

**Early Childhood Sex Education:
How Do Dutch Parents Educate Their Young
Children About Sex, Sexuality, and Pedophilia?**

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ABSTRACT

In this research study, parents from in and around Amsterdam were interviewed and filled out surveys about how they educate or have educated their young children about sex, sexuality and pedophilia. Seven parents were interviewed in 40 minute to hour sessions and 20 parents of primary school students filled out two-page surveys about the topic of early sex education. It was found that most Dutch parents educate their young children openly about sex; however, they do not discuss sexuality and sexual feelings and desires with their children. They speak with their children about sexuality during or after puberty. Many parents speak with their young children about pedophilia, but limit their conversation to talking about the danger of strangers.

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“We can’t teach [children] math when they know multiplication. Then it’s too late. When they develop language, they need to name their genitalia and words connect to sexuality.”

-Thore Langfeldt, Swedish psychologist/sexologist

Introduction

Educating young children before they go through puberty about sex and sexuality is not institutionalized in most countries’ primary school systems. However, young children do not live in a sexless world. Children are curious about gender differences in genitalia between their mother and father; children wonder how their mothers become pregnant with their younger siblings. Most children look to their parents to answer these questions about sex and sexuality. Therefore, parents of young children whether they are prepared for the job or not are usually their children’s first sex education teachers. Some parents take on this role with ease and openness; however, many parents might find questions about sexuality their children have difficult to answer.

In the past couple decades or so, one of the growing concerns about their child’s sexuality is pedophilia. The hyper-awareness many parents have for pedophilic crimes can be translated through familial dialogues about sex and sexuality into negative attitudes in their young children toward sex.

Pedophilia is an adult’s sexual desire for a child. However, the Greek root, *philia*, is translated as love, or friendship in Modern Greek. The concerns many parents have about pedophilia as a sexual threat are mirrored in many western

governments with extremely harsh laws that prevent pedophilia at all costs. In almost every western country pedophiles are prevented from acting on their sexual desire for children or teenagers in anyway. Even pedo-sexual feelings are regulated by governments. Child pornography is illegal for adults to possess privately in most countries. Laws that protect children from sexual relationships with adults are usually enforced strictly and for the most part unquestioned by citizens or lawmakers.

Social attitudes toward pedophiles usually fall in line with the harsh government laws protecting children. The fiercely enforced laws and usually strongly held social attitudes toward pedo-sexuality against pedophilic actions imply that children should not be confronted with adult sexuality until they are of the age of legal consent which is usually between sixteen and eighteen years of age. Parents who are very concerned about pedophilia might feel inhibited in discussions with their children about sexuality. This inhibition might make negatively affect children's attitudes about sex and ultimately their sexual development.

The Netherlands is a country known for its sexual openness. However, it was not clear to me whether the Dutch just tolerate different sexual lifestyles or are truly open about them. The *Dutch Society for Sexual Reform* (NVSH) and the *Party for Neighborly Love, Freedom, and Diversity* (PNVD) are two organizations which have very progressive and liberal ideas about sexuality. They both believe that all forms of pornography (even child pornography) should be legalized. One of PNVD's many items on its political agenda is to lower the legal age of sexual consent from sixteen to twelve years of age in the Netherlands. Because of this, the party is casually referred to

as the “Pedophile Party” although its platform extends beyond that. It did not receive enough signatures to participate in the 2006 elections, but it is still a force in the culture that might affect Dutch people’s attitudes toward sexual issues and pedophilia. Dutch parents attitudes toward the PNVD might indicate how open they are about in their discussions about sex with their young children.

In this paper, I will first discuss the literature written about child sexuality, in America and in Europe. Then, I will discuss some different theoretical perspectives about topics in child sexuality such as pedophilia. I have interviewed seven people about the familial education of young children and have 20 short surveys about those topics. Before I discuss that data, I will tell you the assumptions I held before collecting my data. Then I will analyze my data and come to a conclusions about it.

Question and Focus: What is the political and social attitude toward pedophilia and child sexuality commonly held by Dutch parents? Do Dutch parents educate their young children about sex, sexuality, and pedophilia? If so, how?

Literature Review

There have been many studies which investigate a child’s knowledge of sexuality. These studies might be a result of Freud’s findings that children are sexual beings. Many psychologists, sociologists, and sexologists seem to be interested in children’s own knowledge of sexuality in their own words. For example, in Dr. Renate Volbert, a researcher at the Institute for Forensic Psychiatry in Berlin, Germany,

studied of 147 children between the ages of two and six years old from different parts of Germany. He found that children between the ages of two and six understood gender and genital differences between the sexes, but knew very little about “procreation and adult sexual behavior”(Volbert, 2000, 18). Dr. Volbert states the motivation for his study in the first sentence of his study; “Due to growing concern over child sexual abuse, children’s knowledge of sexuality has taken on increased importance”(Volbert, 2000, 5). Clearly a child’s sexual knowledge and education is linked with issues of sexual abuse. Many parents who decide to discuss sex and sexuality with their young children are probably motivated by a fear of sexual threats such as pedophilia. However, parents who do not educate their children about ‘adult’ sexual behavior and what different sex acts mean might put their child more at risk for being taken advantage of by more sexually experienced children or adults.

Researchers Rademakers, J. et al. performed another study that looked into a child’s perspective on their own sexuality, but with eight and nine year old children. They interviewed 31 boys and girls about their knowledge of sexual experience. They found that “one third [of the children] displayed an active interest in...[experiences regarding sexuality or physical intimacy with peers], had their own experiences and were able to reflect on them”(Rademakers, J. et al., 2000, 49). At the age of eight or nine, when many children are still pre-pubescent, there is definitely an interest in children about sex and sexuality. From this study, and many others like it, we know that children themselves are sexual beings. Therefore, their education about sex and sexuality should not be neglected. Education about issues such as sexuality and

pedophilia are sensitive topics that many elementary schools might not feel comfortable including in their curriculum especially for some of the younger children. The responsibility for a child's early sexual education is usually put on the parents or caretakers of a child. Therefore, it is important to look at how young children are educated in the home about sexuality in order to understand what their attitudes toward sex and sexuality might end up being.

