

VOX

SPECIAL ON
SEXUALLY
TRANSGRESSIVE
BEHAVIOUR



If the other goes too far

ENGLISH EDITION

RADBOUD UNIVERSITY INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE
ISSUE 2 - DECEMBER 2022

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VOX

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'BEFORE I WENT HOME WITH HIM, I SAID MULTIPLE TIMES THAT I DID NOT WANT TO HAVE SEX'

(FROM THE SURVEY)



PHOTO COVER: GETTY IMAGES

EDITORIAL


TITS


Was I interested in joining a working group, my Editor-in-Chief asked me twenty years ago. 'We need some tits!' Did I say anything about it? I probably nodded yes. I may have laughed sheepishly. No way did I say: 'What the hell do you mean, you stupid jerk?' Nor did I demand an apology.


No, I was a young journalist, and I wanted to make a good impression. By 'tits' my boss meant that the working group needed some female members, and women were few and far in between at the newspaper.

These days, his remark would qualify as sexually transgressive behaviour, because that's what it is. The #MeToo movement and recent revelations of misconduct in the entertainment world have luckily brought much more attention to what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. But there is still a lot of work to be done. In a recent Vox survey, one in ten students reported that they have been raped. This is shocking, but it matches earlier research results by Amnesty International. Like other forms of sexual violence, rape can lead to long-term trauma. The guilt which victims struggle with – Why didn't I do anything? – is equally harmful. Victims often remain silent, for fear of a reaction from the perpetrator or their environment. But if everyone keeps quiet, nothing will ever change. Which is why it's better if we report these things, to the university confidential advisor, or to the Sexual Assault Center. But the most important thing, of course, applies to *everyone*, and it is: just behave!

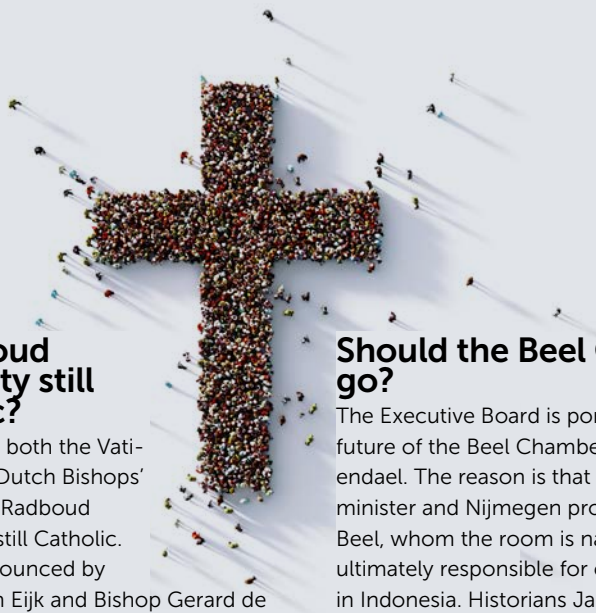
Annemarie Haverkamp
Editor in chief Vox

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IN THE NEWS



Is Radboud University still Catholic?

According to both the Vatican and the Dutch Bishops' Conference, Radboud University is still Catholic. This was announced by Cardinal Wim Eijk and Bishop Gerard de Korte in a press conference following their working visit to Rome. 'Rome still sees Radboud University as an institution that falls under the authority of the Holy Father,' said De Korte. How Radboud University feels about this is as yet unclear. A university spokesperson did not wish to give a direct answer. 'Since 1 January 2021, the Dutch Bishops' Conference has not had any influence on the management of the University,' he said. The spokesperson also pointed out that the statutes of the Radboud University Foundation have remained unchanged.

Should the Beel Chamber go?

The Executive Board is pondering the future of the Beel Chamber in Huize Heyendael. The reason is that former prime minister and Nijmegen professor Louis Beel, whom the room is named after, was ultimately responsible for colonial violence in Indonesia. Historians Jan Brabers and Ronald Kroeze were asked to create a potential new text sign to be placed at the entrance to the room.

New editor-in-chief

As of January 2023, university magazine Vox will have a new editor-in-chief. Mathijs Noij will succeed Annemarie



PHOTO: DICK VAN AALST

HUYGENS CAT STEALS THE SHOW

The most popular article on voxweb.nl in November was about a ginger tomcat. Quite a few students from the Faculty of Science had already met the cat, that was signalled in the Huygens building, but whose owner had not yet been traced. The 'Huygens cat' has become a welcome guest at get-togethers and meetings. 'He's our common study friend now,' says one student.

Haverkamp, who announced her decision to step down. Noij (33) has been deputy editor-in-chief since 2018, and has worked as a Vox editor for the past eight years. He studied social geography in Nijmegen, and went on to write, among others, for *De Volkskrant*, and *De Persdienst*. As editor-in-chief, Noij wants to conduct a readers' survey, 'to find out what kinds of articles students and employees want to read.'

Rector announces his departure

In the run-up to its 100th anniversary, Radboud University will have to look for a successor for Rector Magnificus Han van Krieken, who announced his departure at the Joint Assembly in early November. The Rector intends to retire after the celebration, on 17 October 2023. Van Krieken, a pathologist by training, has been affiliated with the University since 1999, and has been Rector Magnificus since 19 May 2016.



PHOTO: JOHANNES FIEBIG

Radboud University is shrinking

A stop has been put to the ever-growing number of new students enrolled at Radboud University. For the first time in over a decade, there were fewer enrolments this year than last year. The trend break is most apparent at the Nijmegen School of Management, which counted 24,633 students on 1 October, slightly less than the 24,678 enrolled last year. In 2012, Radboud University had fewer than 18,000 students.

Fewer German students

For years now, Nijmegen has attracted a substantial number of German students, but this academic year, their numbers have dropped by one third. This is probably partly due to the introduction of a new psychotherapy law in Germany that may make it impossible for German students to become psychotherapists with a Bachelor's diploma from Radboud University.



Investigation into undesirable behaviour

An investigation is currently underway into undesirable behaviour at the Faculty of Social Sciences. It concerns an employee from the Artificial Intelligence department. It is not as yet known what kind of undesirable behaviour the employee is accused of. The employee is not allowed on campus for the duration of the investigation.

Emergency accommodation on campus

Since late October, 200 to 250 asylum seekers have been housed in the former horse-riding school in Park Brakkenstein. The grounds are owned by the University, and the buildings include shower areas, canteens, consultation rooms for doctors and dentists, recycling points, and small shops for clothing and everyday items. According to a spokesperson of the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA), the emergency accommodation will probably remain in use until the end of the first quarter of 2023.

Philosopher resigns because of 'transgressive behaviour on the part of colleagues'

Philosopher Fleur Jongepier has left Radboud University. The reason for her decision is the transgressive behaviour of her ex-colleagues and the way in which the academic world has dealt with it, she wrote on Twitter. She spoke of 'complete assholes with zero remorse', who 'flailed around, manipulated, intimidated, and blackmailed people' when things first began to emerge. At first, Jongepier planned to take the Veni grant that she obtained in 2019 to another university, but in the end, she decided to leave academia altogether.

Jongepier worked for the faculty where the Executive Board launched an investigation into social safety and norms of conduct in 2020. This led, among other things, to Professor Paul Bakker not being allowed to become dean because he had been guilty of 'improper conduct'. In the wake of this decision, nearly thirty staff members stepped forward to report unsafe situations at the faculty.

LONG-AWAITED CODE OF CONDUCT SHOULDN'T DISAPPEAR INTO A DRAWER

It's finally here: the Radboud University Code of Conduct. A good thing according to many, but experts find the text too vague and doubt the legal value of the document. 'As an employer, you have to communicate much more clearly what the sanctions are for transgressive behaviour.'

Text: Vincent Decates and Ken Lambeets / **Illustrations:** Ivana Smudja





A beautiful spring day, last year. The Pieter Bondamlein next to the CultuurCafé is full of students. The main act of Radboud Rocks, the annual Radboud University festivities, is a Q&A on student well-being, with presenter Tim Hofman. Hofman previously devoted an episode of his YouTube channel BOOS to sexually transgressive behaviour on the part of jury members at *The Voice*. The episode attracted 10 million viewers, and led to much indignation.

The conversation with Hofman quickly turns to social safety on campus. When the presenter hears that the University does not yet have a code of conduct, he is astonished. 'That's really bad news, because it means that you're not telling the people in power how not to abuse their power,' he says. As Hofman points out, RTL and Talpa probably didn't have a code of conduct either, which is what made the abuses at *The Voice* possible in the first place.

Email the Rector

By this time, the code of conduct has been on the University's agenda for some time. In fact, a document is already ready and awaiting approval from the Joint Assembly. However, the Works Council has so far refused to give it the go-ahead, arguing that it doesn't state clearly enough that a sexual relationship between a lecturer and a student is inadmissible.

Clearly, Hofman has no way of knowing that. 'Where is your Rector Magnus?' he excitedly asked the audience. He then calls on the students to jointly send an email to the Rector, asking him to provide a code of conduct. 'It works,' he says. 'You'll see how quickly things happen once you start sending 250 emails a day.' And it does seem to work, even though, in the end, only eight students answer Hofman's call: at the next Joint Assembly, on 4 July, the code of conduct is finally approved by the Works Council.

The code of conduct came into force at the start of this academic year. The document was published on the University website, and employees were informed about it via an internal email and social media. Confidential advisor Marieke van der Burgh is happy with the code of conduct, and hopes it will help initiate

dialogue and raise awareness. 'The code makes it easier to call each other out on unacceptable behaviour. Supervisors can now call their employees out by referring to the code of conduct. It makes it clearer what behaviour is unacceptable.'

An added advantage, says the confidential advisor, is that if someone has an unpleasant experience that is listed in the code of conduct, they may be more willing to talk to the perpetrator or contact a confidential advisor. 'It's easier if you feel that the organisation is on your side.'

Students also benefit from the code, says Van der Burgh. 'Think of cases where a lecturer says something offensive or uses a disrespectful tone. With the code in hand, and with the potential support of a confidential advisor, students may find it easier to address

'SUPERVISORS CAN NOW CALL THEIR EMPLOYEES OUT BY REFERRING TO THE CODE OF CONDUCT.'

such incidents with the person in question or their supervisor.'

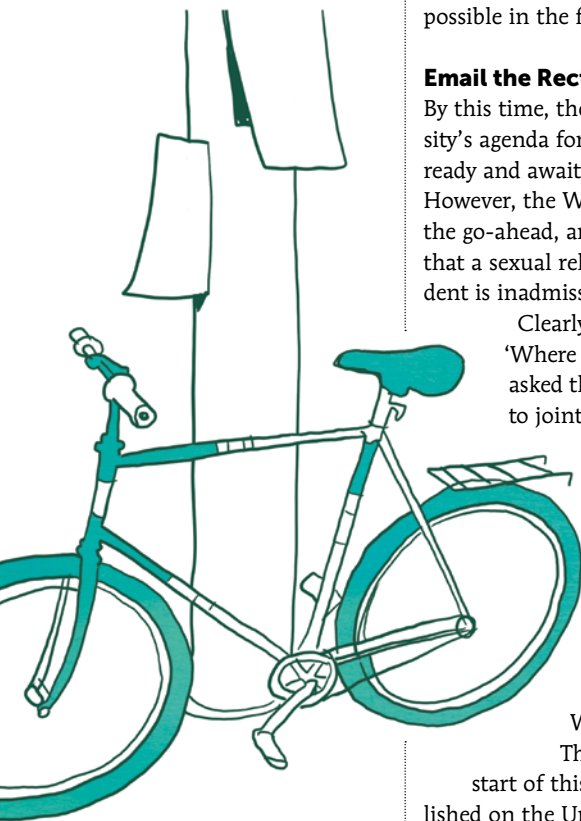
Van der Burgh is particularly pleased about the section on relationships between a lecturer and a student. 'It states that such relationships involve a power inequality dynamic. Lecturers in particular aren't always aware of this. And yet, this inequality often plays a role in the contact between students and lecturers, which increases the risk of boundaries being crossed.'

The code also makes her work easier. Depending on the severity of the offense and the notifier's wishes, a number of steps can be taken. 'You can call the person in question out on their behaviour, report it to their supervisor or a complaints committee, conduct an investigation into the organisational culture, take legal steps, or even file a police report. The hope is that the code will make it easier to take steps like these. How this will work in practice still isn't clear.'

Compulsory meetings

Marijke Naezer, an expert on misconduct at universities, is also pleased about the University finally having a code of conduct. In 2019, Naezer joined forces with Radboud University professors Marieke van den Brink and Yvonne Benschop to write a controversial report on undesirable behaviour in academia for the Dutch Network of Women Professors (Landelijk Netwerk Vrouwelijke Hoogleraren). 'A code of conduct helps by creating a clear normative framework,' says Naezer. 'If breaking the rules really has consequences, this type of code can help change people's behaviour.'

