

Gender and binational partner choice

A qualitative study on partner choice of Dutch men and Dutch women in binational couples

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Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis is about the difference, between Dutch men respectively Dutch women, in binational partner choice. Quantitative studies on binational couples in the Netherlands show that there is a significance difference, between Dutch men respectively Dutch women, with a non-Dutch partner, in frequency and in the countries of origin of their partners. Previous research shows that the three studied aspects, namely partner preferences, subjective norms and opportunities, are different for men and women. In the qualitative research conducted for this thesis, these three aspects of partner choice are considered and are researched through in-depth interviews. Dutch people in a long term binational relationship were interviewed. In total eight Dutch men and eight Dutch women participated. This research shows a difference between men and women, especially in subjective norms and opportunities, but also in preferences. It shows that the partner choice of Dutch people with a non-Dutch partner possibly differs from general Dutch partner choice in all three aspects of partner choice. As this thesis is an exploration into binational partner choice in the Netherlands, recommendations for further research into the subject are given.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Every year, over seven thousand marriages between a native-Dutch and a first generation migrant are taking place in the Netherlands (Beer and Harmsen, 2003). Studies on these couples show, that there is a significant dissimilarity in partner choice between native Dutch men and native Dutch women, who are living in the Netherlands. The first difference is that there are about twice as many men with a non-Dutch partner than there are Dutch women. In 1999, according to the Statistic Netherlands (2003), 4,812 native Dutch men married a first generation migrant woman in the Netherlands and only 2,597 native Dutch women married a first generation migrant man. Another difference in binational partner choice is, that, in general, the Dutch men's partners are from different countries than are the partners of Dutch women; Dutch men have more partners from Eastern-Europe, Thailand, Brazil and the Philippines while the partners Dutch women prefer men from Turkey, Morocco and Dutch Antilles and Aruba.

This is also illustrated in the table below (table 1), which describes the marriages between Dutch people and people with a non-Dutch nationality in 1999. In the table, several countries are shown. When looking at the table, it is clear that there are huge differences between men and women in partners from the Philippines and Thailand. Table 1 shows that there were 172 Dutch men with a Thai partner, next to only 5 Dutch women; there are more than 34 times as many Dutch men as Dutch women, who married a Thai. On the other hand, the partners from Italy, Turkey and Morocco, are regularly the partners of Dutch women. These countries are relatively close to the Netherlands and a lot of migration to the Netherlands took place from these countries in the past decennia. The partners from Southern Asia are often married to Dutch men. While, partners, from Arabic countries, often married Dutch women. Not included in this table is Eastern Europe, but Dutch women rarely marry someone from Eastern Europe, while it is quite common for Dutch men (Statistic Netherlands 2003).

Table 1 Marriages and persons who were registered in the Netherlands and married, in 1999*.

	Dutch men	Dutch women	Total number of marriages
Total	68,341	66,126	89,428
Both native Dutch	63,529	63,529	63,529
One native Dutch, one first generation migrant	4,812	2,597	7,409
Both non-Dutch**	0	0	10,821
One native Dutch, other second generation migrant	3,894	3,775	7,669
<i><u>One native Dutch and one migrants from**</u></i>			
Germany	513	276	789
UK	176	199	375
Italy	50	62	112
Portugal	29	18	48
Turkey	69	164	233
Morocco	124	172	296
Tunis	5	29	34
USA	126	72	198
Iraq	6	17	23
Thailand	172	5	176
Philippines	155	3	158
Sri Lanka	7	7	13

Source: Statistic Netherlands, 2003

* Derived from data about 1997-2001, divided by 5.

** Countries also used in primary research

*** At least one parent or grandparent not born in the Netherlands

But why are these numbers for men and women dissimilar? Previous research shows possible explanations for the difference between men and women, but, to the researcher's knowledge, no research has ever been conducted about this specific case. Consequently, the above mentioned results are interesting findings, appropriate for further research. The focus of this thesis is on the difference in partner choice of the Dutch and not about the partner choice of their partners. It has an explorative nature, because the reasons for the dissimilarity between men and women in this case, can be found in various aspects of partner choice, combining different disciplines in science.

Policies

In her article, Betty de Hart (2000) describes the double standards and influence of a test, which can be done to make sure a marriage, is not a "schijnhuwelijk" (fake marriage in order to obtain a residential permit).

In the Netherlands, in 1994, the law on preventing the fake marriages has been implemented. This law gives the registrar and the alien's police permission to investigate a marriage, if they expect an international marriage to be fake. This is done according to a list with "objective indicators". De Hart (2000) describes the different approaches towards men respectively women of this check by the aliens police and the IND (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst, which is an institution responsible for carrying out the Dutch migration policies). It is clear that the checks are based on prejudices about binational partnerships and marriages. About one third of all applications for marriages with a non-Dutch partner are checked. Noteworthy is, that more Dutch women and their foreign partner, than Dutch men and their foreign partner, are investigated. This is very remarkable, since there are about twice as many Dutch men with a foreign partner than there are Dutch women.

De Hart (2000) states, that the fact, that binational partnerships with Dutch women are investigated more, is a result of the prejudices about partnerships. This fact is only partly due to the difference in nationalities of the partners of Dutch men and Dutch women. De Hart (2000) explains the following prejudices about men and women in an international partnership. The first one is that it seems unnatural for a man to migrate to his partner's place of residence. Therefore, he must have other motives to migrate, such as economical reasons. De Hart (2000) also describes that the IND assumes that a Dutch woman with a foreign partner is often not well-informed and might be unaware of her partner's underlying motive.

Not only between men and women prejudices played a role (De Hart 2000). The tests, on Dutch men in a partnership with a foreign woman, were only on Dutch men with a low socio-economic status (SES). Their partners were also suspected to come to the Netherlands for economic reasons. The SES of the Dutch women was not a determinant; women with a high economic status were as often investigated as women with a low economic status.

Furthermore, the institutions looked at the differences and similarities between partners (De Hart 2000). They, for example, check if there is a large age gap. Besides the differences, the IND checks

how well informed the choice for a foreign partner is; some people even had to show their personal communications in order to prove that their relationship is real.

The prejudices Betty de Hart (2000) mentions, are, that women with a non-Dutch partner are irresponsible and do not see the damage a foreign partner can do to them, or to the Dutch society as a whole. And men with low socio-economic status and a foreign partner are seen as weak men, who fell for the sexual seduction of their foreign partner and/ or they wanted to be heroes and save her.

De Hart's research is linked to this thesis in the following ways:

The double standard between the genders means, that there is a difference between the genders in partner choice, at least a perceived difference. The prejudices against Dutch men and women can play a role in the subjective norms, and therefore in their partner choice (de Hart 2000). Another important element is the difference in opportunities between men and women with a foreign partner. The fact that women are tested more, means that more pressure is put upon their partnerships. Whereby, they are more likely to separate (de Hart 2000).

Dutch, and other, migration policies are based on the stereotypical image of a migrant (Kraus 2003). Traditionally, a migrant is a man and policies are still based on the image that migrants are men. Nowadays, however, about half the international migrants in the world are women. Women have different push and pull factors than men. Nonetheless, Dutch policy is primarily based on male migrants. A good example of this is the criterion for a minimum amount in monthly earnings. Women earn less than men, thus this criterion has more impact on Dutch women. Therefore, it is more difficult for Dutch women to settle with their partner in the Netherlands.

Another prejudice, that created a bias between the genders, is the view on gender role division (Kraus 2003). Traditionally, the Dutch society is patriarchal; children inherit their father's name and fathers are seen as the heads of the families. This patriarchal society was very visible; until 1964 women automatically lost their Dutch nationality if they married a man with another nationality. The children of a Dutch man, with a foreign partner, were automatically given the Dutch nationality, whereas the children of a Dutch woman with a foreign partner were not automatically Dutch. This did not change until 1985 (Kraus 2003). On the other hand, women are seen as the most important in passing on the culture to their children. They are the ones that give birth and are most responsible for raising their children, and thereby pass on their culture. Dutch policy-makers still expect a woman to take their husband's nationality (Kraus 2003). And therefore, Dutch women, with a non-Dutch spouse, are checked more often by the IND and alien police.

Dutch immigration policies are based on dated ideas, such as the idea that migrants are men and the idea of a patriarchal society. The effect of this is that men and women in binational relationships are treated differently by the IND. It is clear that the norms of the society, which differ for men and women, can play a significant role in partner choice (Kraus 2003).

This article, written by Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow (2010), is about the effects of an increase in the minimum income criterion for people, who would like their foreign partner to migrate to the Netherlands. Although, the, in this article described, measures have been proven to be against the European law and have, therefore, been abandoned in 2010, there are still some effects on binational partner choices that can be investigated through it.

From 2004 till 2010, the minimum income criterion for the Dutch, who wanted to live with their foreign partner in the Netherlands, was increased from 100% to 120% of minimum wages. In research by Arjen Leerkes and Işık Kulu-Glasgow (2010), the effects on people have been studied. They combined the data of the Netherlands Statistics, the IND and in-depth interviews. Their study looks at what happened on a national, but also on a personal level. The results show, that there is a decline of binational partnerships in the Netherlands, because of the income criterion. It mainly affected those with a weaker social economic status, such as women¹. The criterion has an effect on the wellbeing of those directly involved. For example, a lot of people were forced to be apart from their partner for much longer, because of the income criterion (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2010). When impacted, the delay was, on average, fifteen months. Another effect on the wellbeing was stress, caused by the fact that the Dutch had to work more, and the increase of pressure on their partnerships. The stress, in some cases, led to relational problems and health issues. Another important aspect is that people felt that their partnerships are a private matter and should not be a concern of the authorities. Their privacy had been invaded (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2010). The groups, that are harmed by the implementation of this law, are already the groups that are most affected by laws and regulations. They are the ones that suffer from most prejudices in Dutch society (Hart, de 2003)

Men and women have different opportunities in partner choice. This is because women, in general, earn less than men and, therefore, are less likely to live their non-Dutch partner in the Netherlands (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2010).

All three papers show a relationship between gender and family forming migration. Since this migration is a part of binational partner choice, it influences partner choice. All the evaluated articles mention that there are more difficulties for women, than there are for men, to live with their foreign partner in the Netherlands. First of all, there is more prejudice against women with a foreign partner in the Netherlands. This relates to the subjective norms in this thesis. Secondly, it is more difficult for women to let their partner stay in the Netherlands. This relates to the opportunities in the thesis.

¹ According to Statistic Netherlands the average income in the Netherlands was €29.900. Women earned €21.200, while men earned €37.900 on average (Statistic Netherlands 2012).

1.2 Relevance of the research

Mostly quantitative data on the difference between the genders, in partner choice of mixed couples, can be found in existing literature. It has, to the researchers knowledge, never (exclusively) focused on the qualitative aspects of the partner choice. The focus of existing qualitative research on mixed couples mostly concerns their relationship itself, instead of the process of the start of their relationship. For example, the role of mixed couples in society, the way people perceive a mixed couple or the family forming migration have been studied. In this thesis, the focus is on the partner choice itself, with a particular attention to the difference between the genders, which is very visible in the quantitative study on mixed couples in the Netherlands.

Studies on partner choice, in general, are also predominantly quantitative studies. These studies are from various disciplines and, therefore, have different theoretical backgrounds. This thesis connects the different disciplines and views the theories as complementary, instead of excluding.

In his paper on intermarriage, Kalmijn (1998) mentions the importance of qualitative studies on partner choice, as well as some implications of conducting qualitative research on this subject. He writes that there is a lot of empirical evidence on partner choice, but the outcomes are not universal and variables are often indirectly tested. Qualitative research can help to understand the individual differences and direct links in partner choice. Therefore, this paper can be an incentive and foundation for further research.

Further research into binational partner choice can also contribute to a better understanding of those with a foreign partner. In the Netherlands, binational couples are still not fully accepted. When people are less ignorant about the mechanisms behind choices of people, they are more likely to accept and understand their choices.

Concluding, this thesis is relevant because it looks at partner choice of mixed couples in an explorative, multidisciplinary way. Although the focus is on the difference in partner choice between the genders, it gives broader insights, besides just the influence of gender. This thesis can contribute to a more in depth understanding of the influence of gender in partner choice in general and in particular of binational partner choice, with respect for the uniqueness of human beings.