The way that children are educated in the home can vary depending on the culture. In Dr. William Friedrich's study that compared the sexual behaviors of children between the ages of two and six years old in Dutch and American children, he found that the way that children were parented might affect their sexual behavior. He believed that he received more accurate information about a Dutch child's sexual behavior from a parent because that parent was more willing to report everything. He believes that this openness of Dutch parents is a result of their generally sex-positive attitudes. American parents might not have disclosed of their children's sexual behaviors because of the cultural stigma that surrounds child sexual behavior in America. American parents might be embarrassed to report that they found their five year old child masturbating (Friedrich, W. et al., 2000, 127). These cultural differences lead me to believe that Dutch parents might be more open in the sexual education their young children than American parents are. It is important that I study a child's sexual education in the Netherlands because of this sex-positive attitude that is seen in how parents feel about a child's sexual behavior and their teenagers' sexual behavior and education. I believe that my study will fill in the hole that I see in most of

the research done in the Netherlands about sexual education. Most of the research looks at school education or with teenagers in the home. I am interested in how Dutch parents educate their young children in the home about sex.

The book Children & Sex: The Parents Speak, is a book created by *The Study group of New York*. This book interviews parents of children between the ages of three and eleven years old about how they educate their children about sex. They ask parents how they discuss issues such as unwanted touching, sexual pleasure, and where babies come from. They interviewed 200 American parents extensively about all of these sexual issues. (Berges, E.T. et al., 1983). This is the type of study I would like to do in the Netherlands.

Theoretical Framework

Child sexuality is a concept that was not created until the eighteenth century according to Dr. Steven Angelides, a history and gender studies author from University of Melbourne Australia. He lays out the history of child sexuality in his paper, “Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Erasure of Child Sexuality.” He states that in the seventeenth century and before that there was not much attention paid to the issue of child sexuality. The term child sexuality had no meaning before the eighteenth century because there was no public discourse on the issue. In the eighteenth century, along with the Scientific enlightenment, child sexuality became an issue that “medical moralists began denouncing...as sinful and physically injurious” (Angelides, 2004, 143). Child sexuality only became less generally despised in the twentieth century

when Freud deemed it as “a normal and natural expression of the infant and child, [and] the suppression of which creates both individual and social problems”(Angelides, 2004,143).

However, in the 1980’s, second wave feminists created a campaign to raise awareness about child sexual abuse issues such as pedophilia and incest. This campaign did not completely ignore a child’s sexuality, but instead claimed a child’s sexuality to be innocent and easily taken advantage of. In this campaign and in other campaigns against child sexual abuse, the unequal relationship between a child and adult is brought up as unfair to a child. Therefore, a child cannot truly consent to a sexual relationship with an adult because of the inherently and immutably unequal power relationship. David Finkelhor, a prominent researcher in the field of child abuse describes consent in child-adult sexual relationships; “For true consent to occur, two conditions must prevail. A person must know what it is that he or she is consenting to, and a person must be free to say yes or no...Children are incapable of informed consent because they ‘lack [relevant] information’ (Angelides, 2004, 147). Children are acknowledged to be sexual beings by many people (even people vehemently against pedophilic acts), but they still need to be guarded against sexual acts. This takes any agency away from a child over their own sexuality. If a child is educated about sexuality, sex, and pedophilia, that child would be more likely to make informed sexual decisions with peers or even with adults.

If a child is not informed about sexuality, sex, and pedophilia at a young age, then that child might be more at risk for being in negative sexual situations. Without

knowledge of what meanings society attach with different sexual acts and situations, that child might not be able to make informed decisions about who he/she wants to kiss or cuddle with or even go further.

In Frits Bernard's study of how pedophilia can affect children and teenagers, he found that "[t]he sexual contacts in themselves do not seem to be harmful, but the attitudes of society have negative consequences (secondary effects)" (Bernard, 1979, 199). Because society's opinion about sex is important in how a child feels about sexual experiences, it is important to discuss sex and sexuality from many different aspects. A child should understand the biological, anatomical aspect of sexuality; however, a parent/caretaker should not end their discussion of sexuality with children there. The discussion of the meaning that society can give to sexual actions such as child-adult relationships, masturbation, and asexuality are just as important as describing the basic mechanics of sex. It is also important for children not to feel inhibited when asking questions about sex and sexuality to their parents or caretakers. Sexual education of children is more important in the reduction of child sexual abuse separating completely adult and child sexual worlds. This separation will only make children more reluctant to ask about things that they believe to be adult sexual behavior.

Methodology

Before I speak about how I completed my research, I would like to discuss my assumptions about how Dutch parents educate their young children about sex. I

gathered these assumptions from experiences I had before I studied abroad here in Amsterdam and during my experience here in the Netherlands. My assumptions were also based on the research that I did on this topic.

Because of the NVSH and the PNVD and the general reputation about the Netherlands being a sexually open and tolerant country, before I began my research I was under the impression that Dutch parents are extremely open about talking with their children about sex. Especially because of the allowance of the PNVD and their agenda to lower to age of sexual consent, I thought that Dutch parents might be less concerned about pedophilia.

Also because of articles that I have read about parents being extremely tolerant of their teenager's sexual experimentation, I believe that parents might also be open with their young children's sexual experimentation. However, I also thought that parents might only be open to talking with their children about sex after a certain age (probably after puberty). I assumed that the way that parents were educated about sex might affect how they education their children about sex. Parents' religious affiliations and the environments they grew up in might also affect their attitudes toward sex. I thought that parents from more urban environments might be more sexually open. They might speak with their children at a younger age about sex. Parents who hold stronger religious affiliations might be less open about sex.

