes a wider variety of identities and ethnicities.

Another potential limitation is linked to the question of whether the LGBTQ+ community should be studied as a collective. According to this thesis, there are distinct differences in the experiences of acceptance between gender diverse individuals and sexually-diverse individuals. While the term LGBTQ+ has a positive effect on community building, the discrepancies in outcomes between these sub-groups suggest that further research should focus on the specific experiences of different sub-groups within the LGBTQ+ community, rather than treating it as a homogenous collective.

While this thesis aimed to interview individuals from diverse geo-demographic backgrounds to capture a comprehensive view of acceptance in the Netherlands, there was a concentration of participants residing in the province of Overijssel. While some individuals were interviewed who lived in different parts of The Netherlands, it should be noted that we cannot make assumptions on ideas about the LGBTQ+ community in different regions of The Netherlands. This brings into questions the generalizability of the conclusions for all LGBTQ+ individuals in the Netherlands.

Lastly, researcher bias should also be considered. While this thesis was conducted at a master's thesis level, under supervision and with scientific integrity in mind, readers should be cautious of potential biases that could influence the outcomes. Such biases could include the researcher's personal beliefs, the framing of interview questions, and the interpretation of the answers provided.

Policy advice

Taking in consideration the findings of this thesis regarding the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as the theoretical perspectives suggested, the following advice regarding the progression of LGBTQ+ acceptance can be put forward.

Healthcare

Firstly, the government should address, revise, and fix the flaws regarding gender affirming healthcare. Specifically, this thesis concludes that due to long waiting times and outdated diagnosis systems, gender diverse individuals are experiencing more mental stress than necessary. This can lead to depression, anxiety and even suicide. Potential fixes for the system can be brought under three mechanisms: reforming gender affirming care, education of healthcare professionals, and the reevaluation of diagnostic criteria.

The reform of the gender affirming care involves the process of accessing this care more efficiently. The referral system should be simplified, and bureaucratic systems should be either abandoned or simplified. Priority should be given to streamlining referrals so individuals can access specialistic care more efficiently. At the time of writing, gender diverse individuals must go through their general practitioner to get a referral to a gender clinic. Due to the psychological and specialist nature of the subject, general practitioners, often, lack knowledge on the subject to make an informed decision. This leads into second mechanism - the education of healthcare professionals.

Healthcare professionals, particularly general practitioners, have been observed to have little knowledge regarding the subject of gender affirming care. Due to the nature of the Dutch healthcare system, individuals must go through their general practitioner to get a referral to a specialized gender clinic. This study proposes a mandatory training programs on the basics of gender healthcare to ensure healthcare professionals have a general understanding and can address the needs of gender diverse individuals, so guiding individuals through gender health is more effective and efficient.

The third mechanism through which healthcare can be fixed relates to diagnostic criteria. To get gender affirming healthcare an individual must be diagnosed with gender dysphoria⁶. According to the gender diverse participants interviewed, there were several cases of individuals lying about their symptoms to get gender healthcare. The main reason for lying about symptoms is the strict and outdated criteria used, which often do not accurately reflect the patients' personal experiences or identities. These criteria are experienced as overly rigid and not inclusive of the diverse ways in which these feelings can be manifested,

⁶ According to the DSM 5: Gender dysphoria is a marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary/secondary sex characteristics, a strong desire to be rid of these characteristics, a strong desire for the characteristics of the other gender, a strong desire to be or be treated as the other gender, and a strong conviction of having the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender. (American Psychiatric Association, 2022)

forcing individuals to conform to a narrow set of symptoms to receive sometimes lifesaving care. This phenomenon is not limited to the Netherlands or the participants in this study; it has been observed in numerous cases dating back to the 1950s, where individuals have misrepresented themselves to obtain desired healthcare (Stone, 1992). According to this thesis and studies done before, it is recommended to rewrite what the diagnosis of genderdysphoria should entail and whether genderdysphoria is the right term to use. While it is not implied that healthcare should abandon all forms of diagnosis, it is essential to reassess and research whether the current diagnostic criteria for determining if an individual should receive gender affirming care.