After all, says Naezer, research shows that people



adjust their behaviour to what they think others in their environment will tolerate. 'If you feel, partly thanks to a code of conduct, that people at the university won't accept certain behaviours, you will be less likely to engage in them.'

Naezer emphasises that policy around such codes of conduct should ideally be formulated, shared, and kept alive in collaboration with students and employees. 'You can encourage this by talking about the document and intervening whenever anyone breaks the rules.' However, she says, this is not what usually happens in practice. 'Unfortunately, what you often see is that a small group of administrators write a code of conduct, which then disappears into a drawer and is all but forgotten.'

Poster campaign

In this respect, Naezer sees room for improvement in Nijmegen. 'Radboud University's code of conduct is a first step. Now the University has to show what role this document can play.' Publishing the code on the internet and sending out an email isn't enough, she says. 'When you hire new employees, you can talk to them about it, and include the code of conduct in courses aimed at PhD candidates and other staff. The University can also organise meetings with experts on various types of transgressive behaviour, or host a theatre performance on campus.' A more approachable intervention, says Naezer, is a poster campaign, similar to the one run by the University of Amsterdam in the autumn of 2021 around the question: 'Do you know what to do if you experience undesirable behaviour?'

Sessions about the code of conduct can be made compulsory, says Naezer. 'Otherwise people in important positions won't attend. And that while this kind of code of conduct is first and foremost aimed at them.'

Willy van Berlo, from the Rutgers Centre on Sexuality, largely agrees with Naezer. She also emphasises that it is essential that the University works on bringing the code to life. 'There are some important aspects when it comes to a code of conduct. For example, there should be confidential advisors and a complaints committee that people can appeal to. This is already in place at Radboud University. But it's also important to communicate via social leadership what the code is really about.'

Unclear and vague

There is clearly still some work to be done in terms of communication, but what about the document's content? Is that as it should be? Marlet Bron is an employment lawyer at AbelnBron in Groningen, and many of her clients are victims of transgressive behaviour at universities. At Vox' request, she took a look at the code of conduct.

In a code of conduct, the employer should clearly state which behaviour will be tolerated, and which not, says

NEW: OMBUDSPERSON FOR STUDENTS

Students in the participational bodies were already asking for one last spring, and now it's actually happening: Radboud University will soon have an ombudsperson for students. This person – the vacancy is due to be published soon – will be given an independent position within the University, and their task will be to listen to students. Anyone who has experienced or witnessed inappropriate behaviour can contact the ombudsperson.

"The ombudsperson isn't only there to handle individual cases, but also to uncover and map specific patterns," says Agnes Muskens, Vice President of the Executive Board. The University already has confidential advisers for students (see page 18), but they are not authorised to initiate an investigation. Confidential advisers are there exclusively for the student, and they stand by the student's side, while the ombudsperson is independent and can actually initiate an investigation. Students can also contact the ombudsperson on their own initiative. According

to Muskens, the two services will work in close collaboration.

In January of this year, Radboud University hired an ombudsperson

for staff: legal expert Nancy Vellevoeye. The intention is for her to work closely with the colleague in charge of the student cases, although the confidentiality of the cases being handled will always come first.

The ombudspersons are there to create more social safety on campus. Muskens reports being 'touched' by the results of the Vox survey into sexually transgressive behaviour. "Every negative experience is one too many." She refers to the rapes, sexual assaults, and other undesirable situations that occur outside campus. "As a university, we feel a broad responsibility for our students' well-being in Nijmegen." She therefore strongly urges students to report all instances of misconduct, whether it happens within university walls, in nightlife, or elsewhere. "It's an important topic that many people still struggle to talk about," she says. "But awareness begins with initiating this kind of dialogue." Mentors are already offered training in the field of social safety so that they can watch out for signals during orientation activities. According to Muskens, student associations will soon also be devoting more attention to desirable and undesirable behaviour. She refers to this development as 'an absolute gain'.





Bron. She finds quite a few passages in the code unclear and vague. 'It could have been formulated more concretely.' For example, the code of conduct states that it is intended to call employees out on unacceptable behaviour, and that severe violations may lead to employment measures. 'I find this very unclear. It creates the feeling that an employee must first be called out on unacceptable behaviour *before* any steps are taken. But what exactly is a serious violation? And what are these employment measures? Does it refer to pay being withheld, or the employee being suspended, or fired?'

Bron also feels that the code includes unclear examples. 'For example, lecturers and students aren't allowed to engage in a private relationship for the duration of their professional contact relationship, but what qualifies as a relationship? Also, employees should avoid personal contact with students, and it is forbidden for lecturers to invite students for one-on-one meetings at their home. But what if a student unexpectedly drops by your house to hand in their thesis, is that something you should report as a lecturer?'

Willy van Berlo, from Rutgers, adds: 'The code doesn't state clearly what qualifies as undesirable behaviour. This may seem like something that should be obvious, but in practice, a lot of people don't really have clear ideas about it. In addition, the code states that it's important to call people out on their behaviour. This is precisely why it's important that all employees know what qualifies as unacceptable behaviour.'

Sanctions

The existence of these grey zones is not Bron's only point of criticism. 'As an employer, when you formulate a code of conduct or staff regulations, you have to indicate clearly what the sanctions are if the code is violated. You should also communicate this clearly, so that you can act on it. This is something that's missing here, in my opinion.'

Without clear communication, it's harder for employers to impose measures. Take the case that came to light last October at Leiden University. A Professor of Astronomy who had for years been guilty of abuse of power and undesirable behaviour was told he was no longer welcome at the University, or allowed to supervise PhD candidates. But he wasn't fired, and he remained on the payroll. 'There are various labour law-related reasons for this,' a University spokesperson reported in the Leiden University's weekly newspaper, *Mare*.

Could the University have fired this man on the basis of a clear code of conduct? 'This is about what an employee can expect as a consequence of their behaviour,' says Bron. 'Then there's the extent to which the employer dares to follow through. If they fail to follow through once, it becomes harder to do so the next time.'

Bron explains how judges usually look at cases like



'THE CODE DOESN'T STATE CLEARLY WHAT QUALIFIES AS UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOUR'

these. In terms of labour law, the assumption is that as an employer, you have to communicate clearly what the sanctions are for violating a given rule – and of course the rule itself must also be clear. A famous precedent is a 2001 case at a catering company at Schiphol. The company had a strict code of conduct that stated that employees were never allowed to eat the company's food, not even if the packaging was open or the food was past its sell-by date.

Peanuts

When one of the company's employees reported eating a few peanuts from an open package, he was fired on the spot. A lawsuit followed. Bron: 'According to the judge, the employer had clearly communicated what was allowed and what not. The employee understood the consequences of his behaviour, so he was fired. And the judge upheld this decision.'

This kind of clarity is lacking in the Radboud University Code of Conduct, says Bron. 'As an employer, if you don't tolerate a professor engaging in transgressive behaviour towards a PhD candidate or student, you must specify in your code of conduct that this will lead to instant dismissal. Otherwise you risk the employee

VICE PRESIDENT:

'WE CHOSE TO TAKE A POSITIVE APPROACH TO THE CODE OF CONDUCT'

The code of conduct is a formal starting point to allow employees and students to talk to each other about social safety, says Agnes Muskens, Vice President of the Executive Board and responsible for the social safety portfolio. 'The code was created in dialogue with at least 100 employees. It brings together various regulations that already existed on this topic.'

Muskens finds communication around the code of conduct very important. 'One of the things we did was to hire a social safety officer for this purpose. The faculties are also independently working on communication. The code is high on the agenda in leadership training programmes and sessions with deans and administrative directors. But I certainly see the wisdom in some of Marijke Naezer's suggestions for

bringing even more attention to the code.'

Muskens understands the criticism of legal expert Marlet Bron concerning some examples in the code of conduct that are not very clear. She indicates that in terms of formulating content, the document proved to be a real challenge. 'Forty or 50 years ago, it may have been easier to define when two people were involved in a relationship. We could perhaps try and define it more precisely in future.'

Muskens does not see the lack of concrete sanctions as a problem. 'In consultation with the Participation Council, we consciously decided to take a very positive approach to the code of conduct. We then linked the code to a number of regulations. If there are signs of a potential violation or undesirable situation,

we will launch an independent investigation, and hear both parties. Only then will we decide which labour law steps to take.'

Muskens sees the risk of the University not having sufficient tools for dismissing someone as a 'hypothetical analysis'. 'If a sound investigation reveals a punishable offence, I trust in the Dutch legal system.'

At the end of this academic year, the code of conduct will be evaluated by the Participation Council. In preparation, the Vice President wants to study various cases of transgressive behaviour that have come to light in the Netherlands over the past year. 'In addition, we also plan to collect input from employees, students, confidential advisors, the ombudsperson, and deans.'

saying: it's OK for someone to correct me, but dismissal goes too far. In which case, the odds are high that a judge will follow the employee's cue.'

Bron also wants to dispel a common misconception: if an employer wants to dismiss an employee for transgressive behaviour, they don't need to file a police report. 'As a company, you can decide for yourself how you want your employees to behave. You can even specify in your code of conduct that employees must refrain from certain behaviours, such as engaging in affective relationships within a hierarchical power dynamic, that may not be punishable by law but would still justify instant dismissal in case of a violation.'

Are judges so detached from the real world that codes of conduct must specify such obvious rules on transgressive behaviour, and in such detail? No, says Bron. 'Over the past few years, many MeToo labour law cases have come to light, also outside universities. The tendency is for judges to be stricter in considering what is socially acceptable behaviour. Employees are increasingly expected to comply with a certain standard of behaviour, but it's still important to lay this down in a clear code.'

Sticker

In fact, says Bron, you could see the code of conduct as one big yellow *Warning!* sticker. 'What you're saying is: if you break the rules and fail to behave in the way we expect you to, you can be dismissed, or suffer other employment-related consequences. Get your employees to sign the document if need be; that will make the urgency very clear. It may be a negative form of communication, but otherwise people may see it as too non-binding.'

How can the University formulate a better code of conduct then? One way, says Bron, would be to use concrete case studies to talk about desirable behaviour and what the consequences should be for various forms of transgressive behaviour. 'You could, for instance, indicate that if someone is verbally aggressive, they will first be offered a course, but if the behaviour continues, they will be dismissed. If the consequences of certain behaviours are predictable for employees, the measures imposed are more likely to meet with the judge's approval.' ★



IN NIJM



EGEN TOO

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IS THE ORDER OF THE DAY

In the Netherlands, one in ten female students is a victim of rape during her student days. This was the conclusion of last year's survey by Amnesty International. Vox conducted its own survey into the experiences of Radboud students. The results aren't reassuring. Sexual harassment, catcalling, sexist jokes, and rape are a problem in Nijmegen too.

Text: Mathijs Noij and Kathelijne Tijms / **Photos:** Getty Images

JUSTIFICATION

Between 29 June and 5 September 2022, 254 students completed the *Vox* questionnaire. Of the respondents, 35% were Master's students, 2% Pre-Master's students, and 63% Bachelor's students. 12% were international students. 30% of the respondents were male, 67% female, 2% did not identify with either gender, and 1% preferred not to say.

What constitutes sexually transgressive behaviour? The Rutgers Centre on Sexuality speaks of a positive sexual interaction if there is mutual consent, voluntariness, and equality. If one or more of these conditions are not met, this is a sexual transgression.

Vox is aware of the methodological challenges inherent to an open survey. For example, the number of respondents was too small to make well-supported statements about all Radboud University students. Nevertheless, the results do send out important signals concerning the extent of the problem.

The survey was designed by the Rotterdam university weekly publication *Erasmus Magazine*, in collaboration with researchers, diversity officers, and a confidential advisor from Erasmus University Rotterdam.

A large majority of perpetrators are male


In the *Vox* survey 28 students (11%) report having experienced unwanted penetration. 13 students (5%) report experiencing unwanted oral sex. More than half of these cases involved 'proceeding without checking', in other words: the person's bed partner not asking for their consent before proceeding. In other cases, the other person insisted or pestered the victim for sex. In 20 cases, the perpetrator of sexually transgressive behaviour misused the fact that the victim was under the influence of alcohol or drugs. A large majority of the perpetrators was male (27 men versus 4 women). Nearly half of the victims reported experiencing problems afterwards and 4 out of 5 students who had experienced penetration or oral sex without consent reported experiencing psychological problems. In the case of men, this also affected their study results, while women mostly experienced sexual problems. Many students only later became aware of the severity of what had happened. In some cases, this was due to being unwilling or unable to talk about it at first, due to shame or trauma. According to Marijke Naezer, inde-

pendent researcher on gender, diversity, and sexuality, the *Vox* survey results are in line with previous research, such as that of Amnesty International, which shows that 11% of female students experience rape during their time as a student. 'We have a huge problem with consent,' she says. 'I'm afraid that some of the perpetrators aren't even aware they are crossing a boundary.' The fact that most perpetrators are men is a well-known fact, says Naezer, and this is related to gender norms and ideas about masculinity. 'Man the hunter. If a woman says "no", you should insist. That kind of thing.' The results of the survey are a consequence of this kind of culture, according to Naezer.