For my data, I decided interviews people and survey them. I interviewed seven people (six in person, and one over e-mail). Six of these interviewees identified themselves as parents, while the other was the head of the PNVD, Marthijn

Uittenbogaard. I met my interviewees through my Dutch teacher, Eduard, my host, Irina, and through my academic director academic director Kevin.

Each in-person interview lasted between 40 minutes and an hour. I interviewed each person in their own home or apartment while I wrote down thorough notes, which I later typed up as a rough transcript of the interview. I asked all six people the same basic questions. I did take the liberty to expand upon these questions depending on each particular situation. The basic questions I asked were: Do you consider yourself religious? What type of environment did you grow up in (rural, suburban, or urban)? What is your job? How many children do you have and what are their ages? How were you educated about sex and do you wish it was different in anyway? How were you educated about pedophilia if at all? How have you or do you plan to educate your children about sex? What topics do you believe are important to discuss with your children? At what age do you think it is appropriate to begin discussing sex with your children? Have you or do you plan to include pedophilia in your discussion about sex? Do you know about the PNVD and its platform and how do you feel about it?

The email interview consisted of only three questions; How do you believe that young children should be educated about issues such as sexuality, sex and pedophilia? How were you educated about sex and sexuality? Did anyone discuss topics such as kinderlokkers /pedophilia with you? How do you think that in general Dutch parents educate their young children about sex, sexuality, and kinderlokkers/pedophilia? The interview, as brief as it may have been, was with a key interview; therefore, I do count

it as an interview. However, it is important to acknowledge that Marthijn Uittenbogaard's answers to the first and last question are not his personal opinions or drawn from personal experience, but the views of the PNVD. In my other interviews, the participants were speaking on behalf of themselves.¹

Because of the potentially personal nature of my interviews, I told my interviewees that their information would be kept confidential. I believed that this assurance of confidentiality might put my interviewee more at ease and feel that he or she could be more open. I will refer to the interviewees with numbers because of my assurance of complete confidentiality. I will share all of their essential background information, such as their job and how many children they have.

I also handed out 20 surveys to parents who were waiting to pick up their children at a primary school in the Oud-West neighborhood of Amsterdam. I would not like to state the school which the parents' children attended because I did not have any type of agreement with the primary school about this data. Since I was not going inside the school to receive the data, I thought that I would not need their permission to hand out my surveys.

The parents who filled out my two-page survey had children between the ages of five and twelve years old. I went to the school during dismissal time, which I learned from my host was between 2:00 and 3:00pm, and found many parents waiting outside. Many parents were waiting outside a half hour to an hour before the children

¹I have disclosed Marthijn Uittenbogaard's name, but not my other participants because Uittenbogaard is speaking on behalf of an organization while the other participants are not.

were dismissed. Therefore, I thought that dismissal would be a good time that parents would be able to use to fill out my surveys. The surveys I handed out were in Dutch because I thought it would make the survey process easier. As a last minute addition to my survey, I asked parents to write their age on the survey sheet. I thought what decade they grew up in might be indicative of some of their other answers. It took the parents between five and fifteen minutes to fill out the surveys. The survey has a few background questions and six questions about early childhood sex education. Copies of my survey in Dutch and English are included in this paper in the appendix section.

I decided on combining both surveys and interviews in my research. In my interviews I was to be able to speak with people in depth. And with my survey I was able to get data from parents from a variety of backgrounds. The survey will allow me to see connections between parents' backgrounds and their views about early childhood sex education more easily and systematically. Although, I only surveyed parents from one school, they proved to have quite a variety of religious affiliations, and variety of environments they grew up in. The survey also covered for the interviewees that I missed. I knew that it would be difficult to hand pick interviewees from such a variety of backgrounds and arrange those interview times. The survey helped me to achieve this variety.

However, I do believe that I could have gotten a bit more of a variety in parents I interviewed. All but one of the people I interviewed currently lives in Amsterdam. Most of the interviewees were not religious. I did try to broaden my interview selection; however, because of the time constraint and where some of the parents lived,

I was not able to interview those people who might have broadened my selection of parents. I also believe that it might have been interesting to interview some parents as a couple. But I do think that it was easier for me to write down notes when I only spoke with one parent.

I also wish that I had tape recorded my interviews in order to get more exact quotes. However, I do think that writing down notes might have made my interviewees a little less nervous about what they were saying. Some people who are on tape, even if it is not videotape get nervous about where that tape is going. I thought it would add to the easy and comfortable atmosphere of the interview.

I do believe that I was pretty unbiased in my interviewing. I allowed for the interviewees to speak without interrupting too much or leading them to one answer or the other at all. I also tried to use Dutch language specific terms such as *kinderlokker* for child-lurer or pedophile, and spoke about the Dutch Society and the Party for Neighborly Love and Diversity with their Dutch letter acronyms.

Data Analysis

Interviews

Interviewee 1 is a father of two children; one boy two months old, and a four year old daughter. He owns his own business. Currently he lives with his wife and two children 30 minutes, by train, outside of Amsterdam. Until he was six years old he lived in an urban environment, but after that he lived in a suburban area with his parents. He identifies as religious, but does not attend church. I interviewed him in his

place of business for an hour.

Interviewee 2 is a father of three children who are all under the age of four years old. He is a secondary school teacher. The children he teaches are between the ages of eleven and 16 years old. He lives with his family in East Amsterdam in, what he describes as, the suburbs. He grew up in a rural area and does not at all identify as a religious person. I interviewed him at his house in the afternoon for 45 minutes.

Interviewee 3 is the mother of two boys who are six and 18 years old. She is a professor of higher education. She and her husband and sons currently live in Amsterdam. She grew up in a small town. She identifies as having “religious feelings, but not very religious.” I interviewed her at her apartment for 50 minutes.