1.3 Research objective

The objective of this research is to explore how, in the Netherlands, the partner choice of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner differs.

As mentioned above, little is known about binational partner choice in the Netherlands. However, previous research shows that there is a difference between the genders in partner choice. This difference is not universal and static, but differs between cultures and over time. In this cross-sectional

study, the current partner choice of Dutch people in a binational relationship is described. The study tries to explore the dissimilarity found between men and women.

1.4 Research questions

How does partner choice differ between Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?

- *What are the partner preferences of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?*
- *What are the subjective norms for Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?*
- *What are the opportunities in partner choice of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?*

The sub questions are answered, using in-depth interviews with Dutch people with a non-Dutch partner. These questions are based on Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (2010) and Kalmijns' theory on partner choice (1998), as is described in the subchapter on theories on page 11. Gender has been added, because it has an important influence on partner preference, subjective norms and opportunities. Secondary literature, which is described from page 14 to 19, gives a basis for the contents of the three elements studied. On page 19, the operational model, which forms a base for the in-depth interviews, is given. In the following pages the data and methods can be found. From page 26, the results are described. Followed by, the discussion, limitations and suggestions, on page 44. This thesis closes with a conclusion on page 49.

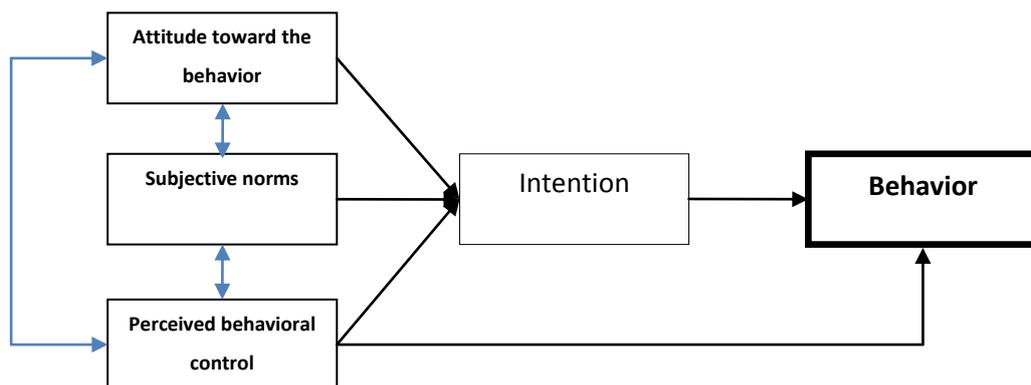
2 Theoretical framework, conceptual model and operational model

Because this thesis is an explorative research, a broad range of aspects of partner choice is taken into account. In this thesis, the elements are explored based on two main theories and existing literature. From the elements researched, further research, in different disciplines, can be conducted.

2.1 Theories

This research is mainly based on the theory of planned behavior by Fishbein and Ajzen (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980, Ajzen 1992, Fishbein and Ajzen 2010). This theory has been developed to predict and understand human behavior, by looking at their intentions to perform a certain behavior. Fishbein and Ajzen believe that human behavior is quite rational and therefore mainly voluntary (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). By looking at the aspects that are important in making a decision, behavior can be explained.

Figure 1 Theory of planned behavior

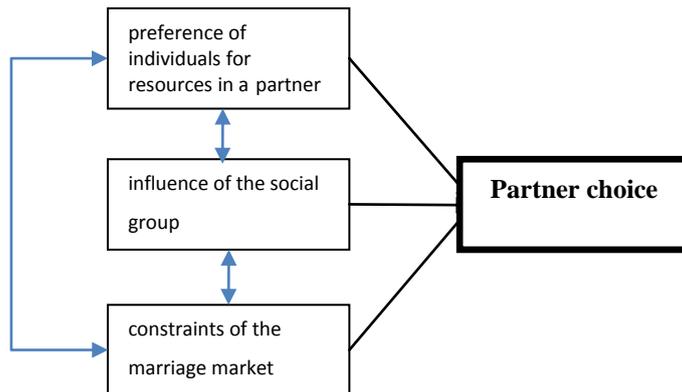


Source: Ajzen, 1992

The theory of planned behavior is based on the principle that human behavior derives from a person's interpretation of three elements; their attitudes, the subjective norms and their perceived behavioral control, as presented in figure 1. The attitudes are a person's view on a specific behavior. It is the individual's personal judgment of the behavior. Next to this internal perception, there is a social determinant too. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) called the determinant, reflecting social influence, the subjective norms. The subjective norms, in this theory are not the attitude of the social environment, but the perception of it created by the individual who is making a decision. In addition to the perception of personal and social attitudes, the perceived behavioral control plays an important role in the decision-making process (Ajzen 2002). The perceived behavioral control is an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty to perform a certain behavior (Ajzen 2002). This element of the theory has been added to the theory later on. The theory of planned behavior started as the theory of reasoned action by Fishbein and Ajzen and was drawn up in 1975 (Albarracin et al. 2001).

The previous three concepts lead to a person's intention to execute a certain behavior, which ultimately leads to behavior. The determinants influencing the intention do not all have the same weight; people base their decisions on scaling the importance of the determinants (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). In some cases, certain people may value the normative considerations to be most important, while others value their own evaluation to be essential. The behavior is ultimately based on what the individual, who is making the decision, considers to be the most positive outcome.

Figure 2 Sociological theory on partner choice



Source: Kalmijn, 1991, 1998

In this research, the theory of planned behavior has been adjusted to fit the subject of this thesis. The adjustments are based on sociological theories on partner choice. The sociological theory of partner choice, used by Kalmijn, is also applied in this thesis. According to Kalmijn (1991, 1998) three social determinants are influencing marriage patterns and, by this means, partner choice (see figure 2). The first determinant is the preference of individuals for resources in a partner. For example age, occupation and physical attractiveness are traits that are important in selecting a partner. This is explained more in-depth in the subchapter on literature. The second determinant Kalmijn (1998) mentions, is the influence of the social group. In making decisions people are influenced by their social surrounding. The social environment of a person is often more or less closed and relatively homogeneous. If someone decides to marry someone outside of the social group, this is often not immediately accepted. The last determinants, that influence partner choice in sociology, are the constraints of the marriage market. Aspects like distance, meeting opportunities and financial and political restraints are important in order to find a partner.

The sociological theory has been tested empirically in previous decades (Kalmijn 1998). The problem is that a lot of hypotheses were indirectly tested and, therefore, the actual cause might not have been discovered. Another problem, with testing the sociological theory, is that the concepts are interlinked. All concepts influence each other and, probably, also other concepts, which may be not included.

Partner preferences, for example, are also based on someone's background and thereby linked to the individual's social group (Kalmijn 1998).

To improve the knowledge about the forces behind partner choice, Kalmijn (1998) suggests that more attention should be paid to the individual instead of the aggregate level. The main advantage of this approach is that many more aspects of partner choice can be included. But, a limitation of this approach is, that it takes two to marry and, therefore, an individual cannot provide the full scope of partner choice. The focus on the individual level also emphasizes that the theory, or at least the weighting of the forces, is not universal. The importance of the elements that, together, lead to a certain partner choice differs per culture, group and probably even per individual.

Additional to the theory of planned behavior and the sociological theory on partner choice, the term gender has been added. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) state that gender is a social background factor that influences the attitudes, perceived norm and/ or the perceived behavioral control of an individual, and therefore a person's behavior. This also applies to the relative importance of one of the three determinants, which can differ between the genders, depending on the particular behavior.

Based on the gender role theory, the difference between the genders is socially constructed (Domosh and Seager 2001). This means that gender roles are constructed within cultures and differ between cultures. The role of men and women varies globally and, probably, also within the Netherlands.

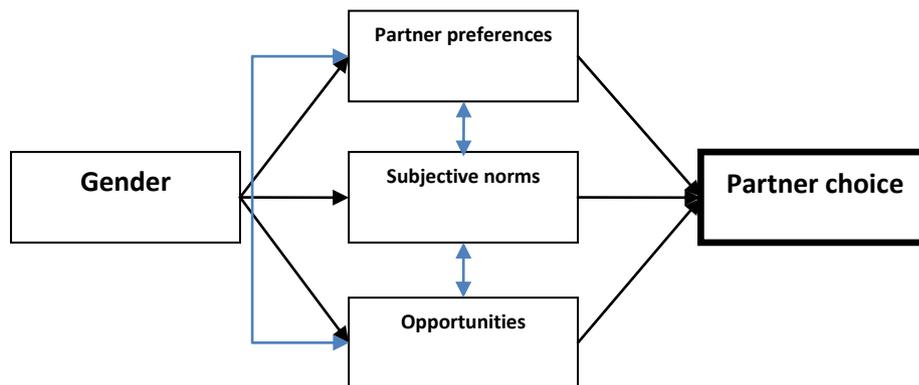
Although, according to the gender role theory, all the non physical differences between men and women are socially constructed, for this thesis it is believed that the majority, not all, is socially constructed. Different researchers, such as Helen Fisher (Fisher et al. 2002), proved that there are differences in the brains of men and women, that relate to a difference in partner choice. These biological factors are most visible in the difference in partner preferences between men and women. Hence, gender in this thesis is used to describe a difference between men and women, both socially constructed and biological.

Ultimately, this thesis should be seen as an explorative research into binational partnerships of Dutch men and Dutch women. It is not universal, but it can give an idea into the general difference in partner choice between men and women. In the following subchapters, the links between gender and partner choice will be described into more detail, using secondary literature.

2.2 Conceptual model

The objective of this research is to explore how, in the Netherlands, the partner choice of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner differs. From the theories described, gender influences partner choice through partner preferences, subjective norms and opportunities. In figure 3 this has been visualized.

Figure 3 Conceptual model of partner choice



Source: Based on Ajzen, 1992, Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010 and Kalmijn, 1991, 1998

In this conceptual model, gender influences partner choice through partner preferences, subjective norms and opportunities. The conceptual model can be applied on a micro level scale, to predict an individual's behavior and, thereby, the behavior of a larger group, which contains multiple individuals. This model describes linkages between an individual's attitudes and possibilities and a particular behavior, in this case partner choice. In the next subchapter, on literature, this conceptual model will be supported with evidence from previous research.

Most of the studies focusing on partner choice and gender are focusing on partner preference. But, some differences in subjective norms and opportunities can also be found. In all three aspects, differences, within the partner choice of men respectively women, can be found. Next to gender, other aspects like culture, age or background of an individual also play an important role. It is important to keep in mind that gender is not the sole determinant of partner choice, but it certainly is influential. In this thesis the following sub questions will be answered by using in-depth interviews:

- *What are the partner preferences of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?*
- *What are the subjective norms for Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?*
- *What are the opportunities in partner choice of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?*

2.3 Literature

Partner preferences

Gender influences partner choice. In several studies, like Kemper and Bologh (1980), gender or sex is the main determinant of difference in partner preferences. Most studies on gender and partner choice focus on the difference in partner preferences between men and women. Studies (e.g. Shackelford et

al. 2005, Sprecher et al. 1994, Simpson and Gangestad 1992, Buss and Barnes 1986) show that the main differences in partner preferences of men and women are the following. Men, in general, place more emphasis on physical attractiveness, whereas women prefer men with resources and social status. The difference between the partner preferences of men and the partner preferences of women can be explained in different ways.

The first explanation can be found in evolutionary theory. Buss and Barnes (1986) explain that different preferences of men and women lead to a genetically mixed offspring and more selection of popular genes, because people with non popular genes will be excluded from mating. Another biological difference is explained by Simpson and Gangestad (1992). They say that the difference between the preference of men and women can partly be explained by a difference in sociosexual orientation. In general, women have a more restricted sociosexual orientation and, therefore, look for more personal and parenting qualities in a partner. On the other hand, men have a less restricted sociosexual orientation and place more emphasis on physical attractiveness of a partner.

A sociological explanation for the differences in partner preference can be found in the sex-role attitudes. Both genders prefer partners who have superior gender specific attributes (Eastwick et al. 2006). This gender ideology for women is physical appearance, while social status and wealth are important for men to possess. The more traditional people are, the more sex typing in partner preferences.