At the same time, she wants to add a caveat: we are probably missing a lot of the male victims. 'When a man is asked whether he has been the victim of transgressive behaviour, he's more likely to deny it. After all, the stereotype of a man is that he should always be interested in sex, and if not, he has to defend himself. Then if something unpleasant happens to him, we're quick to tell him not to make a fuss.'

'BEFORE I WENT HOME WITH HIM, I SAID MULTIPLE TIMES THAT I DID NOT WANT TO HAVE SEX'

(FROM THE SURVEY)



'WHILE GOING OUT, IT IS
ALMOST EXPECTED TO GET
TOUCHED IN PLACES YOU DON'T
WANT TO BE TOUCHED'

(FROM THE SURVEY)

Victim blaming is part of our culture

Just over half of the survey respondents report experiencing unwanted touching. Just over half of the survey respondents report experiencing unwanted touching. Among women, this percentage is 61%. Very often, these incidents occur while out partying. 'Nearly every time I go out, I'm assaulted,' says a medical student. 'It might sound strange, but I don't see it as something out of the ordinary anymore,' reports a student from the Nijmegen School of Management. According to Naezer, this is something cafés could be a lot more attentive to. 'Bar personnel and bouncers should intervene if they see or hear something. This is most definitely not always the case now.' Another smart measure: don't hide the toilets in a dark cellar, but make sure they are located in a well-lit space, preferably with someone to monitor things. Another phenomenon that women

now have to take into account when going out at night is street harassment, also known as catcalling. These can be sexually coloured remarks, but also sissing or staring. A total of 118 respondents have been exposed to it at some time or another. The consequence is that people no longer feel safe on the street. 'I also find trains quite scary,' reports a female student from the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies. Students seem to already anticipate that they might be the victim of harassment or even assault. This is a well-known phenomenon, confirms Naezer. 'Especially women and other gender minorities anticipate incidents like these in various ways. They walk with a bunch of keys in their hands, which they can use to hit their assailant. Or they pretend to be on the phone. They pull their hood over their long hair, don't accept drinks from strangers, drink less alcohol.'

Women are caught in a balancing act: the norm is to dress in a sexy way, but if you put on a short skirt, it can be used as an excuse for unwanted touching. 'So even if no actual violence takes place, sexually transgressive behaviour impacts the lives of women and other gender minorities,' says Naezer. 'Because you can't be who you want to be. You always have to take "what if" into account.' The painful irony of it, according to Naezer, is that when something does go wrong, it is in our culture to implicitly blame the victim. 'We ask the victim: "What were you wearing? How much did you drink? What should you have done?" Plus, victims who do speak out are by no means always taken seriously. 'It's hard to prove that something like this happened. It's often one person's word against another's, which doesn't get you any further.'

'THE CONFIDENTIAL ADVISOR AND STUDENT PSYCHOLOGIST WERE HELPFUL, YET IT NEVER REALLY CAME TO A RESOLUTION'
(FROM THE SURVEY)

University's responsibility

Although most incidents around sexually transgressive behaviour do not take place on campus – they are far more likely to occur at home or on a night out – many students believe that the University does have a responsibility when it comes to social safety. A majority (59%) of the 254 respondents expect the University to raise awareness around healthy and desirable behaviour when it comes to sex. 39% expect the University to offer consent training programmes (33% is neutral, 27% doesn't expect it). Students who have been the victim of transgressive behaviour can talk about it to a University confidential advisor. It doesn't matter whether the incident takes place on campus or not. The confidential advisor offers a listening ear and advises on potential follow-up steps. And yet, few students make use of this service. 'My situation doesn't have much to do with the University, since it didn't take place on campus,'

a student tells Vox. 'I feel that if I wanted to report it, I'd have to do it by filing a police report,' says another student.

Marijke Naezer understands this, but the universities still have an important role to play in this context. 'First of all, there has to be good support for the victims who do want to report an incident. But the University should also offer training and information. We're all pretending that young people's sexual education stops once they leave secondary school, which is clearly not the case. We have to talk to students about sex.'

A voluntary workshop here and there isn't enough. 'Make consent training programmes part of the curriculum. Make it compulsory. Otherwise, it will only attract the people who already behave.' Another important aspect according to Naezer is what is known as active bystander training. 'Many people have at times witnessed transgressive behaviour, but failed to recognise it as such. Or they

didn't feel responsible, or didn't know how to respond. This is something you have to help people with.' According to Naezer, it doesn't make much sense to talk about the extent of the University's responsibility in this respect in legal terms. 'I'd much rather see universities show proof of vision in this respect. You want students to be safe when they're studying, don't you? That's not going to happen if they experience sexual trauma. And universities are training future professionals; surely, we want these to be people who take responsibility for their own actions?' Finally, universities should respond adequately when a case of transgressive behaviour comes to light. 'I'm not impressed by the thoroughness of universities in cases like these. If victims see that people in high positions are enjoying undue protection, they'll think twice before reporting transgressive behaviour.'



The danger of alcohol

We should talk about... perpetrators. 'How we talk about sexual violence has a strong effect on how we think about it,' says Naezer. 'Perspectives are very important in this context. If we only talk about victims, the perpetrators remain invisible, and we automatically place some of the blame on the victims.' This is why the Vox survey also included questions about whether the respondents ever felt that they had crossed another person's boundary. 62 students answered "yes". And these weren't all men. 25 women also admitted to transgressive behaviour. 'Sometimes I'm drunk and I'm afraid that I may not have noticed that the other person didn't really want to proceed,' says a female medical student. More students doubt the integrity of their actions when they are under the influence of alcohol. One

student from the science faculty reports: 'I was very drunk myself and I didn't remember what happened; it was only later that I heard that I was a bit pushy (sic).' Having too much to drink and not explicitly asking for consent seem to be the main reasons for students to feel that they may have crossed someone's boundaries. 23 respondents reported proceeding with sex without checking that the other person was OK with it. According to Naezer, the advantage is that people are daring to be more vulnerable, look in the mirror, and admit that they have gone too far. 'It's not that you immediately have to be ostracised when you admit to something like this. I, for one thing, think it's very brave. And it's the only way to talk about it to each other, and bring about change.'

'I DIDN'T THINK OF ASKING FOR CONSENT AND ASSUMED THE OTHER PERSON ALSO WANTED SEX'

(FROM THE SURVEY)



Inappropriate behaviour among students

Percentage of respondents having experienced unwanted behaviour
True number between brackets (total: 254)

Unwanted sexual penetration

11% (28)

Unwanted oral sex

5% (13)

Unwanted kissing

13% (33)

Unwanted touching

52% (131)

Someone making unwanted sexually coloured jokes or remarks, or telling sexually coloured stories

31% (80)

Someone making unwanted remarks about my body, appearance, or sexual activities

32% (81)

Someone making unwanted remarks about my sexual orientation

11% (27)

Catcalling

46% (118)

Someone sending me sexually coloured remarks, jokes, or stories

17% (44)

Someone sending me sexually explicit photographs or videos

15% (39)

Someone sending sexually coloured remarks, jokes, or stories about me to other people

5% (12)

Someone sending other people sexually explicit photographs or videos of me

1% (3)



CONFIDENTIAL ADVISOR: WHO AND WHAT FOR?

Radboud University students and employees who are the victim of transgressive behaviour can seek help from a confidential advisor. But what kind of position is it actually? Seven questions and answers.

Text: Mathijs Noij / **Illustration:** Ivana Smudja

What is a confidential advisor?

A confidential advisor is someone that students and employees can contact to share their story, ask questions, and ask for advice, in all confidentiality. Radboud University has a total of twelve confidential advisors, of whom four specifically dedicated for students. 'We're independent and neutral, and we're there to support the person seeking help,' says Heleen Kloosterhuis, who coordinates the confidential advisor team. 'We think along about what is actually happening. Sometimes, the offensive behaviour belongs to a grey zone, and the notifier is unsure whether it is transgressive or not. Other times, the behaviour is highly transgressive. If the notifier wishes to take follow-up steps, we explain to them what the options are, and we help and advise them.'

What kinds of experiences justify contacting a confidential advisor?

Anything to do with bullying, harassment, and discrimination, and obviously also sexually transgressive behaviour. It doesn't matter whether the behaviour takes place on or off campus. Nor does it matter whether the person at whom the complaint is aimed is a fellow student, a lecturer, or someone else. If you're not sure that your experience warrants a talk with a confidential advisor, make an appointment anyway, says Kloosterhuis. 'Don't walk around with something that bothers you. Talking about it really helps.'

What kinds of follow-up step are there?

They can be very diverse. You could, for example, file an official report with

the Executive Board or the Head of a Programme. Another option is to organise an interview with a lecturer who has behaved inappropriately. Ultimately, it is up to the notifier to decide what they want to do. If the behaviour is a punishable offence, the confidential advisor may recommend reporting it to the police. The confidential advisor can help with this process, and even accompany the notifier to the police station, if it helps. It is also possible to file an official complaint with an external, independent complaints committee.

So a confidential advisor never takes steps without the notifier's permission?

In the case of extremely severe offences – criminal offences – a confidential advisor may decide to report the inci-



dent, for example to the Executive Board. Kloosterhuis: 'This is something we only do when faced with a crisis of conscience, for example with severe sexual violence. We don't want the perpetrator to do it again, thereby putting other people in danger.' She emphasises that in cases like these, the University does everything in its power to guarantee the notifier's safety.

How often do students contact a confidential advisor?

In 2021, 52 students requested an interview, which is more than in previous years. In 2020, for example, only 36 students contacted a confidential advisor. Out of a total of 25,000 students, that is not a lot. Students can also, of course, talk to other people about their situation, for example friends, their GP, or their student advisor. Also, many students are not aware of the existence of confidential advisors. Of the 254 students who completed the Vox survey on sexually transgressive behaviour (see p. 12), 47% reported not knowing where they could report this kind of behaviour within the University, 39% knew more or less, and only 14% knew for sure. In addition to how relatively unknown the confidential advisors are, another factor that plays a role is that many students experience a high threshold

in talking to someone about their experience. 'Students are often ashamed of what happened, or they blame themselves,' says Kloosterhuis.

In practice, official complaints concerning undesirable behaviour are filed very rarely at Radboud University? (Only once in the past three years). Why is that?

'Because going through this kind of a procedure can be quite stressful in itself,' says Kloosterhuis. A committee has to conduct an investigation, including interviewing both parties. 'The outcome of this kind of procedure is not known beforehand. A notifier has to be able to provide evidence.' This is why notifiers increasingly opt for resolving the situation in a different way, for example by talking to the persons responsible, together with the confidential advisor. They can always decide to follow it up and start an investigation.

Student life doesn't only take place on campus, but also within student associations. Does the University try to create a safe environment there too?