Interviewee 4 is the mother of one nine year old daughter. She works as a clerk in the criminal justice court in Amsterdam. She and her family live in Amsterdam, and she was raised in Amsterdam. She is not religious. I interviewed her in her apartment for 40 minutes.

Interviewee 5 is the mother of one daughter who is now 29 years old. She is a professor of Women’s Studies and Political Science. She lives with her husband in Amsterdam. She has lived all over the world, but mainly in cities. She is not religious. I interviewed her in her apartment for a hour.

Interviewee 6 is the father of one natural daughter who is now 36 years old. He also has been the foster father to several children over the years. He is currently retired, but has worked in professional child care and at a University. He does identify as

pedo-sexual.² He lives in a suburban town now, but grew up in Amsterdam. He does identify as religious. I interviewed him in his apartment for 40 minutes.

The first interview I will discuss is my email interview with Marthijn Uittenbogaardand (Interviewee 7). This interview will be discussed separately since it was conducted in such a different way. Marthijn Uittenbogaardand is the head of the Party for Neighborly Love and Diversity (PNVD), a political party was created in May 2006. The PNVD was not able to participate in the November 2006 elections because it did not receive enough votes to be recognized as a political party. The two goals that are most controversial on the party's agenda are the legalization of all kinds of pornography, including child pornography, and the lowering of the age of consent to twelve years old. This party is sometimes informally referred to in the media and in informal discussions as the "Pedophile Party."

In response to how he believes that children should be educated about sex, Uittenbogaardand stated that children should be educated "in a normal way. No information should be taboo. And children must learn that sexuality is a normal thing." From what he says, I infer that he means normal to be natural. I interpret his answer to mean that parents should be open in their discussion with children and not make any topic off limits. This sentiment was shared by a few of my other interviewees; therefore, I will go further into depth on this parental attitude later.

The one personal question that I asked Uittenbogaardand was how he was educated about sex and sexuality. I was also curious as to whether he was warned

² He loves children and has sexual feelings for children; however, he does not act on those feelings.

about kinderlokkers (pedophiles). He responded:

There was no sex education at school. Only at the secondary school, but then everyone knows what sex is about. Before that, sex was a taboo-issue at school and also at my parents place. That sex can be fun, et cetera is a thing no one tells you. Only the reproduction facts when you are older and already know them.

Thore Langfeldt's quote, which I started out my paper with, illustrates this point that sex education can often come too late. Children begin to hear and learn about sex before they go through puberty. It seems from his quote, that in Uittenbogaard's childhood he feels that sex was not discussed in the home or at school until he already felt informed about sex.

I also asked him how he thinks that the majority of Dutch parents today educate their young children and sex, sexuality, and pedophiles. He corrected me and informed me that parents are not the only people to educate children about sex. However, he answered with the way that he thinks children should ideally be educated about sexuality; "Sexuality should be as normal subject as eating. No special 'education' is required. Let children free and teach them that sexual play can be fun et cetera."

Uittenbogaard seems to believe that children must be allowed to learn about sex is a natural way. Perhaps by "no special 'education,'" he means that parents should not sit down and have a serious talk about sex. This idea of letting sexual subjects come up naturally and be discussed casually was shared with many of the parents I interviewed.

I would like to begin discussing my other interviews on this topic of "natural" sex education. This is a topic that most of the interviewees brought up on their own.

Many said that when their children asked them sexual questions they would answer them, but not give more information than that. Interviewee 1 said that his daughter asked him and his wife questions about pregnancy. In response to her questions he said, “We showed her pictures of her birth (even before her mother was pregnant with their son). She didn’t ask how it got in. We don’t want to talk about it if she doesn’t ask.” His last sentence is important. Most of the parents I spoke to talked about the importance of the education being initiated by the child.

Interviewee 6 [5?] agreed that the beginning of her [6 is a man] daughter’s sex education was initiated by her daughter, “She started asking questions around four. When she asks questions, I answered. I didn’t give more information than she asked for. And then I expanded on basic story each time she was are curious about it.” Later on she said, “When you tell kids about sex do it so they can understand; otherwise, they won’t remember.” Using age appropriate vocabulary and not giving excess amounts of education is supported by most child development psychologists. Supposedly, this type of education supports the natural sex development of a child. If a parent is continuously telling their young child about sex and sexuality, that child might not remember that information, as Interviewee 6 [?] stated. They might also develop a preoccupation with sex if they hear about it so much from their parents.

This preoccupation is a concern that many parents might worry themselves with. Some parents use this supposed danger of over-educating a child about sex as an excuse to barely educate their children at all about sex. None of the parents that I interviewed directly expressed a fear of this. But the way that some parents educate

their children about sex implies that this concern about over-educating is embedded within them. Parents who rely on their children to be the initiators of their own sexual education might be leaving out important parts of a child's sexual education. What child will ask about the emotions involved with sex? What child will ask these complex questions about the negative and positive aspects of their own sexuality and how their sexuality is brought into sexual situations with others? Most children are interested in body parts and how children are made. But is it correct to leave a young child's sexual education at that?

Interviewee 7 [no: 6] strongly believes in the early sex education of children. When I asked him what age he thinks is appropriate to begin the sex education of children, he said six years old; "My grandson is 5, and he still believes in Sinterklaas (Dutch version of Santa Claus). At the age of six, they begin to see reality; society, human relationships, and so on. But I suppose my grandson already knows that he was born from the belly of his mother. I suppose he doesn't understand what the role of his father is; loving the mother and that's it." Children who do not understand the emotional dynamics of a romantic relationship might be at a disadvantage when they do begin to have relationships.

Most of the parents I interviewed stated that children today are starting everything earlier than when they were young. Interviewee 7 [no: 6] talks about his daughter's early development; "My daughter was 9 when she first menstruated. She was young in her first relationships with boys. And we prepared her well to prevent pregnancy. She was quick in her development." Later he described children today in

more general terms; “Modern children are quite young with relationships; ten, eleven, or twelve years old. They are more or less supposed to have a boyfriend or girlfriend. In their teen age years, they surely have [had romantic relationships].”