Education

According to this thesis and theory, not implementing more education as an extra on top of the standard curriculum, but rather control whether schools already adhere to the standard requirements on LGBTQ+ education is advised. This thesis would advise that the government should enforce random controls to assess whether schools effectively enforce these rules. In addition, schools should be required to submit annual reports detailing their implementation of LGBTQ+ education. This includes documentation of curriculum content, lesson plans, teacher training activities, and student feedback. Secondly, the establishment of feedback mechanisms is crucial. Creating channels for students and parents to provide anonymous feedback on their school's handling of LGBTQ+ topics can help identify schools that may not be adhering to standards. This feedback can be instrumental in pinpointing areas that require improvement and ensuring that all students feel supported and included. Additionally, educators should be trained on the topic. This could include workshops, seminars, and online courses designed to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge.

While this thesis does not recommend any sort of extra LGBTQ+ on top of the existing curriculum, it does advise to implement LGBTQ+ topic among existing subjects in secondary education. This entails discussing and educating on LGBTQ+ topics in line with the standard subjects such as: Biology, Social Sciences, History, Geography, Art and Philosophy. For example, within social sciences, education could delve into social constructs shaping gender and sexuality across different cultures and societies. Additionally, comprehensive exploration of LGBTQ+ rights movements is essential, shedding light on the impact of discrimination on both individuals and communities. In the subject of history, attention could be given to studying historical LGBTQ+ figures and their significant

contributions to society and the enduring struggles for LGBTQ+ rights and equality. Geographical inquiry should encompass an investigation into global attitudes and legal frameworks pertaining to LGBTQ+ rights, with the analysis of geographical factors influencing LGBTQ+ acceptance within different regions. By normalizing these discussions within the curriculum, this study expects a positive effect on reducing stigmatization, thereby creating greater acceptance for LGBTQ+ individuals.

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Appendix 1: Code Book

Axial Codes	Sub-codes
Communication	Respectful communication Usage of pronouns Respect of pronouns Digital communication
Community	Belonging Feelings of community LGBTQ+ Community Online community
Education	Usage of curriculum Extra education Integration of LGBTQ+ topics Teacher training School policies
Identity	Diversity Gender Identity General Identity Exploration of identity Sexual Orientation Transgender identity Intersectionality
Personal Circumstances	Personal problems Social Geography Place of residence Family dynamics Mental health

Perspectives of Acceptance

Acceptance

Inclusivity

Positivity

Social interaction

Stagnation

Support

Politics

Right Wing Politics

2023 Dutch elections

General politics

Public policy impact

Appendix 2: Questionnaire

Introduction

- Informal introduction
- Explanation of the research and its purpose
- Personal introduction of the researcher
- Assurance of confidentiality and anonymity
- Consent for participation in the interview
- Explanation of the recording process of the interview (if applicable)

Exploration of Socio-Cultural, Political, and Institutional Factors:

- How would you describe your experience as an LGBTQ individual in the Netherlands?
 - Can you provide specific examples of moments when you felt accepted or excluded?
- Do you notice any progress or decline in the level of acceptance of LGBTQ individuals in the Netherlands?
- Do you experience a difference in acceptance among various LGBTQ+ identities?
 - If so, in what ways does this difference manifest?

- What do you think might cause this?
- Can you provide examples to support your observations?
- What does "emancipation" mean to you in the context of LGBTQ individuals?
 - Do you see that the current state of LGBTQ emancipation in the Netherlands meets your ideas of emancipation?
 - On a scale of 0 to 100, how far are we?
- What factors do you see as obstacles to LGBTQ emancipation in the Netherlands?
 - Can you name specific socio-cultural, political, and institutional factors that you believe cause these obstacles?
- How do you think educational institutions, healthcare institutions, and other political and institutional factors affect how LGBTQ individuals feel treated and accepted in the Netherlands?
 - Do you have examples of specific situations where these institutions have played a positive or negative role in promoting the emancipation of LGBTQ individuals?

Addressing System Barriers and Social Attitudes through Policy Initiatives

- Current situation and effectiveness:
 - Which ongoing policies or initiatives do you find most effective in promoting LGBTQ emancipation in the Netherlands? Why?
 - Where do you see the biggest shortcomings in current policies in addressing system barriers and social attitudes?
- Recommendations for the future:
 - If you could implement one concrete policy measure to further promote LGBTQ emancipation, what would it be and why?
 - What challenges do you foresee in implementing this measure, and how can we overcome them?