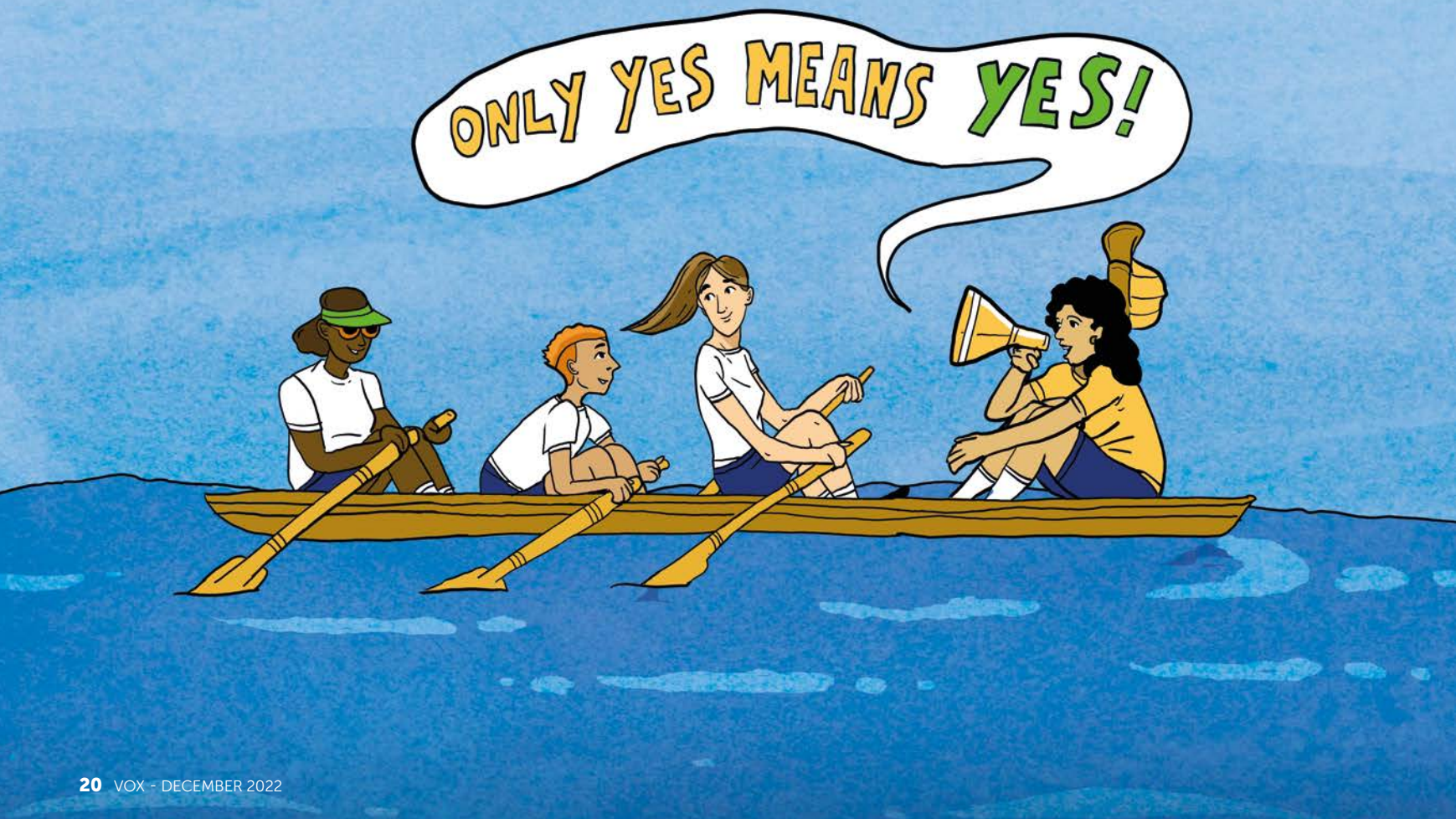
Quite a lot of the interviews that confidential advisors conduct with students focus on behavioural norms at student

associations, says Kloosterhuis. The coordinator observes that associations are increasingly willing to change their approach, but she also sees that there is an older culture of covering up problems.

The University wants to help associations to create a safe culture. In this context, a growing number of associations have appointed a confidential counsellor: a student member who is in direct contact with the University's confidential advisor. 'In this way, we try to infiltrate the capillaries of student life,' says Kloosterhuis. The confidential counsellor follows a short training programme at Radboud University, in which they learn what transgressive behaviour entails, and when they should refer someone to the University confidential advisor. ✱

WOULD YOU LIKE TO TALK TO A CONFIDENTIAL ADVISOR? GO TO WWW.RU.NL/VERTROUWENSPERSONEN FOR MORE INFORMATION.

SEX EDUCATION AT THE ROWING ASSOCIATION



From slut-shaming to sexist speeches – student associations regularly appear in the news due to sexism and transgressive behaviour. Rowing association Phocas and student organisation Gelijkspel tackle the problem at its root.

Text: Anne Polkamp / Illustrations: Ivana Smudja

What do you do when your rowing coach makes flirtatious remarks that make you uncomfortable? Or when you want to kiss your Tinder date, but you're not sure whether the feeling is mutual? These were the kinds of questions put to 250 first-year students during the introductory weekend of the Phocas rowing association. The students were invited to attend a workshop on sexual conduct, a new component of the introduction programme.

'We want students to be clear from the start on how we treat each other at this association,' says Iris van Heerwaarden. As commissioner for internal affairs, she was the one who put the theme on the agenda last academic year. She was inspired by the Rutgers 'Are you OK?' campaign, intended to prevent sexually transgressive behaviour. 'This campaign focuses among other things

on student associations, and one of their tips was: talk to your members. So that's what we did.'

Sexy consent

Over the past academic year, Phocas has devoted more attention to sex education. This was done as part of a wider initiative around social safety, explains Van Heerwaarden. In the first half of 2022, the rowing association highlighted a different social safety theme every month, from exam stress to body image. April's theme, 'spring fever', paved the way for conversations around sexual conduct.

The programme included, among other things, a sexy consent workshop, with a GGD (Municipal Health Centre) nurse offering concrete tools for communicating about sex. How do you actually ask what your partner wants? And how do you set boundaries? These are important topics, says Van Heerwaarden, which are never covered in sex education at school.

Van Heerwaarden took the initiative of contacting the GGD with her idea for the workshop, which ended up attracting approximately 20 students. A successful experiment, she says. 'It was a great collaboration, especially because the workshop took such a positive angle. Instead of focusing on everything that could go wrong, it centred on what positive sexual experiences can look like. This really appealed to the students. Some of the participants said afterwards that they thought this kind of workshop should be compulsory for everyone.'

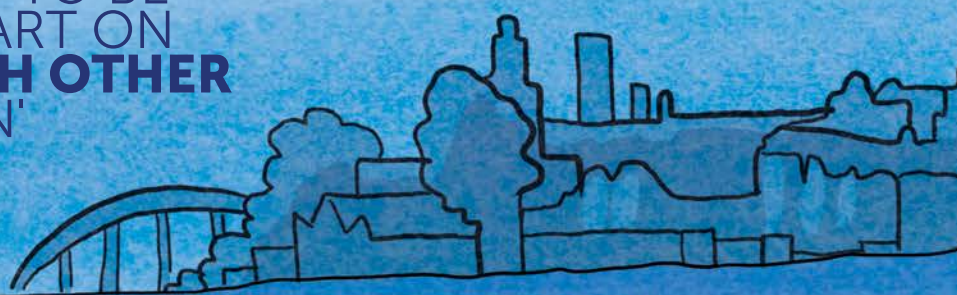
Reason enough to take it one step further during



PHOTO: DIJK VAN AALST

IRIS VAN HEERWAARDEN

'WE WANT STUDENTS TO BE CLEAR FROM THE START ON HOW WE TREAT EACH OTHER AT THIS ASSOCIATION'



GIULIA HIETINK



PHOTO: PUCK REVEN

Orientation Week, thought Van Heerwaarden. She sought the help of Gelijkspel, a student organisation that aims to improve sexual culture among students. To do so, Gelijkspel frequently organises workshops for larger groups of students. According to co-founder Giulia Hietink, this is very much needed, as there is too little dialogue around sexual conduct.

This is a taboo that Gelijkspel hopes to break through with accessible, interactive workshops. Together with organisations like Rutgers and the Centrum Seksueel Geweld (Sexual Assault Center), they developed a programme tailored to student life. Hietink: 'We presented students with case studies they could identify with. This helped bring on a dialogue, for example on how to set boundaries, the pressure of having to have sex with lots of people, or the pressure of not being able to.'

According to Hietink, this dialogue is most effective when the conversation is playful and light, without losing its serious undertone. 'This is why we use metaphors. We talk about the sexual game, the players, and the rules of

the game. And we focus on the positive: what kind of culture do we want to create?' According to Hietink, this light approach makes it easier for students to join in the conversation, and also to take a critical look at themselves.

Safety net

Their approach works. In four years' time, Gelijkspel has grown from an idea casually put forward at a party to a national initiative. To meet the growing demand, the organisation has launched ambassador teams in Utrecht, Amsterdam, Leiden, and Rotterdam. Similar

teams are currently also being put together in four other cities, including Nijmegen. Last summer, the teams offered workshops at more than 25 student organisations and orientation weeks.

Van Heerwaarden is already talking to Gelijkspel about establishing a Nijmegen branch. She hopes that more associations will devote attention to sex education. The first signs are positive: the news of her collaboration with the GGD has spread like wildfire. 'I was approached by rowing associations from around the country, asking me for tips.'

Within Phocas, Van Heerwaarden is already noticing a difference. 'There is less of a taboo around these topics. People are starting to catch on to the fact that they won't be laughed at, and that they can trust each other.' Here and there, some difficult stories have come to light, and more requests have come in for interviews with the Phocas confidential advisor. 'This can be confrontational, but in a way, it's also good that people are daring to come forward and share their stories. It also shows that there's a safety net to catch them.' *

'WE TALK ABOUT THE SEXUAL GAME, THE PLAYERS, AND THE RULES OF THE GAME'



BETTER PROTECTION FOR VICTIMS

THE NEW MORAL LAW

Sexual consent might be high on the agenda of Phocas and Gelijkspel, but it is not yet a priority in moral legislation. From a legal perspective, rape is about coercion, explains Groningen Professor of Criminal Law Kai Lindenberg. According to the law, you can only speak of rape if the perpetrator uses physical violence, threat, or psychological pressure to stop the victim from resisting. Lindenberg: 'If you say no, and the other person proceeds regardless, that doesn't necessarily count as rape under the current legislation.'

In Spain, such rules are now a thing of the past. Last summer, the Spanish parliament ratified a law stating that sex requires explicit consent. This 'Only yes means yes' law ensures that rape is punishable even if the victim doesn't resist. This change could be very significant, especially for victims who freeze, and cannot resist. Incidentally, the 'yes' need not be explicit – according to the law, consent may also consist of actions that clearly indicate what a person wants.

In the Netherlands too, a proposal has been made for a new moral law. However, this is not an 'Only yes means yes' law, says Lindenberg. 'The proposed law doesn't state that you need explicit consent. It's actually the other way around: you're only considered to have crossed a boundary if you knew that the other

person didn't want it, or had serious reasons to suspect this.'

The question is: Doesn't it ultimately boil down to the same thing? If you don't get explicit permission, surely that's enough reason to suspect that the other person doesn't consent? Lindenberg: 'Not necessarily. The assumption in the proposed law is that you have to watch out for signs of unwillingness. It's only when the balance of power is clearly off from the start, for example if there's a significant age difference, that the initiator should

look for signs of consent. In such cases, the proposed law does approximate an "Only yes is yes" system.'

Lindenberg thinks that the new law does provide much better protection for victims.

And yet, he also wonders whether it will in practice lead to many more convictions. 'It's still one person's word against another's. Without additional evidence, it's difficult to prove that there was no consent.' The penalty for rape under the new law is four to twelve years, depending on circumstances.

The new law, which has been years in the making, will enter into force in 2024, at the earliest. Lindenberg understands that. 'It's better to take a bit longer and write a good law, than to rush and put a law out into the world that will lead to confusion for many years to come.'



KAI LINDENBERG




COLUMN

Lucy's law

Lucienne van der Geld is a lecturer of notarial law and director of Netwerk Notarissen.

Unworthy

Figures from the Atria Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History reveal that in the Netherlands, one woman is murdered every eight days. In nearly six out of ten cases, the suspect is a partner or ex-partner, according to Statistics Netherlands (CBS). When men are murdered, the suspects are usually acquaintances or people the victim knew or didn't know from the criminal circuit. So much for the chilling and gruesome data. But read and shudder on. A few years ago, a woman from Beuningen – a 15-minute ride from Nijmegen – was tortured to death by her husband. This case is known as the 'Beuningen torture murder'. If a person is sentenced for murder or manslaughter, one of the consequences is that they cannot inherit from their victim. The law states that in such cases, the perpetrator is considered 'unworthy to gain benefit from an inheritance'. The husband in the Beuningen torture murder case was not imprisoned, but sentenced to compulsory psychiatric treatment (TBS). According to the letter of the law, this means that he is not 'unworthy', as witnessed by the fact that he recently tried to claim his wife's inheritance. General indignation and parliamentary questions ensued. The woman's family have since lodged an appeal to prevent the man laying claim to the inheritance. Public indignation may give the Beuningen woman's family some sense of retribution, but it hardly helps the victim herself. I don't know whether it was possible to prevent her husband from torturing her to death. But perhaps some other man or woman can be saved from the consequences of their partner's violence, if we remember that the greatest danger is sometimes right inside our homes. During the pandemic, the Dutch government launched a campaign entitled 'Attention for each other'. So why don't we make sure that we always pay a bit more attention to each other?



'WHAT MAKES IT HARD IS THAT YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE IDEA THAT YOU COULD HAVE SAID NO'

Sexually transgressive behaviour can take on many different forms. It doesn't always have to be accompanied by violence, and it can seep into a relationship gradually. Vox spoke to three Radboud University students who were victims of abuse. They talk about taboos and physical and psychological consequences that still affect them.

Text: Myrte Nowee and Kathelijne Tijms / **Illustration:** Ivana Smudja



'SHE WOULD
GET REALLY
ANGRY'

JULIE* (24)

Julie was 13 when she first came into contact with Diana, a 21-year-old woman she met online.