Interviewee 1 also expressed the idea that children today are more advanced in their sexual development than when he grew up;

When I grew up it's different from now. My daughter, she's four, comes home with stories from school and everything is earlier than when I was growing up. I anticipate that she will also be earlier with her sexuality and that is something that I'm willing to accept as long as she is happy with it. But she is much riper than I was at her age. But I have to realize she is still young. I don't mind if she is experimenting as long as she is happy with it and it is not against her will.

The parents I interviewed expressed little aversion to their children beginning to experiment sexually when they are young. This idea that children should experiment if they are happy with their actions is a recurrent theme in my interviews. Assuring that a child is positive about their sexual actions is common among the parents; however, only a few say that they want to discuss this sex-positive attitude with their children at a young age. Interviewee 1 does say that at some point he wants to discuss the feelings attached to sexuality with his children; “I want to tell my children that sexuality is more than just the technical thing. There are emotions and it creates a bond. The images from the media are often very one-sided and that is something I had to figure out myself. It is very emotional.”

A majority of the parents I interviewed alluded in one way or another to having a discussion of sex-positivity with their children. Interviewee 2 briefly mentioned it when I asked what topics he wanted to discuss with his children; “[I want to discuss] the use of safe sex. I want to discuss, what sex is, what you have to be careful for;

pedophilia, sex on the internet/chat rooms, having sex with somebody to be certain that you want to. And if you want to have sex that you really want to do it with that one person.” About half of the interviewees mentioned the topics they wanted to discuss with their children in this order that interviewee 2 lays out in this quotation; dangers first and the positive aspects. Parents, who stress the negative sides of sex, such as sexually transmitted illnesses and being taken advantage of in sex (especially on the internet), might frighten their children. Their children might become so nervous about sex and all of its possible negative consequences that their sexual development could be stunted. It is also possible that children who hear of dangerous activities might be drawn to them more in their rebellious teenage years. If children only hear about the negative side of sex when they are young, they might be more drawn to those negative aspects of sex when they are older. Over-educating a child on the negative side of sex could be harmful.

This harm that can be caused by over-educating the negative side of sex could be equal to the harm to a child’s sexual development if parents do not initiate the education of their children at all. In my discussion with Interviewee 4, she discusses how she feels most parents bring up sex with their children; “If there are problems it is also something you can discuss with your parents. That’s how most parents bring up their children. I think they are very conscious of the dangers. And if something is more secret it is more interesting when you grow up.” Secrets interest children just as much as everyone else. Interviewee 6 [?] describes how secrets can tempt children on the internet; “On the internet I believe filters are just encouraging kids.”

The topic of secrets brings me to the discussion that I have found most of my interviewees have with their children about pedophilia. Most parents I interviewed warned children about pedophilia, but they seemed to leave out the sexual part of the story. From an early age parents warn their children about going with strangers offering candy, but hardly ever say why children should not go with strangers. This part is edited out, and the hole is most likely apparent to the child. Interviewee 1 told me how he has educated his daughter about pedophilia: "I have warned my daughter about kinderlokkers. I told her she should not accept candy from strangers...and never go with them. But I have not told her why." He has discussed that strangers might be dangerous, but did not discuss the possible sexual danger. Children are surely confused as to what would happen if they did go with a stranger. Because the discussions between parents and children of strangers are usually vague, children might be intrigued by this hole in the story or the secret their parents clearly do not want to discuss.

Parents who do not fully discuss why they do not want their children to go with strangers might be looking out for the interests of their children. They might also not want to scare their child or give them too much information which they might not understand. This fear of over-education seems to be implied again in parents' the way that parents warn their children about pedophilia. On the other hand, some parents might also be uncomfortable speaking about such taboo subjects such as pedophilia. Whether parents are scared of over-educating or just are not comfortable in speaking with their children about sexually taboo subjects, the gap in the education that parents

do give to their children because of their fears or uneasiness about pedophilia tends to be vague and threatening. Interviewee 2 states the order of sexual education for his daughters; “[I want to educate my daughters about pedophilia] really early, six or seven years old. Tell them not to go with older people in a car as soon as possible. The other things starting around twelve when they are starting their puberty.” If parents’ first discussions about sex is a vague and perhaps threatening warning about pedophilia, their children might develop sex-negative feelings at a young age. Children are extremely perceptive of parents’ unspoken worries and emotions. They can sense parents’ fears. Parents might transfer their worries about negative sexual experiences to their children.

Interviewee 6 [?] speaks about this problem of transference of sexual fears from parent to child; “A parent needs to recognize their own fears and sort them out in order to talk about it with kids.” Parents who are uncomfortable talking about sex or who are over anxious about threats such as pedophilia might transfer their fears or uneasiness about sex to their children. Interviewee 6 [?] describes a neighbor of hers [!] who was extremely frightened of pedophilia; “Our English neighbors worried to no end about pedophilia and had ideas that their children would be hurt by this. Pedophilia is such a scare and it is symbolic [for parents] to focus on one issue [such as pedophilia] when they are really just worried about how society is changing more in general. Children have more risks in traffic than from pedophilia.”

The fear that most of the Dutch parents I interviewed have about pedophilia seems to contradict their usually open attitude toward their children experimenting

with children their own age sexually. As evidenced in most of the excerpts from the interviews I have already included, one can see that parents accept the early sexuality of their children. Children are expected to have relationships at young ages.

Interviewee 1 compares Dutch parents attitudes toward their children's sexual activity with what he knows of American parents' attitudes; "In America there is a saying, not under my roof. In the Netherlands it is; if there should be sex let it be under my roof so I can keep an eye on it. I do think parents are less panicky about sexuality." However, Interviewee 7 [no: 6], a parent who is also a pedophile, describes the fine line that parents draw between early sexual experimentation with peers and early sexual experimentation with adults; "Reality and general opinion in the Netherlands is to keep children out of sex at least before the age of eleven or twelve, but legally at the age of 16...Factually, lots of children have sex below 16 with each other and that is tolerated." Sex between adults and children is not tolerated at all during this age of normal sexual experimentation between the ages of twelve and 16.