The difference between the genders is also explained by Sprecher et al. 1994. According to the biological explanation, the differences can be found across time, within cultures and the difference will remain. While the sociological explanation suggests, that the more equal relationships between men and women, the more similar their preferences are (Eastwick et al. 2006).

Shackelford, Schmitt and Buss (2005) show that the differences, between men and women, are found across time and cultures. Interestingly, in the study of Shackelford et al. (2005) on partner preferences, there is not much difference between the genders in the Netherlands, while in almost all other studied countries significant differences were found. Doosje et al. (1999) also mention that the preferences of men and women in Dutch society are very similar.

Does this mean that gender does not play a role in preferences Dutch people have? No, it does not exclude the possibility that gender influences the preference of Dutch men and Dutch women with a foreign partner in the Netherlands. There are several reasons why. First, in the study by Shackelford, Schmitt and Buss (2005), they only tested a small set of partner preference dimensions. Secondly, the participants were young (17 to 30 years) and most of them are unmarried. The last and, maybe, the most important reason why preference still can be a deterrent is that Dutch people with a foreign partner might be different, maybe more traditional in their partner preferences, than the average Dutch person, who was described in Shackelford et al. (2005). Because of the social changes in Dutch society, including advanced women's emancipation, partner choice is also changing (Hooghiemstra 2003). The societal changes result in a more gender equal society, with a changed sex

role attitude. Physical appearance becomes more important for men to possess and social status is also a more valued quality in women. The lack of significant differences between men and women in Dutch society, as mentioned in Schackelford et al. (2005), thus might be because of increased equality between men and women.

This theoretical background links with the sub question ‘*What are the partner preferences of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?*’ Mapping the answers to this question asked in the in-depth interviews may explain the difference between men and women in binational partner choice in the Netherlands. As noted before, there might not be a significant difference between men and women in the Netherlands. But it is interesting to find out whether there is an expected difference in preferences for physical attractiveness, social economic status, sex role attitudes and sociosexual orientation.

Subjective norms

There are two different ways in which gender and subjective norms are linked. First of all, there is a difference in how third parties view the choices of men and the choices of women (de Hart 2000, Nagel 2004). Secondly, women and men react differently to the opinion of their social surrounding; women might be more sensitive to their environments’ opinion (Nagel 2004).

The influence of third parties on a relationship is often not mentioned in studies on partner choice. Nonetheless, this element is very important for the duration of an intimate relationship. If parents and friends like someone’s partner, the relationship is more likely to last (Sprecher and Feilmlee 1992). If a couple is perceived to be a good match, it will be more likely for the couple to see themselves as a good match and they will act like it. It can also be that they are a better match, because they might be more similar (Botwin et al. 1997). If family and friends like person A, they are likely to like a person similar to A (Sprecher and Feilmlee 1992).

In their research, on the influence of family and friends on an intimate relationship, Sprecher and Feilmlee (1992) state that men perceived more approval from their surrounding than women did from their social surrounding. Is it that women have to deal with more opposition or are women more sensitive and only perceive more opposition?

Likely is that women actually experience more opposition (de Hart 2000, Nagel 2004). As a marriage between groups ultimately leads to the increase of one group and the loss of a member for the other group, it is most likely that women face more opposition from their group; women are the gatekeepers of our patriarchal society (de Hart 2000). When a woman marries a man, she and their children will often be viewed upon as members of a man’s group; this, for example, is visible in the adoption of his last name by her and her children. Therefore, she will probably receive more opposition from her group than men will (Nagel 2004).

But, it can be possible that women also react more sensitive to their surroundings’ opinion. This can be due to the fact that they do have more responsibility for the children; there is more pressure put on

women to take care of the continuation of the group (Nagel 2004). Women are also more selective in partner choice (Hitsch et al. 2006). According to Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) women are often looking for a long term partnership, whereas men are looking for a more ludic one. In finding a partner, women will probably stick more to their own frame of reference. This frame is more or less the same as their surroundings. Therefore, it might look like women are more sensitive, while they might be just more selective. Studies show that women prefer partners of their own ethnicity significantly more than men do (Hitsch et al. 2006). Buss and Barnes (1986) also show that women are more selective and discriminating. This might be due to the protection of their group, as they have to raise their children and the children are often seen as members of the father's group.

Dutch immigration policies are based on the idea that women migrate to their partner's country, instead of the other way around (Kraus 2003, de Hart 2003). It shows that Dutch society is more discriminative against Dutch women with a foreign partner than against men with a foreign partner (de Hart 2003, Kraus 2003, Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2010). As a consequence of these policies, it is more difficult for Dutch women to get their partner to the Netherlands than it is for Dutch men. This comes with uncertainty, and stress is put upon the relationship. Because of this, a woman's binational relationship is less likely to last. This is described into more detail in the subchapter on policies.

The theoretical framework in this subchapter helps to answer the following sub question: '*What are the subjective norms for Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?*' In answering this question it is important to look at the opinion of family, friends and the Dutch society, as well as the impact of this opinion on the person and his or her relationship. Furthermore, the perception by the Dutch, of their partner's nationality, should be explored.

Opportunities

There are several differences between the genders in opportunities to be with a foreign partner. First of all, there is a difference in meeting opportunities between men and women. Secondly, the Dutch policy, mainly the income demands, makes it more difficult for Dutch women to stay with their foreign partner in the Netherlands. Although not intended, Dutch policy executing bureaus are discriminating against Dutch women with a foreign partner (de Hart 2003). The last difference between the genders is the difference in migration patterns; women are more likely to move to their husband's place of residence (Domosh and Seager 2001). Therefore, it is more likely for Dutch women with a foreign spouse to move abroad.

The opportunity to meet a potential partner differs between men and women. According to Haandrikman et al. (2008) spatial homogamy and thereby spatial heterogamy is based on demographic, social-economic and spatial factors. In order to look at the difference between men and women in meeting opportunities, several possible meeting spheres are depicted. In this thesis the meeting opportunities between men and women in the public, private, closed and other sphere will be looked at (spheres according to Haandrikman 2010a).

According to a research by Haandrikman (2010b), most of the time people found their partner within the public sphere. For example, in bars or on holidays. Next to this, about 35 percent met their partner in private spaces, such as at work or in schools. Less than one percent met their partner through the internet. The remaining people found their partner in closed spheres, for example, through family or friends. Over time, there is a change visible from public to closed meeting spheres in the Netherlands. There is an expected difference between men and women in the use of meeting spheres to meet their partner. More men than women are subscribed on internet dating sites (Scharlott and Christ 1999). Therefore, it is more likely for them to find a foreign partner on the internet. There are two reasons why Dutch men are more likely to find a non-Dutch partner on the internet. First of all, there are not enough Dutch women on dating sites for the men that subscribed. Secondly, in a virtual space, absolute distance is less relevant in meeting a partner; although people are far away, they can still subscribe to a Dutch dating site. And many foreign women do so. Expected is, that it is more common for men with a foreign partner, to find their partner on the internet, than it is for Dutch men with a Dutch partner.

Because of the economic differences between men and women in the Netherlands, men are expected to find their partner further away from their place of residence; the lower the income, the greater the proximity (Haandrikman et al. 2008).

In addition to the difference in meeting opportunities, there is a difference between Dutch men and Dutch women in opportunities regarding financial situation and migration policies. The Dutch policies make it more difficult for Dutch women to live in the Netherlands with their foreign partner. First of all, women's income is lower than the income of men in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands Statline 2011a). Not only an income criterion is set, but also the cost of adoption tests and visa for a partner are high. Secondly, the IND finds foreign partners of Dutch women more suspected of undertaking a fake marriage. Betty de Hart (2003) states, that it is clear that the checks by the IND are based on prejudices about international partnerships and marriages. About one third of all applications, for marriages with a partner from outside of the European Union, are checked. Notable is, that more Dutch women, and their foreign partner, than Dutch men, and their foreign partner, are investigated. This is very remarkable, since, there are more Dutch men, with a foreign partner, than there are Dutch women, with a foreign partner, in the Netherlands. The two policy aspects are described into more detail in the policy section of this thesis. Concluding, it is more difficult for women to get their foreign partner to the Netherlands and more stress is put onto their relationship because of it. This makes their relationship unstable and less likely to last (Leerkes and Kulu-Glasgow 2010).

Because women are, in general, expected to take care of the children and men are expected to provide for the family, women tend to move to their partner's place of residence, where he has a job (Domosh and Seager 2001). This can be a major reason why there are almost twice as many men with a foreign spouse in the Netherlands than there are women with a foreign spouse. Men migrate to the

Netherlands for their jobs more so than do women (Statistics Netherlands Statline 2010). While women, more often, migrate for their family.

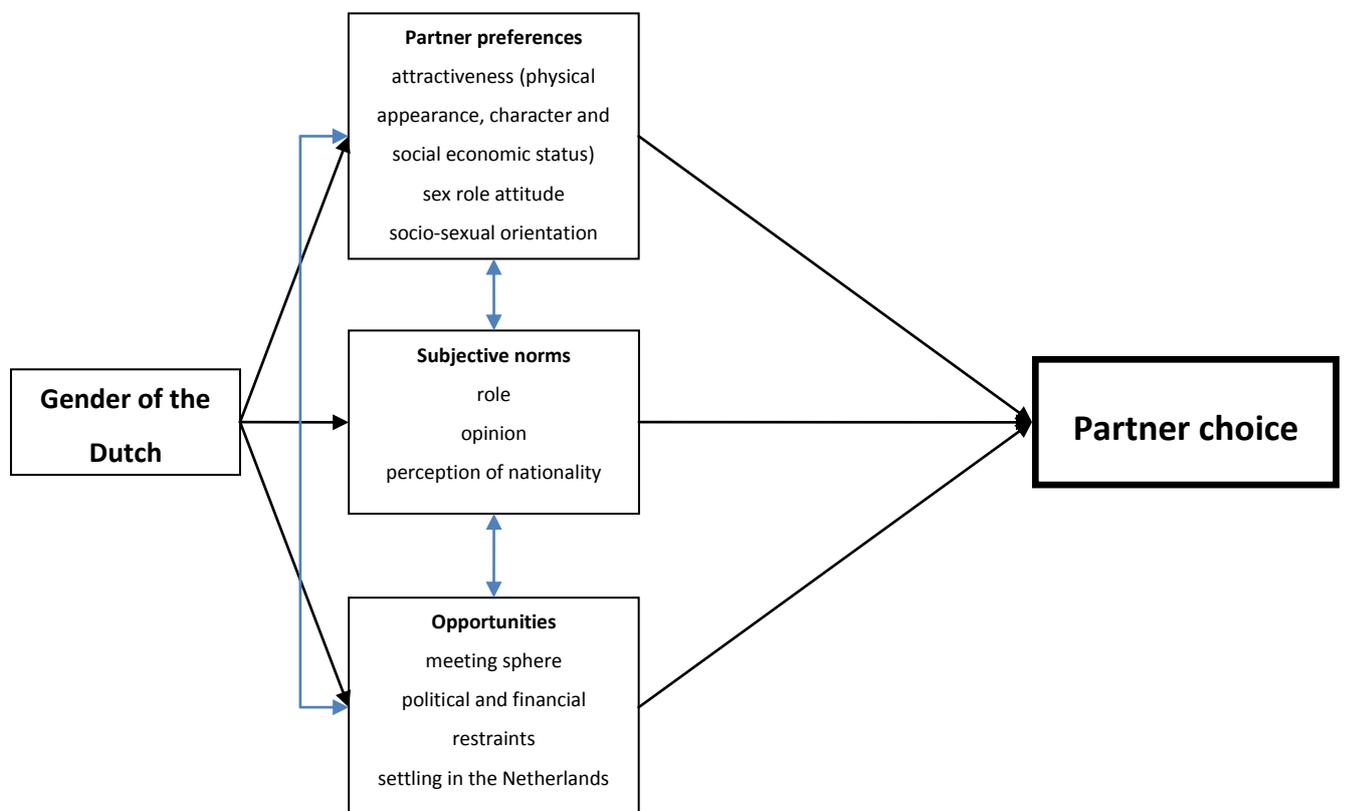
'What are the opportunities in partner choice of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?' is the question that will be explored in the in-depth interviews by using the background, explained in this chapter. In order to answer this question a closer look will be taken into the meeting spheres, political and financial restraints and the decision to settle in the Netherlands of Dutch men and Dutch women with a foreign partner.