Julie was 13 when she first came into contact with Diana, a 21-year-

old woman she met online. She had little contact with children her own age, and something clicked between her and Diana. 'She knew exactly what to say to a 13-year-old. I was "so mature for my age, so clever, and so special." After a while, you start believing it yourself.' Their contact at the time remained online, but it did become more intense, with Diana asking for explicit photographs and videos. 'At some level, I knew that I shouldn't go along with it. You hear about it everywhere, and my parents had often warned me about not sharing anything online. At the same time, I felt strongly that this was different. That it was real love.' After a while, Diana cut off contact. She may have become aware of the trouble she could get into if her contact with the underage Julie came to light. Years went by, until Julie, now aged 21, was once again approached by Diana. 'It was such a strange moment. Because at the time, I had really become attached to her, and I would have like nothing better than to be with her. But at the same time, I was also really angry about what had happened. And I wanted to know whether she still had photographs of me. That was the reason I responded to her contact request. And before I knew it, I got sucked into the relationship again.'

The two started a long-distance relationship, with occasional in-person meetings, but things became increasingly grim. 'She would get really angry, and suddenly decide that she was done with me. I

ended up doing everything I could to avoid this happening, and I became completely isolated. To the point where she was the only person left in my life.' This led to Julie almost automatically doing everything Diana asked. 'For example, she wanted me to keep an open telephone line with her all day, and even at night, so she could hear me. If the line ever dropped, she got angry. When I made plans on my own, she got angry. If she wanted something sexually and didn't get it, she got angry.'

And so it happened that Julie repeatedly had sex with Diana against her will.

'Otherwise, she would become aggressive. Admittedly, this was an easy way for me to stop her from getting angry. Those were the hardest times, when I thought afterwards: I wish I'd said no.'

For a long time, Julie felt that it was all her fault. 'This is the complicated thing in a situation in which you're not being physically abused, but psychologically. The fact that you always have the idea that you could have said no. I could have said no, but at the time, it didn't feel that way.' This is also why Julie is sharing her story now. 'Abuse doesn't mean being dragged into the bushes with a knife at your throat. It can also be someone who makes you feel heard, and then tries to abuse you in this way.'

Julie has been in therapy for a while now, and she is now able to talk about what happened to her. 'For a long time, I felt guilty and dirty. Now I've reached a point where I'm just angry. It's actually very liberating.' And yet, these events will always be part of her life. 'Luckily, thanks to EMDR therapy (Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing, a form of trauma processing therapy, Eds.), I'm much less likely to have a panic attack. I'll always struggle with people being angry at me, but I hope that in future, I'll be able to deal with it better.' *

'IF I FELT PAIN, HE SAID THAT IT WAS NORMAL'

WIES* (22)

Last year, Wies met Stefan* on the dating app Bumble.

The dating went by the book, but gradually, Stefan became more and more dominant. If Wies said she didn't want sex, he convinced her to do

it anyway. 'If I felt pain, he told me that it was normal, and that I should accept the pain, rather than stopping.' Because he was constantly talking to her and convincing her, Wies started to believe that what was happening was normal.

The trauma only became evident later. 'I was diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder, Eds.) and was treated for it using EMDR.' The diagnosis came as a shock. It was a lot to take in. I also had lots of questions. What had happened to me? Why me? Why didn't I notice that Stefan was abusing me?'

These questions were accompanied by feelings of guilt. 'I had the idea that it was all my fault. It's something I've really had to work on with my psychologist. Also, some of the people I knew couldn't understand why I hadn't ended my relationship with Stefan earlier. Why did I stay with him, when he treated me so badly?' She says that breaking off a relationship

can be harder than you think. 'A person can have so much influence on you that you feel that you can't simply leave. Stefan would constantly try to make me dependent on him.' For example, he bought Wies really expensive gifts, that she didn't want, and insisted on them moving in together. 'I really didn't want to. I couldn't reciprocate the gifts at the time, and I was aware of the unequal power balance that this would lead to.' At the time, Wies was not aware that Stefan was crossing her boundaries. 'Some people in my life couldn't understand that, which was really difficult.' With the help of her psychologist, she learned more about it. 'The brain can apparently suppress trauma for a very long time. As a result, you can literally forget what happened.'

She hopes that in future, people will be less quick to judge, especially when victims first share their experiences of sexually transgressive behaviour. 'My advice is: just listen. And if you have questions, check first whether it's OK to talk about it further.'

Her EMDR treatment is completed, but Wies still sees her psychologist on a regular basis. 'After trauma treatment for sexual abuse, you're not suddenly just back to being your old self. I've officially recovered from PTSD, but the memory and concentration problems still really affect me.' ★



'HE GRABBED MY HEAD'

DAVID* (25)

David was abused as a child. Later on, he was in a relationship that involved sexual abuse, and during his time as a student, he has repeatedly been the victim of sexually transgressive behaviour. 'The shitty truth seems to be that this is a recurring theme in my life.'

The last time David was sexually abused was when he went home with a guy after an evening out with the association board. 'He wanted to try all sorts of things, sexually. Apparently, he also felt invited to penetrate me. I was able to stop it, but it took a lot more insistence than I'd expected.'

Not respecting people's personal boundaries is a recurring problem within associations, explains David. 'It's a rather licentious environment. People drink a lot and one-night stands are quite common. I found out that people are quick to conclude that it's OK to cross boundaries that you haven't even had a chance to establish yet.'

Which is what happened on a date with another guy he'd met at the association board. 'It was all fine until he grabbed my head and pushed it down on his penis. He kept on pushing. It happened totally out of the blue, as far as I was concerned. I thought: "No way are we doing this", and I left.'

Although the University has a number of confidential advisors available, David did not contact them. 'At the moment, I've

got enough problems with my studies. Plus, I've spent the last few years in full-time therapy for the abuse I suffered as a child, and I'm still not done with it. It's OK, but it leaves little room for an entirely new emotionally charged process.'

David also found it difficult to talk about these incidents in his association board. 'You're in a group where you all know each other. Talking about experiences like these will trigger a lot of stuff. If you're feeling really strong, this doesn't have to be a bad thing, but I really had other things on my mind.'

David is not planning to pursue this. 'These experiences are a "light" variant of what I experienced in the past. Sexually transgressive behaviour is very common in student circles. I don't feel that I can do anything but accept it.'

Even though David has not sought help on campus, he does think that the University can raise students' awareness of undesirable behaviour. 'Consent is a great concept, but after a few beers, it's no longer in everyone's dictionary. Luckily, not everyone has to go through what I went through. But it's easy to cross another person's boundaries. Be aware of it, and talk about it.' *

* AT THE REQUEST OF THE INTERVIEWEES, ALL THE NAMES IN THIS ARTICLE HAVE BEEN CHANGED. THE REAL NAMES ARE KNOWN TO THE EDITORS.



'SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS A PROBLEM THAT CONCERNS US ALL'

Why is sexual violence so consequential for the victims, even when it's a one-time incident? And why is the environment often so accusatory in its response? Clinical psychologist Iva Bicanic has thirty years of experience with this topic, and she knows that victim blaming can be just as harmful as the abuse itself.

Text: Annemarie Haverkamp / Photography: Centrum Seksueel Geweld

“Why did I go home with that guy? Why didn't I do anything? How could I stand there in the morning and fry him an egg after what he'd done to me?' Iva Bicanic knows the self-reproaches of rape victims by heart. As a psychologist and initiator of Centrum Seksueel Geweld (Sexual Assault Center) (see box), she hears the stories every day in her practice. 'Self-blame, that's where victims often get stuck,' she explains on a video call. 'They're judging their own reaction.'

But this kind of reaction is very logical, she says. Victims of sexual violence (not only women, but also men, and transgender people) understand at such moments that they're in a dangerous or threatening situation. 'They go into survival mode, which may mean that they automatically collaborate, or that they don't defend themselves so it's over quickly or to avoid the assailant becoming aggressive. Afterwards, they're angry at themselves, which isn't justified since no one can know beforehand that a fun date will turn into a rape.'

Disruptive

According to Bicanic, victims of one-time sexual assault take an average of six months to speak up about what happened to them. That is

DEFINITIONS

Rape is sexual penetration without the other person's consent. It can involve penetrating a person's mouth, vagina, or anus with a penis, finger, or object against their will. Rape can also occur within a relationship. In the Netherlands, one in eight women and one in 25 men report having been raped at some point. For men, being forced to penetrate someone else also counts as rape. 'It really happens a lot,' says Iva Bicanic.

Young people aged 12 to 24 are four times more at risk of being raped than other age groups.

Sexual assault refers to touching the outside of another person's body against their will. It refers to being touched against your will in a sexual way, or being forced to touch another person's genitals. Both forms of sexual violence are punishable by law and potentially traumatising.

a long time, and there are a number of reasons for this. First of all, people often wonder whether what happened to them qualifies as rape – they're confused and downplay the event. Usually, a rape does not unfold as in the films, with a lot of pushing around and a hand over the victim's mouth.

Secondly, victims worry about the matter of blame. Then, there is the fear of negative responses from the environment. 'As a society, we still find it difficult to respond to something like this in a calm or reassuring way,' says the psychologist. 'We show great resistance to stories about sexual assault, we don't want to believe it, and we say that people are probably exaggerating. Or we resort to victim blaming, calling the victim naive or stupid. The biggest problem with sexual abuse is actually us as a society.'

This ingrained disbelief contrasts strongly with the facts. 22% of women and 6% of men will at some point in their life experience some form of sexual abuse (source: Rutgers). And of these, half will suffer long-term consequences.

Why is this form of violence so disruptive? Bicanic: 'Because after an incident like this, you lose something essential, namely the trust with which you look at the world. Your sense of safety is impaired, and this changes everything. Even walking on a Monday after-

noon through Albert Heijn can feel unsafe.'

This explains why some victims of bad sexual experiences prefer to stay locked up in their room, says Bicanic. It's the only place where they feel more or less OK. Another thing people do is to try with all their might to forget the incident. They study extra hard, work, or engage in sports, so they don't have to feel anything. But then, they still end up lying in bed at night, fretting about and reliving the whole thing anyway. The trauma is already there then..

Post-traumatic stress disorder

The good news is that you can do something about this kind of trauma. This is precisely what the Sexual Assault Center specialises in. 'We work with an evidence-based intervention to help people process what happened. The result is that victims can look at the traumatic experience from a different perspective, and are less likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.'

Bicanic emphasises that the severity of the sexual abuse does not determine how much someone suffers from it. While one person can be really upset because someone squeezed their butt on the street, someone else is able to put a violent rape aside and move on. It's all about what happens inside a person's head, says Bicanic. 'That's what we look at.'

Half of all abuse victims develop PTSD, a post-traumatic stress disorder. This can be avoided by acting fast. 'The first seven days are crucial; we call this period the golden week. Traces of the suspect can still be found on the body, which is important if someone wants to file a police report. Drugs against STIs or a potential pregnancy can still be issued in time. But also therapists can address the guilt-inducing thoughts in time, for example by explaining that it's normal not to resist if you're being raped; in fact, 80% of victims don't resist.'

Only 15% of victims raise the alarm within 24 hours. Most continue to doubt, or not dare, until finally lack of sleep, diminished concentration, or a short fuse drive them to open up and talk to someone. 'And don't forget it's never too late,' says Bicanic. 'I really hope that people who read this story in Vox and think "This is about me!" will contact us. I can't promise that everything will go back to normal, but I can promise you can still have a great life.'



'EVEN WALKING
ON A MONDAY
AFTERNOON
THROUGH
ALBERT HEIJN
CAN FEEL
UNSAFE'

If you don't want to call, you can also chat anonymously (see box), even in the middle of the night. Do it, do it, do it! repeats Bicanic. 'Also because we know that half of the people who develop PTSD will suffer sexual assault again.'

Abusive behaviour

She is not in favour of perpetrators being automatically ostracised if they overstep the mark once. Imagine that the abuse takes place within a student association, the psychologist finds it more sensible to discuss the behaviour within the group. After all, the odds are high that the members will run into one another anyway, when out partying or in the lecture halls. 'If we keep cancelling people as a society, no one in their right mind will admit to unacceptable behaviour. They'd be crazy to do so - social exclusion is pretty much the worst thing that can happen to a human being. How cool would it be if instead, we could stand around someone as a group, and say: we condemn your abusive behaviour, and we're going to help you. One condition for this is, of course, that the person in question recognises that their behaviour has caused damage and they're willing to work on it.'