When I asked interviewees for their opinions about the PNVD, they almost unanimously and vehemently opposed lowering the age of sexual consent to twelve years old. Interviewee 4, who works as a clerk in a criminal court in Amsterdam said; "It is something which is out of the question. Never. With my work I have to deal with that quite a lot...I wouldn't approve of it being socially accepted because there is an inequality of partners in the act. And he is only fulfilling his own needs. I don't believe the pedophiles when they say the child liked this very much." The idea of equality in sexual relationships seems to be stressed to children even when not talking

about sex with older people. In many of the interviews parents have alluded to the importance of equality in sexual relationships. Interviewee 5 says that when her son asked her about having sex with his girlfriend, she responded; “If she wants it also, you can try it.” Both partners should want the sex equally for it to occur. However, as I have mentioned in my theoretical framework, most adult sexual relationships are based on inequality. In heterosexual relationships, men and women are inherently unequal. Employees date employers, and men and women date men and women who are much older or younger than them very regularly. However, a gap in age when one of the partners is a child seems to be different. Interviewee 6 [No!], a Dutch feminist [No no!], also agrees that the power dynamic between a child and an adult in a sexual relationship could be damaging; “Children are in a lower position of power...Power enters into it if the age gap is very huge. There is a great chance to be forced into something you don’t really want. There is so much difference between children, but it is fine for children to experiment with adult sex.” Interviewee 6 [No] also is the only parent who is in favor of lowering the sexual age of consent to twelve, but she [!] does not think that children should have sex with adults. She believes that the age should be lowered so children feel freer in experimenting with their sexuality with their peers.

Through these interviews, I have learned that most parents acknowledge a child’s sexuality; however, they want to protect it from the world, especially the adult world. Many of the interviewees expressed concerns about pornographic sex on the television and internet that children are exposed to. They want children to understand that sex is about feeling. However, because most parents do not educate their children

about feelings in sex at a young age they are putting their child at a disadvantage. They are either halting a child's sexual development by not giving them the language to explore it or the affirmation in their exploration.

Also the wall that many parents build up between adult and child sexuality can leave children extremely unprepared for their adult sexual relationships later in life. If child sexuality is so extremely different from adult sexuality, then who is supposed to teach children about how to act in adult sexual relationships. Interviewee 7 [?] states that he believes children need to learn some things about sex for themselves; "Also it is important to discuss the privacy of children. Young children will not ask for privacy. But around 10 they do want privacy also in relation with their parents." Children should only receive information about sex if they are curious and are willing to share with their parents. This privacy is important; however, privacy might also be an excuse parents use to educate their children less about sex and sexuality. If children are embarrassed or reluctant to speak about sexual issues, this reluctance might be increased by parents who emphasize a child's privacy.

It is important to let children experience sexuality on their own, but they do need the tools to experiment. If they do not receive these tools from their parents, they will look to the media or their friends, who might not have views about sex that parents support. Also, if children believe that sex is such a private issue, they might not feel comfortable talking to anyone about it and again their sexual development could be harmed. Interviewee 7 [6?] discusses privacy a bit more; "If you refuse to tell me, ok. The understanding with my daughter and foster children [=6] is a feeling without

words. If you want to tell me, I appreciate it. If not, I'll accept it because it's your life. Same with parents. Father and mother can tell children what we do in our beds is our privacy." This demonstrates the wall between child and adult sexuality that has been socially constructed in many western societies. This wall might leave children feeling unprepared for sexual encounters in the adult world.

Deconstructing this wall is a difficult thing to do, especially with the current pedophilia scare. In today's society, children are confronted with sex from all angles, and there is no way to stop this information from being presented to children. Instead of putting filters or locks on the television and internet, parents should speak with their children about sex and sexuality in all of its forms; adult sex, and child sexual experimentation. Child sexuality might be different from an adult sexuality; however, the strict line that is drawn is absurd seeing as, "every child is different in their development," as Interviewee 5 says. Interviewee 7 [?] also says that child's sexuality is different from adult sexuality, but she [!] does not lay it out in such strict terms, "Children have diffuse sexual feelings, which are not related yet to genital sex. They love being cuddled, and as they progress to puberty they begin to have genital desire. Like Freud, I think that children are pansexual. They learn to develop sex." However, every child does not develop sexually in the same way. Some children are ready for more adult genital sex when they are eleven, while some are not ready until they are 17 or 18 years old. Therefore, it is important for parents not to prescribe to one type of regimented sexual education for their children.

Surveys

I surveyed parents of children between the ages of five and twenty years old. Parents had between one and four children, and at least one of those children were twelve or younger. The parents were all between the ages of 33 and 54 years old. This means that they grew up during the '60s and '70s (the time of the sexual revolution in the Netherlands). The decade that the parents grew up in might affect their answers.

In my surveys I found that 12 respondents identified themselves as a little religious (if they circled 4, 5, or 6 on the survey). Six respondents said that they were not at all religious (1, 2 or 3) and two said that they were very religious (7, 8 or 9). Ten of the respondents grew up in suburban areas. Seven were from urban areas, and three from rural areas. No respondents said that they grew up in any other type of area, which I did not suggest on my survey.

In response to my question about whether children had sexual desires or feelings, 18 of the respondents said that they do believe that children have sexual feelings or desires. Out of those 18 parents who believed that children had sexual feelings or desires, 17 of them believed that children should be educated about sex before they went through puberty. The three respondents who did not believe that young children should receive a sexual education did not answer any of the other questions except for the last one about their feelings on the PNVD. These three parents were all under the age of 40 and were a little bit religious; however, the environment they grew up in was both suburban and rural. Perhaps a parent's age and religiosity does affect their views on the sexual education of children. However, no substantial conclusions can be made about this fact since the sample is so small.