2.4 Operational model

From the conceptual model and the previous research, conducted by scientist in different disciplines, the operational model is created. This model is used as a base for the primary research in this thesis; the in-depth interviews.

It contains the elements derived from the theories of Fishbein and Ajzen and the sociological theory on partner choice. The elements described in the operational model (figure 4), are derived inductively as well as deductively, from the conceptual model, the literature and findings in the primary research.

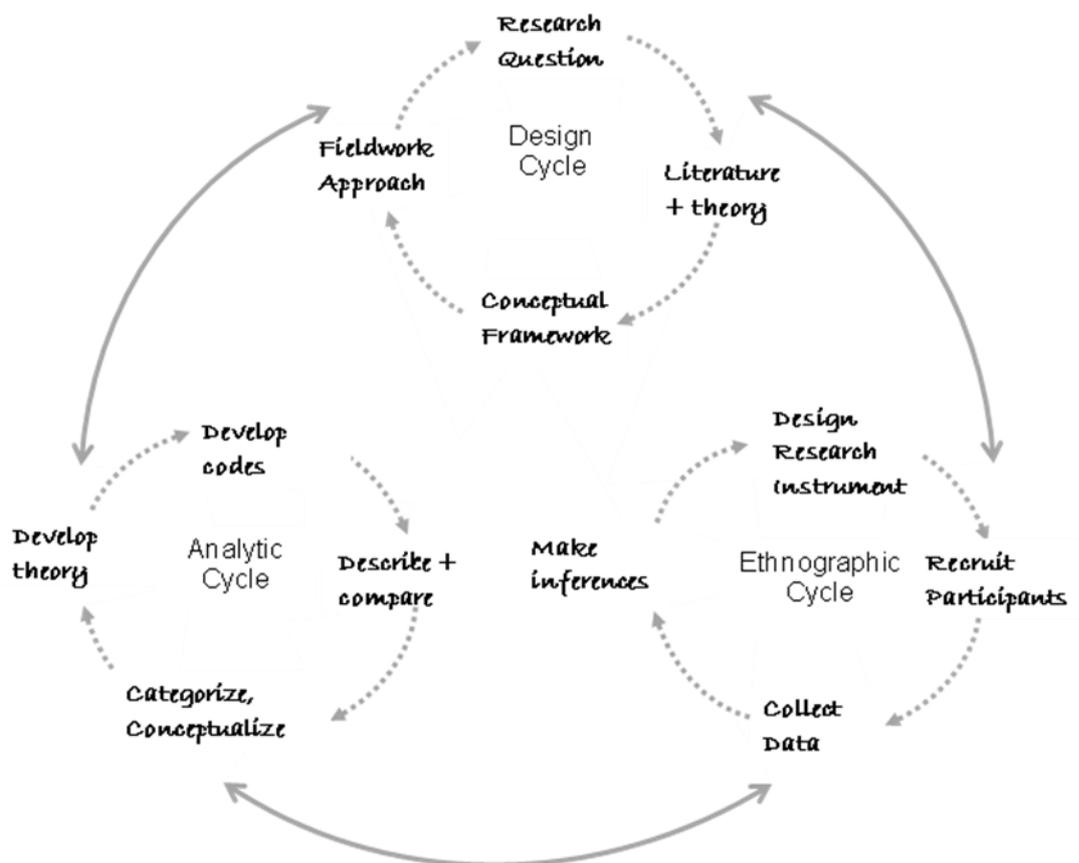
Figure 4 Operational model on partner choice



3 Data & Methods

This research is designed according to the Hutter-Hennink qualitative research cycle (see figure 5). Research is not a linear process, but a cyclical one (Hennink et al. 2011). It starts with study design, which is called the design cycle. In this part of the research, the research questions are created and deductive research is done. In this process, theories and previous research are used to create a conceptual framework. Based on this deductive research, in-depth interviews are chosen as field work approach. This process is not linear. In this thesis the research questions and conceptual framework were adapted continuously, even when working mainly within the ethnographic and analytic cycle.

Figure 5 The Hutter-Hennink Qualitative Research Cycle (2010)



Source: Hennink et al., 2010

After the deductive research, the ethnographic research started with the creation of the interview guide. This was of course based on the conceptual model, and thereby, on the research questions. Meanwhile, the recruitment of the participants took place. This is described into more detail later on in this chapter. Every interview was immediately evaluated and minor adjustments to the interview guide were made constantly. In the analytic cycle, most of the inductive research takes place. By analyzing

the data, more insight into partner choice was given. This thesis was not a linear process, but a cyclical one, like described in the Hutter-Hennink qualitative research cycle (Hennink et al. 2010).

This thesis took longer than initially planned for. The research questions originated from more than two years ago. Over the last two years the research was shaped and reshaped. In 2011, most of the design cycle was written. In the beginning of 2012 the interviews took place and were analysed, so the results and conclusion could be written.

3.1 Thesis design

This thesis is explorative. The objective of this research is to explore how, in the Netherlands, gender influences the decisions that lead to the partner choice of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner. Previous research shows that partner choice differs between men and women. Quantitative research also shows that this difference is visible in binational partner choice in the Netherlands. There is a difference in quantity and in countries of origin of non-Dutch partners of Dutch men and women.

This thesis explores what may be the underlying reasons for this difference between men and women. As it is qualitative research, it should be noted that no conclusion of differences between the genders, can be proved in this research, as it is about a small number of individuals, who are not representative by any means. This thesis is an exploration of various elements of partner choice; preferences, subjective norms and opportunities. The aim is to gain in-depth information of individuals in order to find out which aspects had an important role in their partner choice. This thesis should be viewed as a base for further research into (binational) partner choice and gender. The quantitative difference between Dutch men and Dutch women with non-Dutch partners may be explained into more detail using the outcomes of this research.

The choice for narrowing down to Dutch people, who quite recently established a long term relationship, was the right one for this thesis in order to gain a certain degree of depth. Qualitative research has been chosen, because of its explorative nature and because of the lack of existing in-depth information in the field of partner choice.

The research is conducted at one single point in time, so it is cross-sectional. But a longitudinal study can be useful, because partner choice is not a static concept.

Besides the in-depth interviews, this study is based on existing theories and previous studies on partner choice. The theory of Fishbein and Ajzen (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980) is a widely used theory of planned behaviour. Together with the sociological theory on partner choice, used by Kalmijn (1991, 1998), it forms the base of this thesis. The theory of Fishbein and Ajzen has been tested by over a thousand empirical tests, published in professional journals and is widely used in social sciences (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010). It therefore provides a solid base for this thesis. Complemented with the sociological theory on partner choice and the influence of gender on behavior, the difference in partner choice of men and that of women can be explored.

The other secondary studies, used in this thesis, are from different researchers, who operate in different disciplines. This thesis tries to combine the sociological, psychological and evolutionary view on partner choice, because they complement each other and create a more complete insight in the process of partner choice.

In order to gain this in-depth information, in depth interviews are chosen as method. In in-depth interviews, the motivation for a certain behaviour of individuals can be mapped. It explains how individuals have made the decision to choose their partner. This method is appropriate for this research, because it gains in-depth information about a personal story (Hennink et al. 2010). Through in-depth interviews useful information on the context of a person's partner choice can be collected.

3.2 Methodology of primary study

As mentioned above, the primary research method conducted for this thesis, is in-depth interviewing. In order to obtain the results that fit the research questions, a few criteria were imposed. All the participants are currently *living in the Netherlands*. This was chosen, because the decision to stay in the Netherlands plays an important role. This decision is made, because of the limited amount of time and money and because it is more coherent with the quantitative study, whereby the Dutch person is registered in the Netherlands. As explained earlier, it will still provide useful, in depth information, which can be used for other studies.

By the decision to interview *only Dutch people* in the Netherlands, the variety of people has been narrowed. As explained before, partner choice changes over time and between cultures. An advantage of only interviewing Dutch people is that it gains a more in-depth insight in Dutch partner choice, which is in the literature different from partner choice in other cultures. Furthermore, there is no language boundary as all, the researcher as well as the participants, are native Dutch.

In order to make the difference between the genders more clear, only *heterosexual couples* have been interviewed. In addition, heterosexual relationships are more common.

All interviewees *married, cohabitated or got pregnant with their partner less than five years ago*. This is important, because the interviews are retrospective and people still have to remember the beginning of their partnership. This criterion also means that all the relationships are long-term; partner choice in short-term relationships differs from partner choice in long-term relationships. It is also more in line with the quantitative data used in this thesis. Above all, partner choice changes over time, so this way the information will be more in-depth.

Before the first applicable interview was conducted, a pilot interview was held. This interview was with a man, who had had two binational relationships, but was now divorced. In his family almost everyone did have a binational relationship, so his views on the elements on partner choice described in this thesis, were also discussed. From this pilot interview, more information was gathered and minor adjustments have been made to the interview guide.

The recruitment of the interviewees was done by posting a message on buitenlandsepartner.nl and on the website of Accare. Besides that, several interviewees were contacted through personal contacts and facebook. Six Interviewed women and one interviewed man applied through buitenlandsepartner.nl, one woman through Accare and six men through personal contacts. One woman was found via someone at buitenlandsepartner.nl and one man through snowballing. [Buitenlandsepartner.nl](http://buitenlandsepartner.nl) was chosen to recruit participants, because it is, with 32.000 subscribers, the biggest platform online for people with a binational relationship in the Netherlands. Accare, facebook and other personal connections were used later on, because not enough people did reply on buitenlandsepartner.nl. A website was built for this thesis, so people could answer a sift questionnaire, which was used for the selection of the interviewees.

The recruitment might have influenced the results, as men and women were found in different ways. [Buitenlandsepartner.nl](http://buitenlandsepartner.nl) is often used by people, whose partner is in the process of migration. That only one man and six women were found through buitenlandsepartner.nl can be, because men experience less difficulties in the migration of their partner to the Netherlands. This difference in recruitment, however, possibly also biased the results of the primary research conducted for this thesis, as will be explained in the discussion. But, as it was difficult to find enough men for the interviews, they had to be found another way, primarily through personal contacts.

Sixteen people were interviewed for this thesis, as was decided a priori. Eight Dutch men and eight Dutch women (see table 2). This number of people was enough to have saturation on the topics researched. The interviewees' partners were born in different countries, because the country of birth of their partners was not a criterion for selection. A limitation of this is that there is a discrepancy between the men and women, as more of the men's partners came from Europe. People from Europe can migrate and travel more easily to the Netherlands and, therefore, the findings in opportunities of the interviewed men and women in this thesis is possibly biased. The policy is also the reason why less women are living with their partner, as will be explained in the chapter on results and discussion. The ages of the respondents vary. This has been chosen, because people of all ages do search for and find a relationship. Generally, the ages of the interviewed men and women were similar, as can be seen in table 2.

A limitation of the study is that all but two interviewees are highly educated. Research shows that education is also an important element of partner choice. It is one of the most important factors of meeting opportunities, so no conclusion can be drawn in meeting opportunities for this research. Also other elements of partner choice are likely to be influenced by educational level. The level of education, however, is similar for the interviewed men and the interviewed women.

Table 2 Interviewees

Name	Gender	Age group	Partner's country of birth	Living together	Married
Henk	M	20-25	United Kingdom	Yes	No
Bob	M	25-30	Latvia	Yes	No
Erik	M	30-35	Bolivia	Yes	Yes
Frans	M	30-35	Germany	Yes	No
Jos	M	30-35	Philippines	Yes	No
Cees	M	40-45	Germany	Yes	Yes
Ivo	M	40-45	Portugal	Yes	No
Uri	M	60-65	Thailand	Yes	No
Paula	F	20-25	Iraq	No	Yes
Wietske	F	20-25	Ecuador	No	Yes
Linda	F	25-30	Italy	Yes	No
Tineke	F	25-30	Tunis	Yes	No
Karin	F	35-40	Morocco	Yes	No
Marie	F	35-40	Ivory Coast	Yes	Yes
Roos	F	35-40	United States of America	Yes	Yes
Sanne	F	35-40	Sri Lanka	No	No

Other limitation of this research are that partnerships always are two sided and this research is one sided. Only interviewing one side, means that information on the formation of the partnership is not collected.