It is only by talking to one another that the perpetrator and their environment can learn from each other, thinks Bicanic. 'Otherwise nothing will ever change for anyone. This wouldn't be a problem if sexual violence occurred once every ten years, but it's happening every day. This a problem that concerns us all.' *



SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTER

The Sexual Assault Center is a partnership between hospitals, municipal health centres (GGD), local mental health authorities (GGZ), the police, and Slachtofferhulp Nederland (Victim Support Netherlands), and it operates in sixteen regions, spread across the Netherlands. They offer a telephone hotline (**0800-0188**) that is open day and night. The chat option is available at [centrumseksueelgeweld.nl](https://www.centrumseksueelgeweld.nl). Clinical psychologist Iva Bicanic coordinates the centre and is head of the National Psychotrauma Centre at UMC Utrecht.

POINT TAKEN!

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY STUDENT COUNCIL AND THE WORKS COUNCIL

www.numedezeggenschap.nl



The participational bodies focus on healthy workplaces, diversity, equality and inclusion

Hybrid working has become second nature for many of our staff, but there are also some concerns about the quality of workplaces on campus. Home offices and flexible workplaces are important, but what do we do with individual offices with bookshelves, and how do we make sure that colleagues who need to focus can do so in a quiet place? To get a clearer view of all this, the Works Council has launched a survey to map staff needs.

The University recently published its final **Diversity, Equality and Inclusion** (DGI) plan. We are pleased to hear that the plan is ready for implementation, but we also have some reservations. The participational bodies were only partly heard in the formulation of this plan. We look forward to being more closely involved in the implementation phase, which we believe should trickle down into day-to-day practices of recruitment, promotion, management and rewards. We must avoid at all costs DGI becoming a separate circular policy, far removed from the realities of the workplace.

#youhaveaparttoplay in the participational bodies! Are you a news-reader, a paper-pusher, analytically strong, not afraid of choosing your battles, and good at voicing your opinion? Take a look at the options for joining the participational bodies! We have open vacancies at the central level in the Participation Council as well as at the decentralised level in the Representative Councils, for the September 2023 to August 2025 term. Join an existing party, or find out how to start your own!

Want to know more?

<https://www.ru.nl/en/about-us/organisation/participational-bodies>



AS A MAN, WHY DON'T YOU TAKE AN ALTERNATIVE ROUTE FOR A CHANGE?

Even if a man has no bad intentions, a woman walking in a dark street at night might still perceive him as a threat. Gijs Hablous, PhD candidate at the Political Science department, believes that men should be more aware of this. 'If we can change our behaviour in small ways to create a greater sense of safety in the public space, the burden will be distributed more evenly.' He's decided to take the first step.

Text: Gijs Hablous / Illustration: Ivana Smudja

It was a cold and drizzly night. Sunk deep in the hood of my jacket, with music in my ears, and without paying much attention to my surroundings, I was walking home, at the time still in Nijmegen-West. The station tunnel was part of my usual route when leaving the city via the Bloemerstraat. It was only after walking behind her for a while that I started to notice it. The woman walking a few metres ahead of me kept turning her head. Sometimes, she'd stare at me for a moment. Mostly, it was a quick glance, almost fearful. She saw me as a potential danger.

That moment, a few years ago now, was not the first or the last time that I noticed something like this on a night-time walk. I mostly remember feeling helpless: how can I signal that I'm not a threat to her without coming across as creepy? The world is full of men with and without bad intentions, and there's no stamp on our forehead proclaiming which category we belong to.

Impact

Plus, it isn't about our good intentions. The fact that we are men, and are seen as men, is enough to create the kind of situation I described above. In nine out of ten cases, the perpetrators of sexually transgressive behaviour are men. When it comes specifically to street harassment, the victims are more often women than men (and more

often transgender than cisgender persons). According to a recent study by Statistics Netherlands (CBS), two thirds of young women (12-25 years old) and one third of young men in the Netherlands experienced some form of street harassment in 2020 or 2021. Remarkably, Statistics Netherlands did not ask respondents about the sex or gender of the perpetrators.

The survey did show that not only the frequency, but also the impact of street harassment varies, depending on whether the victims are male or female. More than one third of young women occasionally feel unsafe because of street harassment, as opposed to 5% of the young men. No wonder women are keeping their guard up.

When I ask my female friends whether they do, or refrain from doing, certain things to increase their safety, most answer affirmatively. One friend usually takes a round-about route to go home at night, for example to avoid the Goffertpark. The more people and light, the better, she says. Another friend doesn't like walking through the station tunnel, despite the bright lights. A past experience with physical violence in the tunnel has made her fearful of walking through it.

Keychain

Almost every woman I speak to turns out to have developed all kinds of tricks: making a real or fake phone call,

'WHAT I REALLY WANT IS FOR THEM NOT TO BE AFRAID OF MY PRESENCE ON THE STREET'

walking faster, putting on headphones and avoiding eye contact. A few even prepare for a potential physical confrontation: clutching their fists around their keychain with the keys sticking out between their fingers to defend themselves against a potential attacker. This is probably no news to many women. To some men, it might be quite enlightening.

This was indeed the case for a male friend of mine who I spoke to as I prepared this article. I asked him what he does when a woman on the street perceives him as a potential threat. He told me he had asked his female friends about this after his sister had told him about two of her recent experiences with street harassment.

The conversations with his friends opened his eyes to 'what girls and women have to put up with', and the adaptive behaviour that many of them have almost automatically developed in response. His practical answer to

my question was: 'As a man, just cross the street and make sure a woman can see you'. Sometimes it's as simple as that.

And as necessary. There's a clear unbalance, there's no harm in men also making some adjustments. If we can change our behaviour in small ways to contribute to a greater sense of safety in the public space, the burden will be distributed more evenly. Looking at it from this perspective, I like what another friend of mine wrote: 'I try to create safety (...) by keeping a distance or taking an alternative route.' Just to be on the safe side he sometimes takes a detour just so a woman doesn't get the feeling that he might be following her.

Another friend shares that he sometimes calls someone up on purpose and has a friendly chat, just to make it clear to a woman walking on the street that his attention is not focused on her. And here's a tip from a female friend: 'Talking about stranger danger: as a man on your own, just don't strike up conversations with women walking alone at night.' Don't even ask for a cigarette or for directions under those circumstances.

Raising awareness

I'm positively surprised by the awareness shown by my male friends when it comes to understanding their position. Although one of the men I spoke to correctly pointed out that my sample is hardly representative of society as a whole, my friends' responses still leave me feeling hopeful. If having these conversations in a small circle is helpful here, it might just work elsewhere too. The friend who became more aware of his role after hearing about his sister's experience has since also shared the stories of his female friends with other men, 'without revealing personal details, of course.'

Despite this kind of awareness raising, situations in which a woman perceives a man as a threat will continue to arise. How does this make men feel? When asked about it, my friends say that what matters is not their feelings, but the woman's experience. 'It's not so much that I want to be seen as "a good guy",' says one of them. 'What I really want is for them not having to be afraid of my presence on the street.' By saying this, he is already contributing to turning his wish into reality. *

Gijs Hablous is conducting PhD research on intersex norms at the Political Science Department.

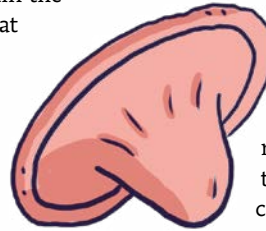
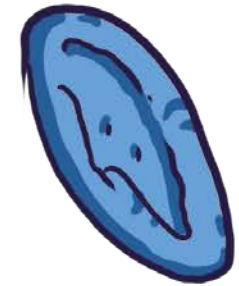
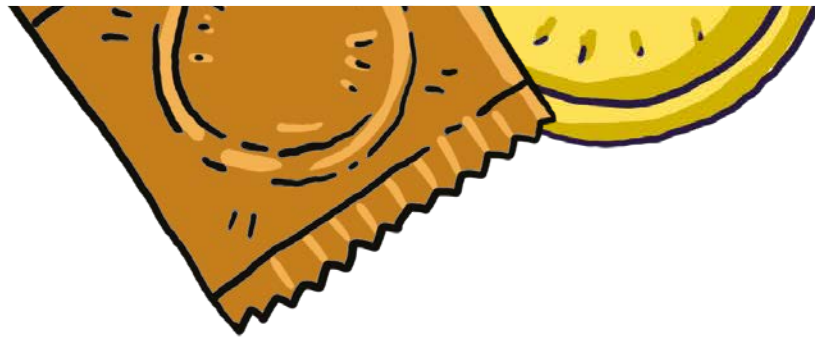
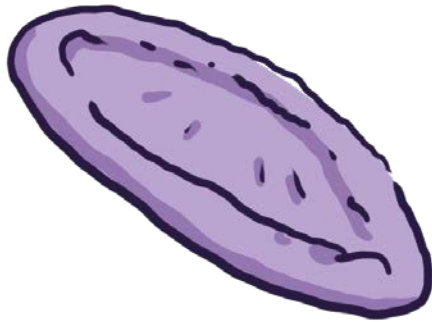


SEX WITHOUT A CONDOM?

IT'S FINE, BUT ONLY IF BOTH PARTIES AGREE

For many students, sex without a condom is quite normal. In some circles, the use of the rubber contraceptive is more the exception than the rule. Students don't mind, as long as there's clear agreement about it.

Text: Arend Beelen and Vincent Decates / **Illustration:** Ivana Smudja



'Did you get laid last night?' asks 20-year-old Sander* of his roommate Martin* (22). A grin spreads across Martin's face. 'With or without a condom?' The answer turns out to be 'without'. 'Well done, mate!' exclaims Sander, and the two triumphantly bump fists

The two students with whom Vox reporters are talking find it normal to talk about each other's nightly escapades. Sex without a condom turns out to be nothing special. But, the students emphasise, only if both parties have agreed to it.

One-night stand

It seems unwise, but in various student circles, sex without a condom seems to be no big deal. This is confirmed by GGD (Municipal Health Centre) figures. The latest edition of the 'Sex before you're 25' survey took place in 2017 (held every 5 years by the GGD, in collaboration with Rutgers and Soa Aids Nederland). Only 29% of male and 19% of female respondents reported always using a condom with their latest sex partner. In the same survey, over 40% of young people whose last sex partner was a one-night stand reported not using a condom.

Colette van Bokhoven, sexual health physician at GGD Gelderland-Zuid, qualifies these figures, adding that 'condom-less sex is of all times,' and that 'this isn't limited to student circles.' She also says that it's hard to tell whether this is a growing trend. A new study on the topic is currently underway.

Vox spoke about it off the record with a number of students. They confirm that sex without a condom is seen as normal. The majority of students did not wish to be interviewed. Two male and two female students were prepared to share their story in public. But only using a pseudonym, since it's still hard to talk openly about sex.

Chlamydia

'Sex without a condom is just nicer,' says Martin, as Sander nods in agreement. 'It's a more intense feeling because there's nothing in the way. I find standard condoms not very comfortable anyway. Plus putting it on can be a real mood killer in the moment.'

The two female students both agree, independently from one another, that putting on a condom can ruin the mood. 'But the argument that it feels nicer without it doesn't apply to me,' says 22-year-old Rosalie*. 'I don't notice any difference.'

'I OFTEN ASK MY MALE PARTNER BEFORE WE HAVE SEX WHETHER HE'S SAFE'

Sander and Martin, both members of a Nijmegen fraternity, say that unprotected sex is the most normal thing in the world among fraternity members. Martin: 'In our social circles, I know enough people who are more likely to have sex without than with a condom. Once in a while, you hear stories about people who have contracted chlamydia or something. It's not unusual.' This is confirmed in off-the-record talks with other fraternity members, both male and female.

In addition, all four students mention alcohol as a factor in not being particularly inclined to use a condom. 'When I'm drunk,

to be honest, I don't even think about it,' confesses Sander.

Pregnancies

And yet sex without a condom is not the norm in all student groups. Rosalie: 'Lots of my girlfriends are actually highly critical when I tell them that I've had unprotected sex. They warn me of the dangers. I have to say that as a result, I've recently become more cautious, and I've started using condoms more.'


In the 'Sex before you're 25' survey, unprotected sex in the context of a one-night stand is seen as problematic, due to the risk of contracting an STI. GGD physician Van Bokhoven: 'Condoms protect against STIs and pregnancy. Plus, condoms are the only way men can make sure a woman doesn't get pregnant.'

Fear of pregnancy is in any case not a factor for the two female students we interviewed. 'I use other contraceptives. So I've taken care of that aspect,' says Anna* (24). The same applies to Rosalie. Sander and Martin say that they ask beforehand whether their partner is using another form of contraception – and trust her answer.

But what about the fear of STIs? 'I often ask my male partner before we have sex whether he's safe,' says Anna. 'If he says "yes", I trust that. It's not that I need to see a negative test on the spot. Plus, the threshold for going to the GGD for an STI test is low: they're really accessible. And if you don't want to go to the GGD, you can always order a test online. You'll get it in the post the next morning.'

