

Secret seducers

True tales of pimps in the red light district of Amsterdam

Marion van San · Frank Bovenkerk

© The Author(s) 2013. This article is published with open access at Springerlink.com

Abstract At the end of the 1990s, a moral panic erupted in the Netherlands about the phenomenon of what came to be known as ‘loverboys’. The suspicion was that a growing number of Dutch girls were being groomed by handsome young men who employed all sorts of devious methods to prepare their girlfriends for life as a prostitute. Stories about a new generation of pimps, often of Moroccan origin, regularly appeared in the Dutch media. In this article, based on ethnographic field-work on pimps operating in the red-light district of Amsterdam, we describe the ways in which these young men operate and how they justify their behaviour. On the basis of empirical research we intend to present a more realistic picture of what goes on in the prostitution industry and highlight the discrepancy between what is reported in the media and what is actually happening in the prostitution sector. We also examine the background to the moral panic about loverboys and the ways in which these young men were supposedly able to induce many young girls into becoming prostitutes.

For more than a decade now, the Netherlands has been plagued by the criminal practices of what are referred to as ‘loverboys’. This English term has a unique definition in Dutch: loverboys are young men who use their seduction skills with the aim of exploiting young girls as prostitutes. What we are actually dealing with here are ordinary pimps and when we take a closer look at the modus operandi of these young men, we find that there is nothing new under the sun. The story about a new generation of pimps, often of Moroccan origin, who are busy grooming young and innocent girls for prostitution that continues to pop up in the Dutch media, appears to be little more than an urban legend.

M. van San (✉)

Faculty of Social Sciences/Rotterdam Institute for Social Policy Research (RISBO), Erasmus University
Rotterdam, P.O. Box 1738, 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: vansan@risbo.eur.nl

F. Bovenkerk

University of Amsterdam, Oudezijds Achterburgwal 237, 1012 DL Amsterdam, The Netherlands
e-mail: F.Bovenkerk@uu.nl

We have argued elsewhere [3] that what began as a moral panic about loverboys became a reality when young men started to re-enact and copy the moral panic. This is probably one of the ways in which a *real* social problem develops: the panic becomes a self-fulfilling example or, as Young [24] phrased it: fantasy is translated into reality. In this article, we will let the main characters speak for themselves: the young men who are the object of the panic explain how they began to participate in the discourse on what loverboys are. Their actions can be seen as a form of protest or social revenge in response to their low status.

Pimping is considered to be the ‘second oldest profession’ [17] and recruiting by manipulating a romantic relationship is nothing new. At the end of the nineteenth century, with industrialization and urbanization in full swing in the Netherlands, young men were observed at the exit of the Central train station in Amsterdam (see Collard, cited in [8]). They would accost girls who had obviously just arrived from the countryside to find a job and then seduce them and make them pregnant. With the bad reputation they soon had at home as unwed mothers, the men could easily pressure them into becoming prostitutes (Reitman observed similar practices in the US).

In the 1960s and ‘70s there was an enormous growth in the sex industry in Amsterdam and other Dutch cities. Foreign prostitutes from South America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Africa and Southeast Asia joined the ranks, and the Red Light District in Amsterdam became a veritable tourist attraction. Window prostitution was now easily accessible for women. It was clear that virtually all these women had a man at their side who they shared their earnings with. It was also clear what role the men played in the world of prostitution: they provided protection. The former neighbourhood pimps with their own little private business switched in the course of the 1970s and 80s to the far more lucrative trade in drugs [13]. This created an opening in the market. Brothel proprietors accepted the new pimps because they depended on them for their supply of women, but only on the condition that they operated discreetly.

At the end of the 1990s, a moral panic erupted in the Netherlands about the phenomenon of what came to be known as ‘loverboys’. A growing number of Dutch girls appeared to end up in prostitution as a result of their relationship with a certain kind of boyfriend. What was noteworthy was that many of the girls began working as ‘window prostitutes’ as soon as they turned eighteen, which is the legal age for working as a prostitute in the Netherlands. The suspicion was that many of these girls had gone through an extensive period of grooming by handsome young men who were using all sorts of devious methods to prepare their girlfriends for life as a prostitute. The moral panic arose because a number of parents found themselves powerless to prevent their daughters from falling into the hands of these young men. The young men allegedly responsible were subsequently labelled public enemy No. 1 and initiatives were developed all over the country to warn young girls about their activities.