The interviews were taking place in February and the beginning of March 2012. The interview guide was open and not very structured, because the interviews were about the story of the interviewee. However, the operational model was used to support all interviews. The questions, derived from the model, were all answered. Besides this, inferences were written down and used when appropriate. The interviews took about one hour per interviewee and were held by the researcher herself. All interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the interviewee. After an interview, sometimes inferences were made to the interview guide. These were then used for the next interviews. In the beginning several inferences were made, but later on a level of saturation had been reached. Generally, after each day of interviews, the interviews were transcribed in Express Scribe (NCH software). A maximum of three interviews took place on a day. All interviews took place at the interviewee's home

or in a restaurant or bar. Sometimes the recordings were not of very good quality, because of the noise. But this did only influence the transcription time and not the quality of the results.

When interviewing people about personal matters, such as their partner choice, one must respect a person's privacy and boundaries. Binational couples often already had interference in their relationships. The direct social surrounding and the society as a whole often are prejudiced (de Hart 2003). Sometimes the IND (Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst/ Immigration and Naturalisation Bureau) even tested their relationship to make sure it is not fake. They, thereby, often invaded the privacy of the ones involved.

For the writer of this thesis it is very important that people feel comfortable and that their privacy is not invaded. Because of that, the author never asked people personally to participate in this research, but always through friends or the internet. It is likely that interviewees did not feel obligated to participate. The interviewees could always pick the place and time of the interview, so they could be most comfortable.

Very important aspects of research are confidentiality and anonymity. Every interviewee has been given a new name and the real identity is only known by the researcher. The information gathered will be only used for this thesis and not for other purposes.

3.3 Analysis in primary study

After the interviews were transcribed, the process of coding started. All the transcribed interviews were added into MAXQDA. Initially, all deductive codes had been entered subsequent upon the conceptual model. This was not very difficult as the elements in the operational model, the interview guide and the codes are roughly the same. It is a translation from concepts in previous research to more colloquial language and then back to concepts (codes). Later on in the process, inductive codes have been added. These codes were inferences in the interview guide or were discovered during the coding process.

In MAXQDA, all interviews were read and codes were highlighted. For the results, a search by topic was conducted, thus the codes related to the matter were explored. When comparing a code/ codes, the same code from all the interviews was retrieved and a general view was described. Men and women were coded in different documents, in order to compare both groups. Besides the general conclusions, specific quotes and cases were added to the results. Obviously, the context the interviewees gave was considered in describing the results. At the end of the analysis, all the used codes and the previous literature were linked and used to describe the findings. These results were categorized in three subchapters; preference, subjective norms and opportunities, which is according to the conceptual model and, therefore, the sub questions. After the description of the data, the most important findings were highlighted and discussed. In this discussion, a link to the theory is explored and analysed. From the analysis, recommendations for further research were given.

4 Results

In this chapter the view of the interviewees is described. It is not about facts, but about the perception of reality. The three sub questions are answered, using the interviewees' comments on the topic. These questions are based on the conceptual model in which partner choice is based on three aspects; preferences, subjective norms and opportunities. Women and men are described separately in each section. All the italic texts in this chapter are quotes.

4.1 Preferences

In this section on preferences, preferences of men and women are described. The following sub question is answered:

What are the partner preferences of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?

It starts with what the interviewees liked in their partner when they just met. As described in the chapter on previous research, similarity between an interviewee and his or her partner is often found in a long term relationship. The concepts within the preferences are described in the following order: attraction (physical appearance and character), religion, socioeconomic status and sex role attitude, perception of partner's nationality and socio-sexual orientation.

Attraction

According to previous research, it is important for people to have things in common with their partner. A relationship with similarity is more likely to last (Botwin et al. 1997). Most of the time, the partners were similar to the interviewee in certain aspects, like for example character or they had a similar profession. Sometimes they were very different, but also said they were very compatible.

Some respondents noticed a difference in upbringing between them and their partner. Marie has had a very free 70's upbringing, while her Ivorian husband was raised in a very strict Muslim household. This has influenced their characters. He lives much more guided by certain rules and regulation while she is more free and flexible. Some other respondents also noticed great differences. Paula said the following about herself and her husband:

Paula: No, we are both quite stubborn, but also very different. Eh, He is really a Kurd, a Kurdish man, you know, and they are really very different from a Dutch girl.

Linda and her Italian boyfriend share a lot of the same interests, but also experience many cultural differences. He is a real Italian man, who carries her bags. She, as a Dutch woman, was not used to that and wondered what people on the street might think when they saw that.

On the other hand Roos and her American husband do share a similar background. They both have very strong family values and their parents had a similar level of education. According to Roos this similarity attributed to their suitability as partners.

It seems like looks are initially more important to the interviewed men than to the interviewed women, which is indeed in line with the previous research (e.g. Shackelford et al. 2005). These studies showed that men place more emphasis on physical appearance of their partner, whereas women in general find SES and a dependable character more important in their partner than men do. Conversely, the difference found between the interviewees, is not in line with research in the Netherlands by Shackelford et al. (2005). But for both groups, men and women, the combination of physical attraction and character was very important. The interviewed women were mostly attracted to a caring character and did not want a push-over. While most men, also fell for a caring, sociable character. Some men also mentioned that they wanted their partner to stand up for herself. So the preferred characters were more or less the same for men and women.

Unlike most interviewed women, Marie was immediately attracted to her husband because of his physical appearance. Once she got to know him, he was very calm, unlike most Africans, who are very outgoing according to Marie. This combination made her fall for him. For all other women physical appearance was not the first reason why they fell for their partner. As Paula said:

Paula: [...] He is not a typical, as far as looks go, what really attracts me. I prefer guys to be a bit darker than he is. But really, his inside counts more.

On the other hand, physical attraction was certainly found very important by the interviewed women. They could not explain what it was, but they just felt the attraction. Karin tries to explain that the physical attraction is not primarily based on looks:

Karin: Ehm, yes, I think I am just in love with him, and therefore find him very attractive. Yes, that eh, yes, I think more because of the way he treated me, the affection, that is the reason why I really fell for him.

As mentioned before, most women fell for their partner because of his character; however the partners all had diverse characters. But overall the interviewed women had a preference for caring, sociable features. Wietske's partner from Ecuador is very relaxed, cheerful and forgiving. Wietske herself is

not as relaxed and calm. She says that this difference in characters is very compatible. Linda's Italian partner also has a compatible character, as he sets boundaries and is clear about what he wants, which Linda finds very attractive. As she explains:

Linda: [...] but, with him, I prefer that he sets his limits towards me. Not always saying yes, yes, that is okay. That is like, do you want a drink? Eh, yes, I will take whatever you take, you know. [...] Those kinds of men I can't stand.

Roos likes her husband, because of his sense of humour, and his sweetness and kindness. But she cannot really explain why she fell for him.

Roos: But he is simply my love. I can't explain it, because, how do you fall in love?

For the interviewed men, it was also difficult to exactly explain what they found attractive about their partners. It was very much based on a feeling. Several men shared the same interests with their partner. Like Frans, who had the same education as his partner. He found it very nice that he could communicate with his partner in their jargon and that they have shared interests. This was also the case with B and his partner, although her education had a different approach.

Cees and his partner both work with people of different nationalities. They are both very interested in other cultures. Although they are different in age and their backgrounds differ, they share the same values. Bob is also interested in other cultures and finds it very interesting that his partner is from a different culture. Uri shares some characteristics with his partner, but does not think that they are very much alike. He explains:

Uri: I'm a real European or Dutch men and she is a real Thai woman. We are starting to grow a bit towards each other, getting to know each other's, eh, things, eh. I wonder if that is entirely possible within four or five years, I don't know. Eh, but no, we don't have, again, not the feeling that we are alike, because, eh, no, no.

For most men, physical appearance was the first reason why they were attracted to their partners. But a partner's character was also very important. Like Cees explains:

Cees: Well, if I had not find Amber attractive or find her attractive, then we weren't... But, look, what I find attractive is not..., if I would have had a conversation with her and, you know, it is about nothing, then I wouldn't have found her attractive.

Some interviewees found their partners appearance attractive straight away. When these interviewed men started talking to their partner, she also had something to say and a nice character, so they wanted to stay in touch with them.

Ivo was also very much attracted to his partner's appearance. He very much likes her figure, her skin tone and her hair. Jos and his partner met online and he initially fell for her looks. They met each other in real life not long after they started emailing. Henk also met his partner online, so he got to know her, before he saw her in real life. He did not think physical appearance was very important, as long as she was taking care of herself. He tells that meeting on the internet is different from meeting in real life, because you are on a 'talking level' instead of doing things together. So he was very much attracted to her, because of her intelligence, humour and the way in which they communicated.

Uri also very much fell for his partner's character. She is very respectful towards him as well as towards other people. He associates that with the Thai culture. Erik fell for his Bolivian wife, because she was very spontaneous and open, especially in her own country. She is also quite traditional, caring and sweet, which he likes.

Religion

In several cases, the interviewed women and their partners do have the same religion or are both atheists. Roos explains that she was brought up an atheist and her husband had a Catholic upbringing, but he became an atheist before he met her. Tineke's boyfriend's parents are Muslim and she was raised a Christian, but neither of them does really practise it. Also in other cases, the religion of one had changed before they met. Like Marie's partner, who became a Christian, like she is, before they met. They met each other through church. In a few cases the religion was not the same. Wietske joined a Protestant church just before she met her Catholic husband. This does not create any problems between them as she explains:

Wietske: Yes, well, he is Catholic, and I am, yes, I am Protestant, let's say. Eh, I am a member of the Reformed church here, and eh, it is, yes, people say sometimes, it is difficult, difficult, but again I never had any issues with it, and, it is actually quite similar.

Karin is also a Christian and her boyfriend is a Muslim. She likes it, because they can talk about religion and they do share a lot of similar values. Sanne also likes her boyfriend's religion, because she had always found Hinduism very interesting. Paula started to read and learn a lot about her husband's religion, because she finds it important to understand him. Although she does not agree with everything in the Islam, she is currently thinking about becoming a Muslim.

Religion does not seem to play a significant role in the relationships of most men. Several men do have the same religion as their partner. Like Jos, who is a Catholic, as is his girlfriend. But, they both

do not go to church anymore. Ivo and his partner do not go to church anymore too. He and his partner both developed a strong interest in spirituality. His interest was there before they met, but developed mostly because of her. Several men and their partners are atheists. Bob finds it important that his partner is not religious. Erik and his partner both have a Christian background and are more traditional because of that. Uri was brought up a Catholic and his partner is a Buddhist. This is not a problem for him, but he does not understand certain things:

Uri: And ehm, sometimes there are stories from her, about people in Thailand that had passed away and after a couple of hours came back to life again. I have the feeling that she is attached to that, as truth. But she also only heard it, so she didn't experience it herself. [...] And that I found a little bit strange to deal with, sometimes. For me, someone that has passed away does not return.

Cees has an interest in small religions and found the religion of his partner very interesting. It was one of the first things they ever talked about.

Socioeconomic status and sex role attitude

For both, men and women, educational level was often not very important. They, however, found it important to be on the same intellectual level with their partner. Overall earnings were not an issue, as long as they could pay the bills together. All women wanted their husband to have a job, while some men did not care, as long as their partner was happy. Almost all interviewees did not care about the status of a job. This is not in line with previous literature, in which women are more guided by their partner's status (e.g. Sprecher et al. 1994).

All the interviewed women did work or study, almost always full-time. Their partners did also have jobs, but not often fulltime and sometimes through a temporary employment agency. Most of the women did not want to work fulltime, but several had to in order to provide for their family. Almost all Dutch women earn substantially more than their partner. This was also the case with most interviewed Dutch men. All men want to work and most of them almost fulltime. Several men preferred a more traditional partner and thought Dutch women were too emancipated. Some women also preferred a more traditional partner, but most seem to want a combination of traditional and modern values; a man who takes care of her and who helps out with the household chores and the freedom to work herself.

Education was not very important for most interviewed women, but it was important for almost all of them to be on the same level intellectually. Some women do have more or less the same occupation as their partner; they were both teachers in different subjects for example. They liked that. None of the women has a partner with a higher socioeconomic status than their own; it was always the same or lower. The women with a lower educated man still felt like they were on the same intellectual level.