'I've contracted chlamydia a few times,' says Martin. 'I just had to take some antibiotics for it. Two pills, and a week later, it was all gone [the antibiotics treatment for women usually takes longer, Eds.]'

More serious conditions, such as herpes or



HIV, are not really on the students' radar. 'Sure, you can catch diseases like these, but the odds are really low,' says Anna. The men think the same. Sander, with a wink: 'I'm not really worried about it. If I see a mushroom growing on the end of my penis – that's when I'll start worrying.'

Consent

But, Van Bokhoven warns: 'Some STIs are becoming harder to treat, because they're becoming resistant to antibiotics. Right now, we can still treat all STIs, but that could change in the near future. That's why the GGD isn't only focusing on curing, but mostly on preventing sexually transmitted infections.'

The physician agrees that what matters in sex is that partners talk to each other about whether they're using any other form of contraception. 'If someone wants to use condoms, that's OK, without the other person trying to convince them otherwise. It's important that anyone who wants to have sex can do so on their own terms. Consent is the main thing here.'

For students too, consent plays an important role. 'If a woman says she'd prefer to use a condom, I'll put one on - no problem,' says Martin firmly. Sander adds: 'I'm obviously not going to insist on having unprotected sex if a woman feels uncomfortable about it. Wearing a condom isn't such a big deal.'

And rightly so, says Rosalie. 'I've noticed that it's actually much nicer to agree on the use of a condom beforehand. And when a guy is understanding about it, it only makes him more attractive to me. So it's a win-win.' *

** For privacy reasons, the students' names in this article were changed. The real names are known to the editors.*

**'I'M OBVIOUSLY
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SEX IF A WOMAN
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MANY CATCALLERS BELIEVE THEY'RE PAYING WOMEN A COMPLIMENT

Whistling as a woman walks past, or calling her a 'hot babe'. It is usually men who engage in this kind of behaviour. But why do they do it? To show off their virility, for example. Or because they think they're flirting, in which case, they don't even mean for it to be offensive.

Text: Johannes Fiebig en Alex van der Hulst / **Photos:** Johannes Fiebig

What behaviour do you find most offensive in men? Catcalling, answered four out of five students writing their Bachelor's thesis with Max Primbs (PhD candidate in Social and Cultural Psychology). This led them to the idea of conducting a study on this phenomenon. Their remarkable conclusion: half of the Nijmegen men who engage in catcalling believe they are paying women a compliment. 'A loud whistle or a comment of a sexual nature made by a man to a passing woman,' that is the Oxford Dictionary definition of a catcall. The term originally referred to expressing dissatisfaction with a theatre performance by whistling or shouting at the actors on stage.

'But there are as many definitions of catcalling as articles written about it,' says social psychologist Primbs. 'One thing all the definitions have in common, though, is that this is unwelcome behaviour.'

Catcalling is usually something men do to women, says Primbs. The other way around happens only very rarely. It is something that most women will experience at some point, especially younger women and teenagers.

Aggression

Students Johanna Kube, Renée Derix, Céline Epars, Hanna Schuller, and Fenne van Geene chose to devote their thesis research to examining the causes, consequences and background of catcalling. They also looked at ways to reduce catcalling, since this kind of shouting and whistling is anything but innocent. Primbs mentions research showing that women who are the victim of catcalling experience negative consequences and physical symptoms such as nausea or increased muscle tension.

'As a victim, you feel powerless, because if you say anything about it, you risk triggering further aggression. Catcalling can lead to self-objectification, and even a negative self-image. Victims tend to feel less safe, and report a higher general anxiety level. Women also tend to avoid places where street harassment is known to happen.'

Nijmegen students Yana van de Sande and Judith Holzmann have launched Catcalls of Nimma to raise awareness of street harassment. 'It's about women being sexualised and objectified, but also members of the queer community being insulted on the street,' says Holzmann, who has by now graduated. By, for example, chalking some of the catcall texts on the street, Catcalls of Nima wants to literally and metaphorically bring people's attention to street harassment. Holzmann: 'While we were chalking, we ended up talking to a man who genuinely thought he was paying women a compliment; he didn't realise what it was like for the women.'

Virility

It's true that most catcallers don't feel guilty, as the researchers concluded on the basis of a public survey. Approximately half of the men who engage in catcalling have no intention of leaving a negative impression. Of the surveyed men who admitted to catcalling, 30% said they thought they were flirting, and 20% thought they were paying women a compliment. Primbs: 'These men may not mean to offend, but their behaviour still has negative consequences. The other half of the men did it for different reasons, for example as a display of power, or to show off their virility to their friends.'

Other well-intentioned initiatives are campaigns against catcalling, says Primbs. He's referring to an add by L'Oréal, entitled 'Stand Up Against Street Harassment'. At first sight, the add looks like a great instructive video, but things go wrong in the voice-over: '78% of women have experienced sexual harassment in public.' Psychologists know that this sends catcallers and potential catcallers the implicit message that what they do is the norm. Primbs: 'This tends to have a counterproductive effect.'

Education can help victims to understand that it's not their fault, says Yana van de Sande, of Catcalls of Nimma. 'And it's important that bystanders intervene in a friendly way.' Holzmann: 'If that's not possible, you could at least speak to the victim and ask her if she's ok. It's all about recognising that what just happened isn't normal. We're responsible for each other's safety on the street.'

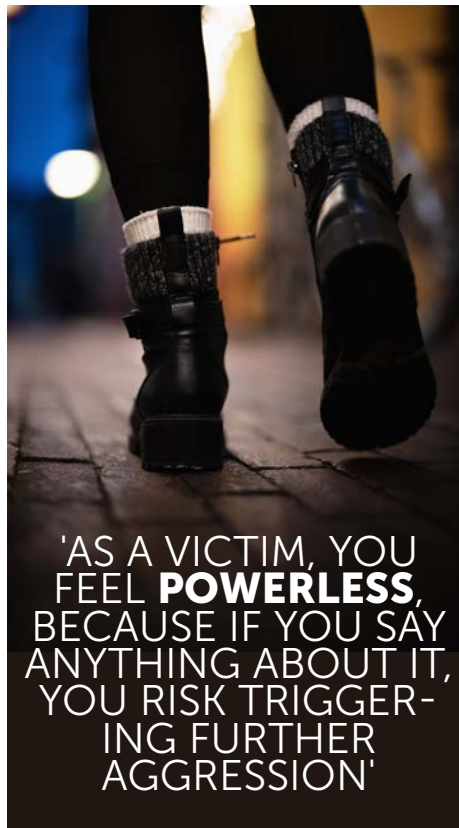
Group pressure

The survey they conducted brought Primbs and his students face to face with a difficult paradox. 'Most men distance themselves from catcalling, yet most women report experiencing it. There are two potential explanations for this: either there is a very small group of active catcallers, or there is a difference between the men's socially acceptable answers and their actual behaviour. Probably, it's a mixture of both.'

The researchers suspect that catcalling is related to age and education level, but also and foremost group pressure. Primbs: 'Even if you're highly educated and you understand that it's wrong to shout after people on the street, you may still succumb to group pressure.'

The 50% of catcallers who have no bad intentions are susceptible to interventions aimed at changing their behaviour. In other words: progress is possible. One option is for the police to issue fines. In Rotterdam and Arnhem, street harassment is already a punishable offence. Primbs: 'Men who want to demonstrate their power won't stop catcalling just because it's made illegal, but men who do it due to lack of knowledge can be swayed by such measures.' Catcalls of Nimma also sees the potential benefit of making catcalling punishable.

Van de Sande: 'I know that it's hard to enforce, but it still sends out a signal that this is socially unacceptable behaviour. Ultimately, street harassment is a problem for everyone. Through education aimed at young people, but also for example in workplaces, we can open the dialogue on where the boundaries lie, and teach people that compliments are welcome, but that it all depends on what you say and in what context.' *



#METOO

MADE SEXUAL HARASSMENT INTO OUR SHARED PROBLEM

Five years ago, the hashtag #MeToo went viral. Millions of people shared on social media their story of sexual harassment, assault, and rape. What has changed since? And what still has to change? 'Historically, we crossed a threshold, but it's still a very young movement.'

Text: Anne Polkamp



Time magazine named *The Silence Breakers*, people who stood up against sexual harassment, as *Person of the Year* in 2017. Among them was Tarana Burke, founder of the #MeToo movement

On 5 October 2017, *The New York Times* published the news that film producer Harvey Weinstein had for years been guilty of sexual abuse.

Actresses Rose McGowan and Ashley Judd were two of the first to speak out, later joined by dozens of women. That same month, the hashtag #MeToo went viral. Inspired by a tweet by actress Alyssa Milano, millions of people shared their story of sexual violence online.

In de nasleep van het nieuws over Weinstein komt het ene na het andere verhaal over seksueel misbruik aan het licht. De #MeToo-beweging dwingt mensen wereldwijd om het gesprek aan te gaan over grensoverschrijdend gedrag. Vijf jaar later rijst de vraag: waar staan we nu? Wat heeft de beweging precies opgeleverd en welke problemen staan nog altijd in de weg?

Historical turnaround

'The #MeToo movement was a historical turnaround, no more and no less than that,' says Renée Römken, Emeritus Professor of Gender

Based Violence at the University of Amsterdam, and former director of the Atria Institute on Gender Equality and Women's History. 'This movement revealed for the first time the extent of the problem. It instantaneously dispelled the myth that sexual harassment was a private issue. Instead, it revealed it incredibly clearly as the societal problem that it is.'

For women, the impact was huge, says Römken. While sexually transgressive behaviour had for a long time remained under the radar, the #MeToo movement cleared the way for openly talking about it. 'Conversations about this kind of misconduct had for a long time been marginalised. Now the social media offered a huge podium for talking about things

'FOR THE FIRST TIME, POWERFUL MEN HAD TO PAY THE PRICE'



Actress Rose McGowan faces the press as former producer Harvey Weinstein arrives at court in Manhattan in January 2020. McGowan was one of the first to speak out against sexual abuse in Hollywood. Weinstein was found guilty of sexual assault and rape and was sentenced to 23 years in prison.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES / PABLO MONSALVE

that used to be swept under the carpet.'

In academia too, the #MeToo movement has had an important impact, says Nijmegen Professor of Organizational Behaviour Yvonne Benschop. Over the past years, abuses have come to light at universities across the Netherlands. Benschop believes that this is precisely the result of the #MeToo movement. 'It was no longer acceptable that misconduct could occur and go unpunished.'

For some men, this had serious consequences: they were charged, sentenced, or fired. Römken: 'For the first time, powerful men had to pay the price, whereas in the past, they were always able to use their position of power to intimidate others and get away with it. Think of rapper Ali B, who was accused of rape by a candidate from *The Voice*. According to the victim, he explicitly said that he wasn't scared, because even if she were to speak up, no one would believe her.'

Paradox

And yet, there's still a lot of work to be done, says Römken. Already in 2008, in her inaugu-

MAIN ACTORS IN THE #METOO MOVEMENT:

Tarana Burke

You're not alone. That's the message of the American civil rights activist Tarana Burke, founder of the #MeToo movement. Burke has fought for victims of sexual violence for nearly three decades, and she's known for her tireless activism on behalf of black girls and women

Hollywood Silence Breakers

Dozens of Hollywood women, including Lupita Nyong'o, Gwyneth Paltrow and Angelina Jolie, spoke up about the decades-long misconduct of film producer Harvey Weinstein. *Time* magazine has referred to them as *The Silence Breakers*. In 2017, the magazine named the actresses, Tarana Burke, and other silence breakers *Person of the Year*.

Anke Laterveer

Two years before Alyssa Milano first tweeted about #MeToo, another hashtag went viral in the Netherlands: #ZegHet. The initiative came from author Anke Laterveer, who filed an official sexual assault complaint, only to be told by the police that they could do nothing about it. Out of frustration, she called on others to share their story, a call that received a huge response.



FOTO: ANP/MARTEN BRANTE

Writer Anke Laterveer, initiator of the #zeghet (#sayit) campaign, during an Amsterdam protest in January 2016. It was triggered by the assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015.

YVONNE BENSCHOP



**'RESISTANCE
CAN BE HIGHLY
PRODUCTIVE'**

ral lecture at Tilburg University, she highlighted a number of persistent problems in the debate around sexual violence against women.

And some of these problems, she says, have only increased since then.

Cultural prejudices are one example. In her inaugural lecture, Römken pointed out that sexual violence against women in the private sphere is often portrayed as a problem of the 'cultural other' – specifically Dutch people of Moroccan or Turkish origin.

'These prejudices have only intensified over the past years,' she says now. 'This is in line with a political shift towards the right. Parties like PVV and Forum voor Democratie try to cash in on problematising migration. But sexual violence occurs in all cultures, and it's just as much a problem among white Dutch people.'