All of the 17 parents who believed in early sexual education for children believed that parents should educate their children about sexuality. Ten parents said that teachers at school should educate their children. Seven parents believed that extended family members should educate their children about sex, while ten parents believed that brothers and sisters should educate their siblings about sex. Five people believed that doctors should educate children about sex, and no one added any other people who should educate children about sex.

It is clear from this finding, that parents believe that they, themselves are the primary educators in their children's education. It also seems that parents do support sex education for primary school. However, I cannot be sure whether parents believed that this education should be implemented formally by the institution, or taken on more informally by individual teachers. Interviewee 5 said that she believes that sex talks do come up in school, but these talks might be more informal. However, she was not certain how sex education in primary schools worked. Interviewee 2 said that the primary school sex education is not required or implemented in most schools in Amsterdam. The school administrators can decide about sex education. This falls in line with the pillarization [better: compartmentalization along religious lines] of the school system in the Netherlands. Schools' curriculums are not usually dictated by the central government especially in the lower grades.

In response to what topics parents believed should be addressed with children, all 17 parents circled sexual organs, the act of sex, how babies are born and safe sex. Ten parents circled sexual feelings and desires. Nine parents circled sexual threats

such as pedophilia and molestation. And only six parents circled masturbation. There was only one topic added by one parent which was privacy.

These results show how much importance place on teaching children about their anatomy, and the mechanics of sex. Parents also seem to stress the importance of safe sex with their young children. Since there were only ten parents who believed that sexual desires and feelings should be discussed with their parents, I assume that parents might not think that young children can handle serious conversations such as sexual feelings and desires. This fits in with my findings from the interviews. Parents believe that the discussion of sexual feelings and desires is important, but might not talk with their young children about this. They might wait until they are older.

My next question was at what age they think that they should discuss each topic with their children. Most people who circled sexual organs and how babies are born said they would discuss it with their children when they were five years old. Those who circled safe sex and the sexual act said they would discuss these topics at around twelve years old. Those who circled sexual threats and masturbation said they would speak with their children around the age of six or seven years old. And the few parents who circled sexual feelings and desires said they would have that discussion when the child is eleven or twelve.

It is interesting to see the time line parents create for their sexual discussion with their children. Most start off simply with body parts and where babies come from. And then a few will caution their children against sexual threats. Parents save topics such as safe sex, the act of sex and masturbation for when children are a bit older. This

progression also fits with my interviews. If a parent discusses sexual threats with their children, they usually do it early. And most do not discuss sexual feelings and desires early if at all.

My last question, which all 20 respondents answered, was whether they were familiar with the PNVD and whether they supported their goals of lowering the age of consent and legalizing child pornography. All 20 respondents responded negatively to this party and their goals. They would not want to age of sexual consent to be lowered. One parent stated that the sexual age of consent law protects children from sexual consent. Another responded that child pornography should never be legalized. There were no positive responses to that question.

The data from the surveys supported my interviews and did not present any new information. However, the survey was important to my research because it assured me that the parents that I interviewed were not atypical in their views on early sexual education for children.

Conclusions

To answer my research questions, I would say that Dutch parents do educate their children about sex. However, parents do not discuss topics involved with sexuality, such as sexual feelings or desires, regularly with their young children. Many of the parents I interviewed expressed desires to speak with their children during or after puberty about sexual feelings, power dynamics in sexual relationships, and the importance of making one's self happy in sexual relationships.

Dutch parents do seem quite open when addressing their children's inquiries about sex. Before puberty, most children ask questions in sexual body parts, pregnancy and birth, and the mechanics of sex. Since parents seem to wait for their children to initiate discussions about sex, the early of sex education of children by their parents can be constrained by children's observation skills and their sexual vocabulary. However, a child might be curious about the relationships involved with sex, but cannot ask because they are not sure how to vocalize their questions. Even though the Dutch sexual culture might be viewed as open and progressive (especially in Amsterdam), parents are not as progressive as I first may have thought in the sexual education of their young children.

Waiting for a child to ask questions about sex might be harmful to a child's sexual development. Children might only obtain the vocabulary to ask questions about the dynamics of a sexual relationship when they feel uneasy or embarrassed talking with their parents about sexuality. Therefore, they might look for this information in other places such as the television or their friends. These sources might not describe sexual relationships in the way that a parent wants their children to learn about relationships. However, it might also be developmentally appropriate for parents to wait for their children to bring up issues. I cannot make a definite conclusion about who should initiate a discussion of sexuality because all of the parents I interviewed and surveyed began educating their children about sex when the child first began to ask questions. My research would be more complete if I had found parents who discussed sexuality in depth with their young children without prompting from their child at all.

For further research, I would seek out these parents who initiate discussions about sexuality with their young children. I would also try to speak with their children.

Concerning pedophilia, Dutch parents are less progressive than I hypothesized in this discussion with their children. Even though there is one political party such as the PVV that is seeking to break down the wall between child and adult sexuality, many Dutch parents believe that this wall, enforced by the age of sexual consent, is a positive one, which protects their children. The strict divide between adult and child sexuality is evident in how parents educate their young children about pedophilia. They warn their children about strangers at a young age; however, they do not discuss sex with older people at all with children during this discussion of strangers.

In my interviews, I did not even find that parents talked about what a child should do if an adult (or even another child) touches them in a way they do not like. The discussion of strangers seemed to be all that parents discussed with their children regarding pedophilia or molestation. Parents' warnings about strangers might seem threatening or ominous to children. The warnings might subconsciously create sex-negative attitudes in children's psyches during their early sexual development. Also, since most parents do not discuss sexuality with their young children, these vague warnings about strangers might be the only way children learn about their sexuality. Therefore, children's sexual psyches might be even more negatively affected if these warnings about strangers are the only things they have to latch onto. In future research, I would like to speak with children or at least young adults about their views on how their parents educated them about pedophilia.