He just never had the opportunity or motivation to follow a higher education. One woman experienced some intellectual difference. Although he is currently a university student, she feels like his education is too difficult for him and she would like for him to do something else, but that is not very acceptable in his South American culture. Tineke also noticed a difference between her and her Tunisian boyfriend, who did not have any education after high school:

Tineke: Yes, you know, sometimes it is difficult when you are here in the Netherlands obviously, because he knows less words, but in general it is [equal], so it is not that I think you are a lot more stupid than I am or anything like that.

All interviewed women do work. Most of them, who are living with their partner, divide the housework more or less equally. Most of the women who do not live together with their partner are dividing the housework equally when they are together.

Linda has two jobs, while her boyfriend works from home. In their household, Linda's partner does most of the cleaning and cooking. Only Marie does most of the housework and, besides that, she works fulltime. She explains:

Marie: If you, for example, have had a really busy day, then it wouldn't cross his mind to even go into the kitchen to cook [...]. But anyhow, it is actually just very traditional, so I just do the cooking, the laundry and those kinds of things. [...] So, eh, yes, [my husband] does more of the manly things, so, the administration, the arranging of things, taking out the garbage.

The socio-economic status was also not very important for most men. The level of education was not very important for most of the interviewees, but, like the Dutch women, they wanted their partners to be on the same intellectual level. Bob thinks it is important to have the same level of education and says it is something highly educated people want. He has found it difficult that his partner did not have the same interests in for example politics, but she is adapting to his culture. He explains:

Bob: But you notice once in a while that she does not understand things. Music, she doesn't understand at all, politics, she doesn't know one thing about, history, like for example in Europe, those are that kind of things... She is actually from a family, which, yes, had the Soviet-mentality, that is what I find it a little bit. That you just work, sleep, friends, working in the garden, further on... [...] So she often had nothing to say. I've always found that a problem, but surely you accept it, because you also know what the background is.

Unlike other interviewed men, a few men did not find it important for their partners to have a paid job, as long as they are happy with what they are doing. Other men saw their partner as equal and expected his partner to also, evenly, provide financially for the family.

All but one man do have jobs. Most men also want to divide the housework equally. But in some cases the interviewed men work fulltime, while their partner is at home, and therefore she does most of the work at home. In most cases, the men's partners do have jobs to, but often less hours a week. Therefore, his partner also does a bit more inside the house. One man is more traditional and does not want to manage the household. He however does things in the house, like taking out the garbage, cooking in the weekends and he does all the vacuum cleaning.

Sociosexual orientation

Some women and men, almost immediately were in a serious relationship, but in most cases the relationship developed more slowly. A difference between men and women is in the explanation for this quick development. In some women's cases, the relationship developed very fast, because of the opinion in her partner's surrounding. Other reasons for a rapidly developing relationship are, that the couple liked it themselves or because of the distance or policy.

Some women almost immediately knew they were going to have a serious, long term relationship with their partner. In two cases it was not accepted by the partner's culture to date without any commitments. Like Marie explains:

Marie: And, yes, we just knew each other a couple of weeks, when he already asked me to marry him. So, yes, the expectation immediately was either a marriage or nothing, so to say. [...] It is not very acceptable there, if you, as a man and a woman, just hang around or just walk around a little with the two of you.

In Tineke's case, it was also not very common to live together without getting married, but she wanted their relationship to develop at a slow pace to see if it worked out. When she met her boyfriend, they became friends and later he became her boyfriend. Her intention was to break up when she was going back to the Netherlands, but by that time, after dating for several months, it was not easy, so they stayed together. Two other women also did not have the intention to start a relationship with their partner, but, like Tineke, when they started to know them better, they developed a serious relationship. As Paula, who had just broken up with someone else explains. When she saw her husband in a club she thought:

Paula: I and my friend were thinking okay, we are just going to use them (her partner and his friend). I thought, well, then I will overcome my heartache because of the other boy.

Several women started to live with their partner shortly after they met. Sometimes, for a short period of time, and mostly, because of the distance. So some women started their relationship with a more serious attitude, as expected from the literature (e.g. Simpson and Gangestad 1992), while others did want a more ludic one.

Some men were not planning to have a long term relationship either, as was expected. One man in particular always had doubts about his relationship until his partner got pregnant. Two other men did not want to be in a relationship when they met their partners, because of their last marriage. As Uri explains:

Uri: But again, I solely, purely wanted friendship. I wasn't ready at all to start a relationship.

Several men started their relationships as friends. So they got to know their partners first, before a romantic relationship developed. But in most cases, it was a romantic relationship right away. Generally this romantic relationship developed slowly. They started dating and after a while moved in together. But in Jos' case the relationship developed very fast. He explains:

Jos: Yes, it happens after a few months, that you start thinking, yes, now I have to see eh, is this, am I really enjoying this, then I should continue it, do I not enjoy it, then I should quit it.

She moved in with him shortly after they met, also because she was pregnant and her visa was about to expire. Bob's relationship developed slowly and it was not very serious as he was quite young when they started dating. He lived with his girlfriend on and off for several years.

Bob: It is like, it just happened. It was not like I have to have her, so to say. It always was very composed; [we] will see how it goes. It is too, that I thought if it is pleasant, then why would you knock it off?

4.2 Subjective norms

This subchapter is about the experienced differences in subjective norms. The following question is answered:

What are the subjective norms for Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?

Role and opinion of social surrounding

Often, as described in Nagel (2004), the family and friends of a woman with a non-Dutch partner, were quite cautious in the beginning. It was not always because the partner was a foreigner; in some cases it was because of the way they met and/ or the pace in which the relationship was developing. For example, meeting on the internet was a concern for the parents. The two women, who met their partners on the internet, were told to be careful. Another concern by their surrounding is that the relationship develops very fast. An example of this is that the partner stayed at the interviewees place immediately after the first meeting. Like Linda, who met her partner on the internet:

Linda: Hm, my mom found it all a little bit strange [...] I, obviously, told her [...] that a man was coming. [...] And my mother is very overprotecting, she doesn't like it. She said, he is not going to stay at your place and tu tu tu tu tu. Don't even think about it, you will not do that! [...] But, yes. I took him to my parents as soon as possible. But normally you don't do that. [...] But now, eh, I just did that to reassure my mom a little bit. She immediately saw that he is really caring towards me, so, yes, then you immediately got that over with.

In one case the interviewee could move in with her parents, so she could save some money to build a life with her partner in his country. According to her, her parents had a much more realistic view on the relationship than the interviewee, who had an image of a rosy prospect.

Sometimes, the surrounding was surprised that the interviewee had chosen a non-Dutch partner. In other cases, they were not surprised. This was even the case if the interviewee had never had a non-Dutch partner before. The family is often worried before they met the interviewee's partner. But commonly, they fully accept him once they get to know him. The worries are based on fear of the unknown in some cases, according to some interviewees.

In Karin's it was more persistent. The father of the interviewee did not like Muslims and did not approve of the relationship his daughter has. Therefore her mother did not approve of it either. The disapproval disappeared as Karin pregnant.

Several women experienced negative criticism from people not as close to them, like friends' friends or colleagues or even people they had never met before. It also happened that the social surrounding reacted more positively, than they would have done if the interviewee had a Dutch partner.

Several interviewees have an international surrounding, like Roos, who has a multicultural group of friends. Marie and Tineke have worked abroad, so they met a lot of different nationalities. Some other interviewees travelled a lot. Karin has lived abroad and travelled a lot. Wietske did a year of high school in Ecuador. The majority of the interviewed women did not have many non-Dutch friends or family in the Netherlands before they met their partner.

The influence the surrounding has on the interviewees varies. The opinion of people very close to the interviewees is considered important. Karin's, whose parents did not approve of the relationship for years, said the following about the influence her parent's disapproval had on her relationship:

Karin: I thought, this feels so good and, yes, I'm at an age that I think... Yes, [there was] a boyfriend of mine before that [my parents] really did not approve of and back then I really went along with them. But [now] I thought, no, this feels too good to say I will not do this.

Another way to deal with the criticism, the interviewed women experienced, is to wait for parents to meet the partner, until an interviewee was certain of the relationship. Others did the opposite by taking him to their friends and family, very soon into the relationship. The interviewees thought that it was mainly because of ignorance, that the surrounding was worried. And when they would see the partner, they would be more understanding. As Wietske said:

Wietske: And, yes, later, they, when [the relationship] turned out to be serious, [my parents] sometimes said, gosh, Wietske, is this what you want? And they had seen an episode of Grenzeloos Verliefd (love without borders). In which a girl was, in Peru. And her boyfriend was living in the middle of nowhere, somewhere, surrounded by horses and cows and pigs et cetera. [...] and she was in a small hut et cetera, so my parents thought: Are you sure? [...] But he (Wietske's husband) is living in a big city, you know, so it is not at all the case, so. [...] It is too, yes, since they saw him [...] it is not troubling them anymore. Now they think, oh, no, it is just an ordinary boy, and not a strange guy, not a weird Indian or something like that.

Reaction from people other than family and friends were not taken seriously. Roos responded to someone who did not agree:

Roos: What business is that of yours?

Another consequence of the prejudices in Dutch society is that employers rather employ native Dutch. One interviewee said that her man did not have a contract because of it.

Men got a much more accepting reaction from their family and friends, as was expected from the literature (e.g. de Hart 2000, Nagel 2004). In only two cases, the family did not immediately approve of the interviewee's partner. Both the interviewees do have religious parents. In one of these cases the mother said that the relationship could not work. It did not fit in the norms of her religion. Other reasons for her disapproval were that her son was divorced and his partner has an interest in spirituality.

In other cases, there were other concerns, such as age difference, meeting on the internet or him moving abroad. In one case the mother of the interviewee accepted his non-Dutch girlfriend, but did not want him to move, so she was glad his girlfriend moved to the Netherlands.

In several cases, the friends of the interviewed men encouraged the relationship. When friends were asked for advice, they encouraged the relationship. People less close to interviewees, were much more prejudiced. In one case colleagues gave their opinion. Like in Jos' case where his colleagues made remarks about a hooker from Thailand. In some cases, the respondent had been with a non-Dutch partner before, so the surrounding was not really surprised.

Like the women, most men did not have an international group of friends in the Netherlands or other binational relationships within their families. But several travelled a lot and have an interest in other countries and nationalities.

Because most men did not come across as many prejudices, they did not have to react on it. The men, who received a negative reaction from their surrounding, did not change the way they thought about their partner choice. But it would have been nicer if the family agreed with their choice. As Ivo explains:

Ivo: It is nice to eh, well, hear from your parents that, although you are grown up: Hey, what a lovely partner you have.

Almost all men found it important to have support from family and friends. They were, however, not bothered by the opinion people not as close to them gave.

Perception of nationality

There is also a difference in perception of the partner's nationality between the interviewed men and the interviewed women. Most women were much more prejudiced and adjusted their opinion more often than did men. Most men were more blank and often had not really thought about the difference in cultures. This is in line with the literature, where women are more selective and discriminating (Buss and Barnes 1986). The interviewed women had a much more positive or negative image of their partners' country in the beginning of their relationship or before they met. Later on, a more nuanced

view on their partner's nationality developed. A good example of this was given by Roos about the USA and American people:

Roos: [I did have a] very double sided [image], but I think all Dutch people do have that. Because, on one side [...] you do have a little bit of a Hollywood, TV-show image of it. So on one side it is quite fun and exciting. Wow, New York [...] L.A. On the other side, I did have a little bit of that typically Dutch [image] like all Americans are capitalists and bad and the wars and things like that [...] and they are all fake [...] And yes, [when I met more Americans] I realised, hey, they are just people too. [...] And they are not, either actors in movies or all bad guys. You know, it is just in between. And my image is very positive now.

An example of a very positive image of Ecuador that turned into a more negative image:

Wietske: [Initially I thought] it is all beautiful and so much better than in the Netherlands. O, how nice, look at the nice weather, and things like that [...]. But, now certainly not. Now I also have, you know, now perhaps you view it in a different way and now I do think, oh, help.

The interviewees gave different reasons for their non-Dutch partner choice. Several women have shown a preference for non-Dutch partners. In Paula's case it had to do with an aversion against Dutch men. Therefore she always had a preference for non-Dutch men.