Analysis of the Influence of Election Campaign Messaging:

- Have you experienced that LGBTQ issues were high on the political agenda during the elections?
 - How did you notice this or not?
 - Which LGBTQ issues did you find most prominent during the elections?

- Were there certain issues that remained underexposed?
- Do you believe that the election campaign messaging has had any influence on the social acceptance and emancipation of LGBTQ individuals?
 - If so, in what ways?

Conclusion

- Thank the participant for their time and insights.
- Ask if they have any additional thoughts or comments to share.
- Emphasize the confidentiality of the interview and provide contact details for further questions or concerns

Appendix 3: Ethical considerations

According to a report on LGBTQ+ (mental) vulnerability by the COC (2013), LGBTQ+ children and youth have increased vulnerability. A large proportion of them are subject to negative experiences at school, at home, at the sports club and/or at work based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. Based on previous literature, this study makes use of relevant and confidential ways to execute the research in an ethical way manner.

There are 5 main forms of ethical considerations in Qualitative research. The LGBTQ+ foundation created a document which describes these 5 considerations in context of the LGBTQ+ community. This document draws on the ethical principles set out by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Framework for Research Ethics (2015). These 5 considerations are: Integrity and Quality, Fully Informing Researchers and Participants, Confidentiality and Anonymity, Avoiding Harm, and Informed Consent.

Consideration 1 focuses on integrity and quality in research. It emphasizes the ethical responsibility of researchers to ensure that their work is of a good standard and adds value to existing knowledge. In context to the LGBTQ+ community this emphasizes the significance of considering the inclusion and representation of LGBT+ communities in research, especially where they are underrepresented. When presenting findings, it is crucial to amplify the voices of LGBT participants rather than speaking on their behalf. (LGBT Foundation, 2023)

Consideration 2, Fully Informing Researchers and Participants, highlights the importance of transparent communication about the research's purpose, methods, and risks to

both researchers and participants. In the context of this research, sensitivity for individuals who are not publicly out as part of the LGBTQ+ community is needed. Choosing a setting that is known with privacy at mind is important. At the start of every interview consent is asked from the participant. In the case of this study, this meant two things: participants were asked if they could give verbal consent before participating in this study right before the interview. The participants were asked if they agree with the the interview and if they consent to the interview being recorded (LGBT Foundation, 2023). The second way consent was ensured was via written consent through an online form. While schuduling interviews via e-mail, participants were sent a link that led to a form, which contained extra information and had users fill out their name, the label they identified within the LGBTQ+ community, and written consent.

Consideration 3 focusses on maintaining confidentiality and anonimity in research. This has the aim of protecting the indetities of participants. This should lead to a feeling of speaking freely. Another aspec of this consideration is on the safeguarding of vulnerable participants. In context of the LGBTQ+ community handling this with care is essential. Even if the research topic is not directly related to LGBTQ+ identities, not all individuals within the community may feel comfortable disclosing their identity and/or feelings on certain topics. This leads to the consideration that when recruiting for LGBT research through an institution, there is added risk. For instance, a workplace might demand disclosure of participating staff. This would breach confidentiality and anonymity, potentially harming LGBT individuals who might feel unsafe or fear career repercussions if their identity is exposed. At the beginning of the interview we will assure anonimity and confidentiality by replacing the original names of the repondents and storing the recorded audiofiles on an encrypted external ssd so the identitiy of the repondent will be anonymus and confidential. (LGBT Foundation, 2023)

Consideration 4 emphasizes voluntary participation and the absence of coercion. Providing clear information for informed decisions and the ethical duty to ensure all parties are fully informed, particularly in funded projects is mandatory. This consideration states that researchers should ask informed consent allowing participants to withdraw consent anytime. This enables participants to make informed decisions freely. (LGBT Foundation, 2023)

Consideration 5 emphasizes the avoidance of harm in research. This can be either physical, mental, or emotional, and acknowledges that all research carries some level of risk. Potential harm to both participants and researchers should be taken seriously, and measures

should be taken to mitigate it. Even though a 100% guarantee can never be given, while interviewing, enough space is provided for the expression of emotions. While interviewing, inclusive research is used. At the beginning of each interview the pronouns are asked of each individual to accompas the participants gender indetity during the interview. (LGBT Foundation, 2023)