Dutch parents are open with their young children about the mechanics of sex when a child asks questions about sex. However, the discussion of sex does not go much further beyond the child's inquiries for most of the parents I interviewed. One sexual topic that a parent might bring up is pedophilia; however this topic is brought up so vaguely that children might be left confused or frightened of sexuality. Parents are not as open with children as I had hypothesized based on the seemingly sexually open Dutch culture. However, during and after puberty it seems that Dutch parents are very open with their children about sex *and* sexuality.

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APPENDIX

English Version of Survey

Sex Education Survey for Parents/Caretakers

Sarah Davies

School of International Training Gender, Sexuality, and Identity Study Abroad Student

Email: Sarah.davies@pomona.edu, Tel: 06 383 20001

This survey was created to understand better how Dutch parents feel about the education of their young child(ren) about sexual topics. Your survey answers will be used as data for my research project on Sexual Education in the Netherlands. Your answers will be kept anonymous in my report. Also, if there are any questions that you would not like to answer, feel free to leave them blank. Thank you for taking time to fill out this survey. Your views and opinions are valued and appreciated.

If you would like me to email my final report to you, please write your email address here:

II. Biographical Questions

Age _____ Occupation _____

Number of Children _____ Age of Children _____

Are you religious? *(circle a number)*

Not at all Somewhat Very
1 ---- 2 ---- 3 ---- 4 ---- 5 ---- 6 ---- 7 ---- 8 ---- 9 ---- 10

What setting did you grow up in? *(circle one)*

Urban / Suburban / Rural / Other _____ *(please specify)*

II. Short Answer Questions

1. Do you believe that young children (before they go through puberty around 12 years of age) have sexual feelings or desires?

2. Do you believe that young children (before they are twelve years old) should be educated about sex and sexuality? (If you answer no to this, you may skip answering question 3 through 5 and just answer **question 6**)

3. Who should educate young children about topics relating to sex?

(circle as many as you want)

Primary school educators

Siblings

Parents/Caretakers

Pediatrician

Extended Family (aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.)

Other _____ *(please specify)*

4. What topics should parents/caretakers bring up with their young children (before twelve years of age) about sex? *(circle as many as you want)*

Sexual body parts

Masturbation

Safe sex

How children are born

The act of sex

Sexual desires or feelings

Other _____ *(please specify)*

Sexual threats (such as, pedophilia, molestation)

5. What is the earliest age that you have educated your child(ren) or plan to educate your children about sexual topics?

6. Are you familiar with the Partij voor Naasteliefde, Vrijheid & Diversiteit (PNVD) and their political goals of lowering the age of consent to 12 years of age and legalizing child pornography? If so, how do you feel about this political group?

Dutch Version of Survey

Onderzoek naar seksuele voorlichting

Door Sarah Davies

School of International Training Gender, Sexuality, and Identity Study Abroad Student

Email: Sarah.davies@pomona.edu, Tel: 06 383 20001

Met deze enquête onderzoek ik hoe Nederlandse ouders denken over de opvoeding van hun jonge kind(eren) op het gebied van seksuele onderwerpen. Uw antwoorden zullen gebruikt worden in mijn onderzoeksproject over seksuele opvoeding in Nederland. Ik zal uw antwoorden anoniem verwerken in mijn verslag. Vragen die u niet wilt beantwoorden, kunt u overslaan. Hartelijk bedankt voor uw tijd!

Als u wilt dat ik mijn verslag naar u mail, verzoek ik u uw e-mail adres hier te noteren:

I. Uw gegevens

Leeftijd _____ **Beroep** _____

Aantal kinderen _____ **Leeftijd van de kinderen** _____

Bent u religieus? (*Omcirkel een van de getallen*)

Helemaal niet

Een beetje

Heel erg

1 ---- 2 ---- 3 ---- 4 ---- 5 ---- 6 ---- 7 ---- 8 ---- 9 ---- 10

In welke omgeving bent u opgegroeid? (*Omcirkel er één*)

Stedelijk / Voorstedelijk / Landelijk / Anders _____ (*Specificeer alstublieft*)

II. Uw opvattingen

1. Geloof u dat jonge kinderen (voor zij de puberteit rond hun twaalfde jaar ingaan) seksuele gevoelens of verlangens hebben?

2. Geloof u dat jonge kinderen (onder de 12 jaar) over seks en seksualiteit voorgelicht zouden moeten worden? (Indien u 'nee' antwoordt, kunt u doorgaan met vraag 6).

3. Wie zou jonge kinderen over seksuele onderwerpen moeten opvoeden? (*u mag meerdere antwoorden omcirkelen*)

Leerkrachten op de lagere school

De huisarts

Ouders/voogden

Leeftijdgenoten

Verdere familie (tantes, ooms, grootouders, enz.)

Anders _____ (*Specificeer alstublieft*)

Broers en zussen

4. Welke seksuele onderwerpen zouden besproken moeten worden met jonge kinderen? (*u mag meerdere antwoorden omcirkelen*)

Seksuele organen

Gevaren (zoals: pedofilie, aanranding)

Veilige seks

Masturbatie

Hoe kinderen geboren worden

De seksuele daad

Seksuele verlangens of gevoelens

Anders _____ (*Specificeer alstublieft*)

5. Op welke leeftijd moet elk door u aangekruiste onderwerp uit de vorige vraag worden

besproken?

6. Bent u op de hoogte van de Partij voor Naasteliefde, Vrijheid & Diversiteit (PNVD) en hun politieke doelen (de leeftijd waarop kinderen seks met volwassenen mogen hebben verlagen naar 12 jaar; de legalisatie van kinderporno)? Zo ja, wat is uw mening over deze partij?