Paula: Well, I do prefer foreign boys, I do. [...] I don't know [why]. I think it is just because I was born in Ollen, which is a really small village, with a lot of Dutch provincial boys. So I certainly didn't want that. [...] So, Then you are more likely to look, well, to foreign boys.

There were also other reasons, why women preferred a non-Dutch partner. Sanne noted that a relationship with a non-Dutch partner is less boring. She said that a relationship where everything was going smoothly did not match with her character. Character was important for a Linda. She said she did not want a pushover and associated that with Dutch men. Consequently, she preferred the natural macho behaviour of Italian men. Some other women, like Tineke, who has a Tunisian partner, did not have a preference for non-Dutch men and explains it:

Tineke: I did not choose him, because he is an inhabitant of Tunisia. I just fell for him, because I immediately liked him very much and [because of] what we had and not because he is a foreigner.

The interviewed men seem to be less prejudiced and did not change their opinion on their partner's nationality as much as the interviewed women did. For example:

Jos: [...] “In the beginning [of our relationship], I did not have an image of the Philippines at all. No, [when] I started a relationship with her... [I thought] I will look for it (the Philippines) on a map, haha, no, just joking. “

Some other men also had never thought about their partner's nationality and discovered the cultural differences over time. Erik did have an image in the beginning of their relationship and did not change this image later on. He, on one hand, liked the laidback atmosphere in Bolivia, but on the other hand he disliked the lack of discipline.

Several interviewed men have always had a preference for non-Dutch partners too. Like Frans, who has a German partner and prefers the unknown. He finds a different world and a different context very interesting. While Erik prefers non-Dutch looks, like a slim figure, and according to him, Dutch women are more heavily built. Cees does not know what exactly he finds attractive, but has always had an interest in non-Dutch women:

Cees: Always something foreign. But I always had, even as a child, you know, the first girl I liked was Indonesian, the first girl I really fell in love with was a quarter Surinamese, the love of my life was American. I did have an Indonesian girlfriend. So it has always been inside me, I think.

Other men did not have a particular interest in non-Dutch women. They just fell for their partner.

Jos: It just happened to come into my life. I'm open to anything and this, it's not about her colour for me, or, or, but just what her personality is like, and eh, that could have been a Dutch women as well.

In Uri's case he had never considered a non-Dutch partner, but he got to know a Thai woman. The respectful character, which was in his eyes typical for Thai people, very much appealed to him.

Uri: And I have to be honest, if I had met a woman like this before, I would have never been divorced, I have to say. Personally, the European women, the one woman I knew, let's say it that way, the two women, at a certain point it gets into a rut. Then there is no respect left for each other. [...]Nothing against the Dutch or European woman, but I think that the European or the Dutch woman is emancipated and [she] should be. [...] But I think it has been carried out too far.

For a different man a non-Dutch partner had never been an option because it did not match with the image from his childhood. He was very much attracted to the skin tone of his partner.

4.3 Opportunities

What are the opportunities in partner choice of Dutch men respectively Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner?

Is the question answered in this subchapter. It starts with how the interviewees met their partner and how the decision, to settle in the Netherlands, came to being. Followed by the influence of the Dutch policy. And the influence the distance and contact had, whenever the interviewees were apart from their partner.

Meeting and migration

Most women met their partner abroad, while on holidays or working or studying abroad. Only Paula met her partner in the Netherlands. Two women met their partner online. They were in the Netherlands and their partners were in their country.

Paula, who met her partner in the Netherlands, met him in a club, so public sphere. One other woman met her partner in a public place. It was in a café in France. She was on holidays there and he was staying at his family. The women, who were working abroad, met their partner in private sphere. One, through work and one, through church. One partner also had migrated to the country where the interviewee was working and the other partner was a native. The one that was studying abroad, Wietske, met her partner in the closed sphere in his country.

Two men met their partner on the internet. One, through an online game and, the other one, on a dating website. Most men met their partner in the Netherlands. Erik met his partner, while working abroad and Frans, while on holidays. Erik met her in private sphere; they were colleagues. Frans met his partner in a bar, while they were both on holidays. Two men met their partner in the Netherlands in a private sphere; one through his university and the other in a retreat. The others met their partner in a bar in the Netherlands or on the street, when she asked him for directions.

Not all interviewed women are currently living with their partner in the Netherlands; three women are living separately from their partner. All three do have at least one child with him. In Paula's case, it is quite certain that they will eventually live in the Netherlands together. As Paula gives her reasons:

Paula: Yes, I do have my family and friends here [...] I would find it terrible, my parents will become granddad and grandma, so to say [...]. So yes, eh, it's just, Iraq is very different. As a woman you are a lot more indoors than outdoors, you don't really have the opportunity to work. [...] I do want to work for sure.

In the other cases, it is still uncertain. In Sanne's case, the plan is to move to the partner's place of residence, but it is difficult, because they want to set up a successful business first in order to provide

for their children, which has already taken several years. The other couples, which are living in the Netherlands, are living there for several reasons. One of the reasons was that the interviewee did not speak the language and did not have a chance at a job in her area of interest. Her partner, on the other hand, did not follow a specific education, so he was more flexible. In several other cases the interviewee did have a better job than her partner did, or he did not like his job anymore, so it was quite easy to make the decision to settle in the Netherlands. In one case, the couple was living abroad and did not want to move to the Netherlands, but they had to, because their business went bankrupt and the interviewee got a burn-out. They plan to migrate to his country in the future.

All interviewed men are currently living with their partners in the Netherlands. This is mostly, because he had a better job or income, than his partner did. In several cases, the men's partner wanted to live in the Netherlands or Europe, even before they met, because they wanted more security for themselves and/ or their families. Another important reason to settle in the Netherlands, especially for those with children, is the social security and good education and health care in the Netherlands. Some men are thinking of migrating to his partner's country, but no serious plans have been made. Like Erik said:

Erik: Eh, look, one on side, I often dream, but okay, I don't know, I think it stays at dreaming, to for example, start a travelling agency or something like that, to, for example, try to let Dutch people book a trip to Bolivia and that I will be a guide, so to say.[...] Yes, on one hand, it seems fantastic to me. To taste a little bit more freedom and, but yes, it is also [my] character. But you do have a lot here [in the Netherlands]. You have, yes, it might be a bit more boring, so to say. But if you, on one hand, are used to that, it is quite difficult to live without the certainty.

Political and financial restraints

Like described in the literature on policies (e.g. de Hart 2003), it was much harder for the interviewed women to get a residence permit for their partner. For the unemployed man this period also was a struggle. The other men did not experience a significant problem with the policy. This also might be due to the fact that the partners of most men, who were interviewed, were from Europe.

In the cases where the partner's country is not a member of the European Union, it was quite difficult for the women to get a permit of residence for their partner. Mostly, because of the income demands, which are set by the Dutch government. In all these cases, the women did not have a contract, which was enough to ensure the income demand. In some cases, this was solved by changing the contract into a full-time one, like in Marie's and Karin's case. Especially for those who had lived abroad and had to build their lives again in the Netherlands, it was difficult to get a residence permit for their partner. For one of them it was very stressful as the procedure took thirteen months. She and her partner could not see each other over this period of time. The reasons for this long process were that she had to rebuild her life in the Netherlands; she had to find a job and a house. And, sometimes, they

needed to save money to pay for the next step in the procedure. On top of this, she was pregnant and lost the child, while he could not enter the country. He was not even allowed in on a tourist permit, because of the risk of settling in the Netherlands.

In Tineke's case it was very difficult at first. The couple even split up during the period in which they applied for a residence permit. But, they had never stopped the procedure and shortly after they broke up she found a house and a full time job, which was sufficient to meet the income demands. So after that, they got back together. He passed his Dutch exams and now they are living in the Netherlands. Another difficult case was Roos'. She did not meet the income demands, because she was self employed. Most of the money she made was invested back into the company. However, when she applied for the residence permit, she had to take out most of the money. This ultimately meant she could not invest into her company anymore and had to give up her company. Combined with this, she had to wait for months for the approval of the IND, which was very tough.

In another difficult case, a partner already applied for asylum before they met, but that was refused, so he stayed in the Netherlands illegally. Consequently, he can not apply for a residence permit anymore. He was not allowed to enter the country when she was pregnant and gave birth to their daughter.

Overall, the women were not happy with the immigration policy in the Netherlands. Most of them felt that the policy is affecting the wrong group of people.

For the partners of the interviewed men, the immigration went a lot smoother. Also because half, of the interviewed men, does have an European partner and one partner was already living in the Netherlands for many years. Most men with non-European partners did reach the income demands and did not experience any problems.

One man, however, is unemployed and did have a struggle applying for his girlfriends' residence permit. He was very frustrated about the fact that they could not develop their relationship in their own pace. For example, they are planning to get married, to make it easier to get a residence permit. Another obstacle was the waiting time at the IND. They waited for several months and phoned the IND almost daily. One day, he went to the IND and that was when they found out that the person who was supposed to process their dossier had been ill for several months. During this period, his partner had to go back to her country, so they were separated. Financially the procedure also was a huge burden, not only because of the fees, but also because she had to fly back to her country.

Distance and contact

Initially, the distance to their partner was less for most men. They, therefore, did have more occasions where they could see their partner. Contradictory, women, sometimes only saw their partner once a year for several weeks. The distance forced people to seriously evaluate their relationship, often in the first few months. In some cases, it meant that they were really sure, very early into the relationship. In other cases, the distance made the relationship more complicated and less sturdy.

In some cases the distance between Dutch women and their partner, was difficult to deal with. However, Linda mentioned that it also had its advantages; the time spent together became more valuable and there is more time left to spend with friends.

The frequency of meeting the partner differed a lot between the women. Some saw each other every month and others only once a year for several weeks. In two occasions, the distance was a reason to consider breaking up with the partner, and in one case it actually happened for a period of several months.

In other cases the distance enhanced the relationship. One reason is that the time spent together was very intensive, so it did not take that long to get to know each other. Karin explains:

Karin: Yes, but I think, if you are living with each other as intensively, eh, then you are in a flow. And you think it will all be alright, And if someone is away for a while, then you start thinking, do I really miss him or had it become normal that he is around? And then I realized no, I really miss him very much. [...] It was a confirmation of what I already felt for him, but that was emphasized by the fact that he wasn't there.

Most of the interviewees contacted each other almost every day. Mostly, through Skype and by phone. One interviewee was going through a very difficult period when she was separated from her partner, therefore she preferred e-mail instead of phone, because then she and her partner could be stronger for each other. Other interviewees liked the fact that they could see and hear their partner, like Linda said:

Linda: But we always had Skype, that's just very nice. [...] Yes, because we even left it on during the night, you know, like oh, good night. And then you wake up and you still see him, you know. [...] Or you have dinner together. Then you take the laptop with you into the kitchen and he does the same and then you both eat different things, but you'll find ways. [...] Or that we both, that we watched a movie, it was like, one, two, three, start.

Unlike the women, several men lived quite close to their partner. One partner even moved in with her boyfriend before they started a relationship. She had to go back to her country, because she had to apply for a new residential permit. During this time, they phoned each other. Jos' girlfriend moved in after a few months and did not leave. It was easy to get her residence permit. Some interviewed men were further away from their partner and found it difficult to maintain as close, like Bob:

Bob: Yes, Skype and once in a while, it is, if you do see each other every month, nothing really changes. But if you don't see each other for two months, then, I did notice it, because you have not been in a relationship all that long, that you then, eh, after two months you start to lose the idea, that you are in a relationship, a little.

But they saw each other quite often as she started to work in the Netherlands and they lived together off and on. Erik also had doubts during the period that they were not together:

Erik: It is very difficult to, so to say, keep the fire, yes, burning completely, so to say, over such a distance.

The distance did never bother Henk much, but his girlfriend did have more problems with the distance. He said that Skype works fine for him. They bought several things, like a good webcam and phone to improve the communication. The distance forced several men to make a decision very soon into the relationship. It did not progress normally, but big decisions, like moving in together, had to be made at an early stage.

