

Onderstaand de tekst van de lezing die ik heb gehouden op 19 november 2005 bij het C.O.C. in Amsterdam met als onderwerp:

`Development of T community in NL and function of Peer counselling in this`

Dit was voor een groep jonge Oost-Europeanen uit verschillende steden en regio's.

Zij zijn daar zelf actief met het opzetten van zelfhulpgroepen, in een voor onze begrippen, totaal andere wereld. Daar waar ik het had over `lastigvallen` of de verschillen en soms rivaliteit tussen Amsterdammers en Rotterdammers, moesten twee 20 jarige studentes meewarig lachen om mijn naiviteit. Bij hen is sprake van puur geweld met soms moord en doodslag, en dat alleen al omdat je uit een andere stad komt. Of iemand die zich op straat niet goed voelde worden en door een ander werd ondersteund en thuisgebracht, daardoor werden zij aangezien voor homo's en het ziekenhuis in geslagen.

Een poging tot het starten van een Gay Pride werd letterlijk in de pan gehakt. Succes met je coming out!

Waar hebben wij het hier dan nog over?

Groeten,

Chris.

`Development of T community in NL and function of Peer counselling in this`

Answering the following questions:

- From what specific angle do you offer counseling in your organization (e.g. target group or interest group)?
- What is the special need of this group?
- What are successes and failures?
- What approach(es) do you have to counseling?
- How do you (practically) organize the counseling?
- What are points of attention (do's and don'ts)?

AmsT&Terdam, 19 november 2005

Ladies, Gentlemen and other people.

Talking about `T&T` which stands for `Transvestism` and `Transsexuality`

Before telling you, as I was asked to do, something about the history of T&T and peer counselling. Standing here at the COC, with my wife/partner with me, I am modestly about to say that I am probable the only normal man present here. But to be honest I am a transvestite or crossdresser, just like so many other normal men. Homosexuals probably don't know what

a crossdresser is. Well a crossdresser is, and I am the proof of it, a person that wears clothes of the opposite sex. So in that sense the whole world is full of cross dressers. But, only half of them are free and easy out and about. Those are the genuine woman, for them it nowadays is excepted to wear mans clothes. The other half, the genuine man, remains mostly in the so called closet to be able to wear women's clothes. In the small closet which is home. Or the a bigger closet to meet their peers. In that sense you can call yourselves lucky to be homosexuals, because emancipation wise we -as a group- are ages behind on your group. And if I look at recent brochures, flyers and activities of our support organisation, I don't see much progress. Why?

Let's look at history first.

In the 60's and 70's The Dutch Society for Sexual Reform (NVSH) did a lot for our National 'sexual revolution'. But when this hype was over, their work was about finished. Sex (hetero) was not a taboo anymore, and for that part the organisation had made itself redundant.

Some subjects still remained a taboo. Crossdressing an Transsexualism were amongst those. Therefore in Amsterdam the initiative was taken to start a support group for these people. In 1970 the first T&T Travestie & Transseksualiteit support group was set up. People came together, meetings were organised, and after a while they were monthly held in the NVSH office in Amsterdam. At first there was no sharp distinction made between the one T or the other T . They were considered to be peers because of the thought that both groups were dealing with similar problems.

(According to the 'Santa Claus Ban, only a few decades ago` it was forbidden, with criminal consequences, to be publicly dressed up -other than during Dutch festivities- as the opposite sex. Being run in by the police for doing so, meant being undressed at the police station, confiscation of the cloths, a large fine and being delivered at home in a suit used for drowning persons)

The support group in Amsterdam was a success, and other sexual reform-chapters in the country formed T&T groups in some of the bigger cities.

Meeting first and later with volunteers to offer help, or leading self-help groups and giving consultations from their own life experience.

The different groups started to exchange information and for that purpose they later formed the so called LKG Landelijke Kontakt Groep, translated: the National Contact Group. First as a body within the organisation for sexual reform (NVSH). That lasted until about 1985, then the LKG started to work towards their independence and set up there own organisation.

In that same period a group of transsexuals of both sexes (male and female) in Amsterdam experienced that the mixed groups for transvestites and transsexuals didn't meet their need for support and care. Because transvestites, despite all mutual respect for each others feelings, interfaces and motives are essentially different. Most transvestites, up until today, are happy in their hideaway monthly meetings/gatherings with dressing facilities. Convinced that they are doing something to be ashamed of. No place for a transsexual to be in. And not for me either.

Transsexuals are to face their surroundings and be out of that closet, starting their Real Live Test (also one of the conditions to get surgery) and (learn) to socialise. Instead of lingering to long with 'peer' crossdressers in hideouts

So, some transsexuals in Amsterdam tried to find; help, recognition, support and company, social work, genuine psycho-social care and psycho therapy. In 1984 they went to Humanitas in Amsterdam, a large nation-wide humanistic association. Humanitas provided them accommodation and, with a philosophy for welfare to work with and an interest in minorities, they started psychosocial assistance and progressively gave all the support they needed. The humanistic line of thought of taking one's own decisions and taking responsibility for ones own life, linked up perfectly with the life of the transsexual participants. This organisation did for them what they needed and what had to be done, something no other organisation had done for them so far. And they still continue to do so.