The misconception that sexual violence is something that mostly takes place elsewhere is also apparent, says Römken, in the focus on the misconduct of celebrities. 'Take the trans-

gressive behaviour at *The Voice*. As soon as something like that hits the news, everyone pounces on it.' The danger, according to Römken, is that we're using celebrities as lightning rods to deflect attention from the bigger issue. 'The focus on celebrities creates the impression that these are incidents, exceptions. And these incidents seem very far away.'

Competitive culture

According to the professor, people's shocked responses to this kind of news are highly revealing. 'People keep emphasising that they didn't know anything about it, and that they can't believe that such a scandal could take place.' This reaction shows that we're still in denial about the extent of the problem, says Römken. 'There's a social tendency to set aside misconduct as something that happens far away. We don't want to admit that it's a structural problem, and we don't want to see how close it is – that your neighbour, your husband, or your father could also engage in transgressive behaviour.'

Yvonne Benschop sees a similar tendency in the dialogue around transgressive behaviour at universities. 'The media often report on the misconduct of Professor X or Y, and this one case is then examined from all sides. That's great, but it offers only a limited perspective on the underlying mechanisms and patterns that make this behaviour possible in the first place. It suggests that these are just a few rotten apples, rather than an entire system that facilitates misconduct.'

One element of this system is the hierarchical competitive culture so typical of academia, says Benschop. 'In this kind of strong hierarchy, inequality is as it were ingrained. This makes it possible for a person to take on a position in which his word is much less likely to be refuted.'

This kind of power inequality is one of the driving forces behind sexual harassment against women in science, as apparent from a 2019 study conducted by Benschop in collaboration with Radboud University researchers Marijke Naezer and Marieke van den Brink. Young researchers depend on their PhD supervisors, while the latter enjoy the protection of the academic hierarchy. In addition, gender inequality works to men's advantage – think of how overrepresented men are among professors, stereotypes about women, and the power of the old boys' network. All kinds of factors, say the researchers, that trivialise, normalise, condone, and even encourage sexually transgressive behaviour towards women.

The sad conclusion, says Benschop, is that five years of #MeToo has not produced sufficient changes to this system. And attempts at changing it continue to encounter resistance. 'It's amazing how many people still respond with: "Well, I guess you can't say anything anymore!"' Benschop says that remarks like these show that people don't really understand where the boundaries of professional conduct lie, and that they may in the past have crossed these boundaries themselves. 'If you're suddenly feeling very awkward, and no longer know what's allowed and what's not, it's really time to ask yourself some hard questions.'

This resistance is not surprising, says Benschop. 'When you start calling norms into question, you're undermining power processes. And there will always be people who benefit from the status quo. They owe their position to it. These people aren't used to having their



RENÉE RÖMKENS

EXCLUSION WITHIN #METOO

The #MeToo movement did not devote equal attention to all victims, says Emeritus Professor Renée Römkens. This is apparent, among other things, from the history of the movement, launched in 2006 by American civil rights activist Tarana Burke. Römkens: 'It took the movement a long time to really gain momentum. It wasn't until 2017, when it touched the lives of white celebrities, that everyone suddenly sat up and paid attention.'

Since then, says Römkens, a debate has erupted concerning the marginalisation of women of colour within the #MeToo movement. 'There was loud criticism of this exclusion, especially in the US, and this triggered a social debate.' Tarana Burke herself launched a campaign in 2021, together with three feminist organisations, to ensure that the stories of black women are heard loud and clear.

'PEOPLE KEEP EMPHASISING THAT THEY DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT IT'

power curbed, and they're not likely to give in easily.'

Long-term commitment

And yet, these are also positive signs, says Benschop, because it is precisely this resistance that can help the #MeToo movement move forward. 'Previously, sexual harassment and gender inequality often remained underground, because certain norms of conduct were self-evident and unquestioned. By questioning these norms of conduct, we're putting them in the spotlight. This is bound to lead to resistance, but it also shows straight away where the problem lies. In this way, it becomes clear which behaviour is controversial, and we can talk about it. This kind of resistance can be highly productive.'

Looking to the future, Benschop is not entirely optimistic. 'We're making progress. But to say that the work is done?'

When drawing a parallel with other feminist movements, she can feel a bit demoralised. 'We've had an Equal Pay Act since 1975, but it's still not enforced – and we still have a major pay gap.' The most important thing about the #MeToo movement, she concludes, is that it calls for long-term commitment.

Römkens also sees progress and opportunities for improvement. 'Historically, we crossed a threshold, but of course it's still a very young movement. We still haven't recovered from our shock at the situation. In that sense, as a researcher working in this field, I feel part of a historical process.'

Incidentally, if it were up to Römkens there's one demographic whose voice could be heard more loudly throughout this process. 'I often find myself wondering: where are the Dutch men protesting against violence? As a researcher, I find this a fascinating question. Most men definitely don't want to be associated with the image of a perpetrator of violence. So why aren't they out on the streets protesting?' *

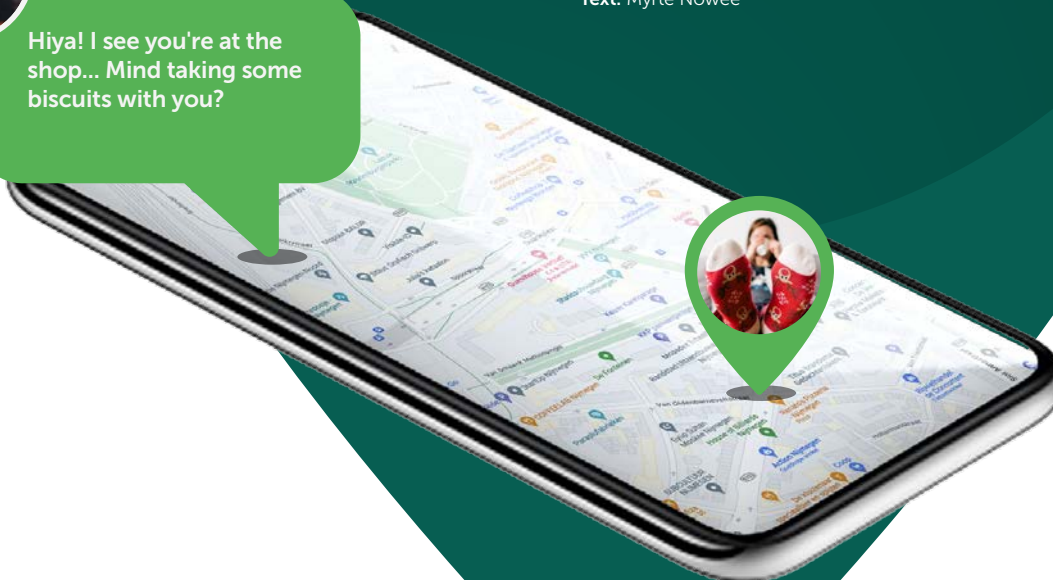
SHARING YOUR LOCATION WITH YOUR ROOMMATES EVERY MINUTE OF THE DAY

Whether she's out partying or shopping, or spending the night at her boyfriend's house, Anne's roommates know where she is 24/7. And she in turn can track her roommates' movements, because the four students are constantly sharing their location with each other. 'When they're on a date, I follow them live to check that everything's going well, and that they're not suddenly relocating to a strange place.'

Text: Myrte Nowee



Hiya! I see you're at the shop... Mind taking some biscuits with you?



The incentive for it was quite unpleasant: one night, two of Anne's* four roommates went out to party and lost track of each other. Roommate 1 thought: 'She's probably already gone home!' which wasn't the case. Roommate 2 turned out to have gone to spend the night elsewhere. After this incident, the four women installed an app that allows them to track each other's movements at all times. Anne shares what it's like to be followed 24/7.

Constantly sharing your location: many people would experience it as a serious violation of their privacy. Doesn't it bother you?

'It's true that I had to get used to it at first. The thought that someone always knows where you are, that was hard. In the end I decided to give it a try. If it didn't feel right, I could always delete the app.

But it didn't have such a drastic impact at all. We already always knew where the other ones were, because we tell each other everything. If I'm in Nijmegen with friends, or in my hometown with my parents, my roommates know about it anyway. In that sense, it doesn't really feel like a violation of my privacy.'

When do you use the app?

'I mostly use it when my roommates are out on a date. You hear such horrible stories about dates going wrong. So I follow along live to check that everything's ok, and that they don't suddenly relocate to a strange place. At times like this, I find it reassuring to be able to follow each other. If something happens, I'll know straight away.'

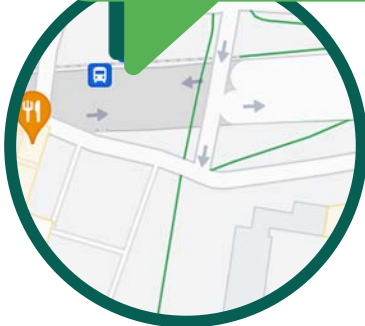
What do you do if you see something strange?

'One of our roommates is abroad at the moment, and we even keep track of her there. The other day, we noticed that she hadn't been online for more than 24 hours. We looked at the app, and we saw that the last time she'd checked in was on an isolated car park. So I made some phone calls to find out whether anyone knew where she was and why she wasn't online. Luckily, there was nothing wrong. She was in the countryside and had no signal.'



You're on the bus, right?
Taking a while...

Yeah, almost there.... Got delayed. Had to wait for an hour.



But I still felt unsafe, so I called my boyfriend. At times like this, I don't think "My roommates can follow my location". Now I think: if something had happened, they would have seen where I was last. That does offer a bit of extra safety.'

Would you recommend it to other people?

'I wouldn't use this kind of app with my friends, because we don't live in the same house, and they don't usually know where I am. If I tell my roommates that I'm going to the campus, and they see that I'm suddenly in the middle of nowhere, they'll think it strange, and they'll message me to ask whether everything is all right.

It's useful for specific times with my friends, though. For example, the other day I was at a festival, and I shared my location not only with the friends I was with, but also with the boyfriend of one of them. That way, if one of us was to suddenly disappear from the festival grounds, it wouldn't be just us who could see that something wasn't right, but he could see it too.

If you want to share your location 24/7, you should do it with the people you live with or with people who always know where you are anyway. That creates a sense of safety. Otherwise, it's just for fun. *

**To respect her roommates' privacy, Anne's name has been changed. .*

It sounds like it's keeping you busy.

'It's not that bad. And there are nicer stories, too. If I see that one of us is at the supermarket, I ask whether she can grab some biscuits. One roommate has even set the app so that she gets notified anytime one of us is anywhere near the Jumbo, so she can ask us if she needs anything.

We also use the app when we meet for lunch at the University. You can see where the other person is walking, and you can go and stand in a convenient spot, so they'll see you. If we haven't seen someone emerge from their room all day, we check that we're all really home. And when we eat together, we can see when the other ones start cycling home. For us, it's become very normal. We're not consciously using it all the time - we mostly use the app for practical things.'

Do you feel safer knowing that your roommates can always see where you are?

'We've done it for nearly a year now, so I'm not so aware of it anymore. Maybe it would help if I ever end up in an unsafe situation, knowing that my roommates could see where I am. Luckily, that's never happened yet. Actually, if I feel unsafe, I usually call my boyfriend. Last week, for example, I was cycling home, and it was quite dark. When that's the case, I usually choose a better lit route.



Wanna grab a coffee?

On my way!





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POEM

BANG IN HET DONKER

Je vertelde mij laatst dat je bang bent in het donker,
voor het rommelen in jouw kast en voor de monsters.
Ik vertelde je dat monsters natuurlijk niet bestaan
en dat niets werkelijk verandert in het donker.

Dat ik tegen een kind, zo onschuldig nog, moest liegen
maakt dat het nooit pijnlijker geweest is dan thans
om je te schamen voor de daden van een ander.
Want het ritselt in de bosjes en de struiken,

er leven monsters achter deuren, achter luiken.
Die wachten op hun kans om je te pakken,
die je je leven lang naar liefde laten snakken,
door je zomaar zonder omhaal te gebruiken.

Haal je dekentje maar knus tot net onder je kin
en grijp je pluche schaapje nog even stevig vast.
Nu ben je nog veilig en weer ik de kwade geesten,
maar overmorgen ben je ouder en zie je mij als last.

Dus ga maar lekker slapen mijn lieve kleine schat,
vergeet de monsters en het gerommel door te dromen
over ijsco-etende teddybeertjes of een ezeltje in bad.
Dan ben ik alvast bevreesd voor wat jou kan overkomen.

DERK WIJKAMP IS THIS YEAR'S CAMPUS POET. SHE WRITES A POEM FOR EACH EDITION OF VOX.

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COLOPHON

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