5 Discussion, limitations and suggestions for further research

5.1 Preferences

In the in-depth interviews, the interviewees were asked what they had found attractive about their partner when they started their relationship. Most interviewees, men and women had certain things in common with their partner, like for example a similar education, similar characters, a similar religion or a similar upbringing. They, however, also experienced differences. Physical appearance did not seem very important for women, while most men found it very important at first. This is not in line with previous research in the Netherlands, thus it might suggest that people with a non-Dutch partner are more traditional than the general Dutch person. The difference in partner preferences can be explained in several ways. When looking at evolutionary studies, this difference might be because of a difference between men and women in sociosexual orientation (Simpson and Gangestad 1992). Sociologically it can be explained by the sex-role attitudes. When a person is more traditional, he or she will prefer more gender specific attributes, like beauty in women and SES in men (Eastwick et al. 2006). This suggests that, the more traditional a person is, the more difference there will be in partner preference between the genders. As the Netherlands is a relatively emancipated, non-traditional country, the difference between the genders in the Netherlands is expected to be small. This reason why the difference in the Netherlands is not significant was also mentioned in, for example, the study by Shackelford et al. in 2005.

Nevertheless, for most people, men and women, a combination of physical attraction and character was important. So, it might also be that women do not describe physical appearance as looks, but talk about the physical attraction instead, when they mean the same thing. In this case men interpret physical appearance differently than do women. Most men felt this attraction when they first met their partner, whereas many interviewed women had to know their partner's character first. This is in line with the previous research on sociosexual orientation. The outcome does not mean that the men did not find character very important, but often they found it of later concern.

Religion seemed to play a bigger role in the relationships of the interviewed women, than in the relationships of the interviewed men. This might be, because there were more religious women interviewed. Even when an interviewee and her partner did not have the same religion, they mentioned sharing the same values, because they both are religious. Most interviewed men are not (very) religious and do not really care whether their partner was religious. But does this mean Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner are more often religious than Dutch men with a non-Dutch partner? No conclusion, about whether Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner are more often religious than Dutch men with a non-Dutch partner, can be provided based on the cases described in this thesis. It, however, might be partly an explanation for the difference between Dutch men and women and,

therefore, further research on religion is recommended. Another element, concerning religion, might also be interesting to research further; in the interviews it was mentioned that some people involved in a binational relationship changed their religion prior to the relationship; one woman was an atheist and became a Protestant, one man became spiritual instead of a Christian, some people were Christians and became atheists, one partner was a Muslim and became Christian. Therefore, it might be that people with a binational relationship are more open minded and/ or like changes and/ or changed their religion for another reason. Subsequent research is recommended to find out whether, and how, religion and binational partner choice are linked and what the reasons for a person to change their religion are.

In general, for both, the interviewed men and women, it was important to be on the same intellectual level with their partner. Most interviewees did not really care about their partner's education. This indicates that both men and women might not really care much about their partners SES. Almost all the interviewees do earn substantially more than does their partner. This, however, can also be because the interviewees are living in the Netherlands and it is easier for them to find a job here than it is for their partner, who grew up and was educated abroad. This means the partner does not often have as many chances in the Netherlands. The reverse is also an option; maybe the interviewees and their partners are living in the Netherlands, because the Dutch person earns more. All the partners of the interviewed women did work, but often not full-time. This also applies to most of the partners of the interviewed men, some, however, did not have a job.

In most of the cases, the household chores were divided more or less equally between the Dutch women and their partner. Whereas most men wanted to divide it equally but in reality their partner did most of the housekeeping. So, Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner do not seem to be traditional in this aspect, while Dutch men do not appear traditional, while in reality the gender role division is more traditional. In both cases it can, again, be because of the opportunities for the Dutch in the Netherlands. They often have more chances to provide for their family than does their partner, so less time to do the household chores.

The interviewed men did often not have an image of their partner's nationality before they met. If an interviewed man had an image, he was not likely to adjust it when he developed a relationship with his partner. This was very different for the interviewed women. Almost all did have prejudices, both positive and negative, about their partner's nationality. Once the interviewee got to know her partner's background more, she often nuanced her perception of his nationality. This difference between the interviewed men and women may exist, because most men met their partner in the Netherlands and most women abroad; the women went to their partner's country, so were more likely to think about their culture. It, however, also might be, that, like in previous research, such as Buss and Barnes (1986), women are in fact more judgemental than men are. Additional research can show whether women are indeed more prejudiced and what the influence of the prejudices is on the frequency of binational partnerships.

More than half of the interviewees did not care whether their partner was Dutch or not. There were however, women, who had a preference for non-Dutch partners, as did several men. For both groups there were three reasons why. The first reason is physical appearance; they had a preference for a certain skin colour or figure. The second reason why the interviewees preferred a non-Dutch partner is because they felt a Dutch partner was too soft or too emancipated. The third reason is that a non-Dutch partner brings more excitement; because of the differences in cultures the relationship is not boring. The second reason suggests that there might be people with a more traditional gender role attitude and therefore a more traditional partner choice. Whereas, the third reason is an argument for the more flexible and adventurous character of Dutch people, with a non-Dutch partner. Interviewees, who preferred a non-Dutch partner, were not always more traditional in their preferences than people, who did not have a preference for non-Dutch partners.

5.2 Subjective norms

The subjective norms are about the influence of someone's social surrounding. In this case the influence on their partner choice. In the literature is described that, in general, men receive more approval for their partner choice, than do women (Sprecher and Felmlee 1992, de Hart 2000, Nagel 2004). The interviews held for this thesis showed the same. While women's family and friends were often concerned about their non-Dutch partner at first, men's surrounding most of the time did not express any concerns. Whenever the family and friends of a woman did have concerns, they almost always disappeared once they got to know the interviewee's partner. The reason for the interviewed women's surrounding to be more concerned might also be that most women met their partner abroad, instead of in the Netherlands, like most men. It might be that women are put off, by the opinion of their social surrounding, and, therefore, are less likely to have a non-Dutch partner. This study is only with people, who are still with their partner. Further research can show what the impact of someone's social surrounding on a partnership is.

In general, both the interviewed men and the interviewed women, cared what their surrounding thought of their relationship, but would not split up with their partner, when received negative remarks. People not as close to the interviewees did make remarks about the partners of the men and women. The interviewees did not really care about these comments.

In previous research, like Buss and Barnes (1986), shows that in general women are much more selective and discriminating, in their partner choice. As is described in the results, it was also the case in this research. Hitch et al. (2006) described that women prefer partners of their own ethnicity significantly more than men do. This might be a main reason why there are less Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner, than there are Dutch men with a non-Dutch partner. On the other hand, this might also be the case for the non-Dutch partners of Dutch men. Therefore no conclusion can be drawn from this and further research on this topic is recommended.

5.3 Opportunities

According to previous research, there are differences between men and women in meeting opportunities. This is especially found in the use of internet, like described by Scharlott and Christ (1999). From the interviews conducted for this thesis, there were no differences in meeting opportunities between men and women. This can be, because meeting opportunities are, according to Haandrikman et al. (2008), mainly dependent on demographic, social economic and spatial factors, and not so much on gender. Therefore, gender is less influential. There are, however, differences in the financial position of Dutch men and Dutch women (Statistic Netherlands 2011a). The interviews also showed a difference in economic status between men and women. But no conclusions about a difference in meeting spheres can be found. Subsequent research, that includes people with different financial positions, can be useful to find a difference in meeting opportunities. This could include the difference in demographic and socio-economic factors between Dutch men and Dutch women with a binational relationship.

The difference in economic status between the interviewed men and the interviewed women was quite remarkable, given that almost all interviewees were highly educated. The difference in income might be partly explained, because several women lived abroad for a while, so they just (re)started their career in the Netherlands. Haandrikman et al. (2008) described that the lower the income, the greater the proximity of a partner. This did not apply to the interviewees, as most men met their partner within the Netherlands and most women outside of the Netherlands. This might be a result, or, it might be, because most women were recruited on Buitenlansepartner.nl, while most men were found through personal contacts. On this website, a lot of people look for information on Dutch immigration policies, so it is more likely that the partner did not live in the Netherlands. Also here, further research is recommended.

As expected from previous research, Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner were more affected by the Dutch immigration policies. Mostly because they did not meet the income demands or had to wait a long time for approval of the IND. Most interviewed Dutch men were not affected. Here, again, should be noted, that the partners of the interviewed men were more often from Europe or already living in the Netherlands, which was not the case with the interviewed women. Like expected from previous research, the one unemployed man did experience difficulties with the migration policy and the IND.

According to Domosh and Seager (2001), women tend to migrate to their partner's country of residence more often than men do. This might be an explanation for the differences between men and women in non-Dutch partner choice in the Netherlands. For all interviewed men, the decision to settle in the Netherlands was quite easy to make. Whereas, for several women, it was more difficult. The main reason for settling in the Netherlands was the security, as the interviewees earned more in the Netherlands than they would abroad. Besides that, there is good education and health in the Netherlands. For women family was also a reason to stay in the Netherlands. Some of the interviewed

women are not currently living with their partner. Expected is that women are, indeed, more likely to move to their partner's country, as men in general earn more and people find the financial certainty important, especially when children are involved. Some interviewed women did have a better education and job prospects than their partner. Therefore, these women decided to stay in the Netherlands, where they have better job opportunities. Some of the men's partners already came to the Netherlands before they met in order to have more security for themselves and/ or their families.

As more interviewed men met their partner in the Netherlands, the distance was not as big. The distance between women and their non-Dutch partner was often much bigger, so they did, or do, not see their partner as regularly. The distance did have an impact on the relationships. Most women found the distance difficult to deal with and, in several cases, the relationship almost failed. In other cases, the relationship was stronger because of the distance. For men the distance sometimes also made the relationship less sturdy, as some men needed to see their partner to maintain as close. For several men, the distance meant that they decided to live together with their partner quite early into their relationship. The uncommon development of the relationship can have effects on the stability and duration of binational partner choice. This effect might be explained in further research.

Concluding, this study contributed to the more in-depth understanding of partner choice, especially in binational context. There are some limitations to this research. The most important one the different recruitment strategies used, for the men and women. Another limitation is that, all but two, interviewees are highly educated. And, what might be a limitation is that the men more often met their partner in the Netherlands. This research, however, provides many ideas for further quantitative and qualitative research. More research should be conducted to better understand binational partner choice in the Netherlands.

6 Conclusions

There are differences between men and women in all three elements of partner choice in this study. The most important difference found in preferences is that men initially seem to find physical attractiveness more important than the interviewed women, while the interviewed women seem to find character initially the most important. As this is not the case in the Netherlands anymore, Dutch people with a non-Dutch partner might be more traditional in partner choice than the average Dutch person. Some people preferred a non-Dutch partner, others just happened to meet one. Those, who preferred a non-Dutch partner, did so, because of three reasons; physical appearance of a non-Dutch person, aversion against a Dutch partner's character and, because of the excitement a non-Dutch partner brings.

Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner do have more prejudices, about their partner's nationality, than do Dutch men; maybe therefore they are, as described in the literature, less likely to have a non-Dutch partner than do Dutch men. Dutch women with a non-Dutch partner also experience more disapproval from their nearby surrounding, in the beginning of their relationship, than do Dutch men with a non-Dutch partner. This disapproval often disappears later on. There was not really a difference, between the interviewed men respectively the interviewed women, found in coping with the surrounding's opinion. There was also no difference in international orientation between the genders. Almost all liked to travel, but did not have an international orientated surrounding in the Netherlands.

Differences in opportunities were also found. Most interviewed men met their partner in the Netherlands, while most women, met her partner abroad. There were almost no differences in meeting opportunities between men and women based on this research. But, these two differences should be researched more, as they are also dependant on other factors and on the recruitment strategies used. The distance between the interviewee and his or her partner, in some cases, enhanced the relationship and, in some cases, made it more fragile. In general, it changed the 'common' development of a relationship.

Dutch women with non-Dutch partners are impacted more by the Dutch immigration policies than Dutch men with a non-Dutch partner. It is also likely that men with a lower SES also are impacted more than men with a higher SES. Most interviewees did earn more than did their partner. This might have been a reason to settle in the Netherlands, as the main reason to settle in the Netherlands is the financial security. And as men, in general, earn more, it might be a reason for women to move to their partner's country. Some Dutch men, Dutch women and/ or their partner changed their religion prior to the relationship.

Concluding, there are differences between men and women in binational partner choice in preferences, subjective norms and in opportunities.

7 References

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