T&T (mainly male-crossdressers) remained with the LKG that went on with their work. But `peer counselling` has always been done by dedicated individuals with a strong drive to help other people. There is one crossdresser and his wife that, already for more than ten years now, daily welcome men in their private home to give help and advise. Nearly all of them are first-timers, so they must have seen most of them by now! Keep up the good work. For our monthly meetings in Amsterdam we stayed located at the NVSH where our meetings had been held since 1970. Up until 5 years ago, when the venue got sold. We went to a new location, but our visitors found it was too closed and that it felt closeted. (being already used having a semi-open location and to go to neighbouring bars and restaurants). Therefore in 2002 we decided to move to a `normal café` that most of our group already knew and regularly visited. Before, we had also temporary held our meetings there, after there had been a fire in the old venue. Out in the open, good for emancipation! That's what we thought. But that was not the thought of the chairman of the LKG at the time. He disliked the openness, and even after discussing it he still thought it was necessary to warn people about the new location in Amsterdam. A `normal bar` in an easy going neighbourhood in Amsterdam where everybody can walk in and out without having to explain why they are there, other than having a drink. No `Real Life Test` for crossdressers and some (re)socialisation in that direction. In the mean time there came a new chairman, but in his inauguration text he does not mention this kind of emancipation as a positive `T- friendly` development either. So, after all, crossdressers, their `peers` and partners should not be out in the open, but in the closet (provided by the organisation), instead of mixing and talking with `normal people`. Perhaps it is my delusion to consider them as my peers too. Do not send a transsexual or a crossdresser to a normal shop or service out into the real world where they belong. No, don't let them go. And if we work hard enough maybe we can even bring the transpeople back in again and show them some of our skills. Let's try to keep them all inside, and pamper them until they die.

Thanks a lot buddy, but please leave me alone with that kind of help.

Another open and social group in Amsterdam, mixed and formed by absolutely `undefined gender` first started meetings in 2003 at the same café as T&T Amsterdam meets every month. Later this group moved and now they have their monthly meetings in a (former strictly women only) café. No victim talk there, but fun and focus on action. They call themselves "Noodles" (after a meal they had when they met for the first time).

Of course you may think it is easy for us. After all this is Amsterdam in the Netherlands. That's correct. Sometimes it has even been my excuse for my behaviour. For me this is the place to be and therefore I consider myself lucky to live here and now. But please do me a

favour and tell my `peers` about this, because they are not so sure about it all. Even here in Holland our T community has still a long way to go, according to my opinion. Trying to inform the world with flyers, while hiding in the closet, and complaining that the world does not understand you, brings nobody any further. An abstract and far away person on television does not make people realize that the topic is about their best friend, colleague, or a family member. And even so, each individual has to do his/her own personal bit. Maybe the friendly guy next door is hiding the same secret for you, as you are hiding for him. Give him a flyer!

But there is hope for the future too. There are more and more people in Amsterdam with new ideas to make it an even more colourful city than it already is. There even is a name for it: The Multicultural Society. In which we need to learn and understand that not everybody is the same, and together we must do our best to make it a place where people should welcome and have respect for each others cultures. Yes! Yes!

That's exactly what I always thought, but never dared to say (and I am not even a homosexual).

``I am a transvestite.

Because I am a man who does cosmetic things that are meant to be for woman. So what? I like them too, and feel very happy and comfortable doing so. They are (culturally) meant for woman, therefore as a man you are not suppose to do them. As a man you should behave as a man, and then those femininities don't fit in. For me they do. I am really happy with my manhood and the gender role and I love everything that goes with it. But why do I have to explain that, on top of that, there is more that I like and love to do. Apparently I am simply not supposed to do them. Maybe that is the reason why I like them, or simply go for the difference.

Let that be the case. Just as for my wife. She feels different in her silk dress and on high heels than in her leather motor outfit. That is exactly the same, nothing more, nothing less.

But with one big difference. For her, being a female it is accepted. Being a man means you have to explain something. This explanation is very simple. I am a transvestite. Ready, over and out with it. But than again where does it start, and where does it end?. May I please have long hear. What about my fingernails and, why not, apply varnish. Shave my face, and not my armpits or my legs. That is my own choice. Why should I walk on high heels while my sneakers are far more comfortable. Like other people and so many other things in our culture, I should be allowed to decide that for myself. And all that without the need to, pretend to be or to pass as the opposite sex. I am real and there is nothing fake about me. Helpful people in the shops sometimes try to warn me that what I want to buy is women's. Yes I know, but if I walk into the shop and ask where I can find the gentlemen's pumps, stockings or mascara than I will come out of the shop empty-handed for sure. To make life easier I prefer to enter the shops plainly recognizable as a crossdresser. That way they know what to expect, everybody is always very helpful and on top of that people like it. So my advise to any man with any preference for any kind of femininity: Just present yourself as a crossdresser. Than people will understand. And in the end everybody will get used to it, and perhaps someday they may even realize that we are `the safety proof` of society.

Tolerance is good for everybody ``

Chris
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