In this article, which is based on our conversations with a number of so-called loverboys, we intend to reconstruct how their relationships with some girls ended with the girls being involved in prostitution. We also intend to demonstrate how these young men operate and what arguments they use to explain their behaviour. On the basis of our empirical research we hope to paint a more realistic picture of what currently goes on in the prostitution sector and to what extent there is a discrepancy between what is reported in the media and what is actually happening in the sector. At

the end of this article we will further examine the background to the moral panic that erupted at the end of the 1990s about the loverboys and the ways in which they were allegedly able to coax many young girls into becoming prostitutes.

Ethnographic research on pimps in Amsterdam

Between 2004 and 2006, we carried out ethnographic research on pimps operating in the red-light district of Amsterdam. The stories of victims of loverboys had been given wide publicity and the popular image of loverboys was therefore mostly based on statements made by young girls and on social workers' interpretations of these statements. The pimps were usually portrayed as handsome young men, often of Moroccan descent, who appeared to be able to win over 'weak' girls, shower them with gifts and then trick them into becoming prostitutes. The boys themselves had never been given an opportunity to present their side of the story and nothing was known about their version of events.

We first turned to the police precinct where the Red Light District was located. No girls were recruited as prostitutes there, but prostitutes did work there and the district was teeming with pimps. A district team of eight police officers monitored the daily course of affairs at the brothels and the prostitution windows. In principle, they had contact with all the women who worked there and checked their age and residence permits. At the time of the study, the Red Light District had 200 prostitution businesses and 350 prostitution windows, which were rented out in three daily shifts of 8 h. Some of the businesses were run by one owner, but a large portion of the prostitution and other vices were predominantly organized by sixteen criminal organizations that were already identified in 1995 [13].

With such a small police team, there was no way the contacts with the prostitutes could be anything but superficial. The fact remains though that the team compiled what they called a rogues' gallery of 76 faces for their own use, without the police authorities knowing about it.¹ They were men the police team had the impression were playing a leading role in the world of pimps. All of them had police records to demonstrate their violent tendencies. In the course of our field work on the streets of the Red Light District, we started to see and recognize more and more of them. We sometimes walked around with the policemen patrolling the neighbourhood and chatted with the women. These policemen knew which girls were the victims of loverboys. They were young white girls who sat at the windows looking glum and obviously did not want to be there. You could also recognize them by the tattoos they had done, with the name of their first pimp. It was difficult for the police to develop a relation of trust with the women, they said, because the pimps told their girls the police were all corrupt and collaborated with the brothel owners.

¹ In 2000, the ban on prostitution was lifted in the Netherlands. The Amsterdam authorities wanted to show to the outside world that administrative measures were more effective than criminal measures and, in line with this new policy, surveillance of the Red Light District was drastically reduced. This was much to the dismay of the vice team, which was well aware of the severity of the exploitation. The team decided on their own initiative, and without informing their superiors, to compile a rogues' gallery. When the Chief of Police became aware of this through our report to the city council, he was not amused.

We never got to see the pimps themselves this way. Later, without the police accompanying us or via the television circuit at the police station, we got to see young men ducking into the dark alleyways of Amsterdam when they saw the police coming, including plainclothesmen. However, they were not the 76 men from the album. These were the boys who seduced the girls and we were able to observe how they picked up the money and served as guards to keep the prostitutes from leaving.

Obviously, we did more than just follow the police around. In the course of our research we came into contact with a social worker working for an evangelically inspired organisation with an office in the middle of the Red Light District. Night after night, armed with bags full of bibles and informational material, we accompanied her on her rounds of the area in order to get in touch with the prostitutes. One of the more popular booklets we distributed described the story of a young girl who had been manipulated into becoming a prostitute by the cunning tricks of a handsome young man who turned out to be a pimp. Many of the ladies we spoke to claimed to recognize themselves in the story. According to their accounts, they had also been 'tricked' by their boyfriends. On the other hand, we also met girls who told us that they had made their own decision to become prostitutes and that it was only later that they had met a male companion who got used to getting a share of the money they earned. We became more and more interested in these young men, but since they tended to remain out of sight even during our rounds with the social worker - probably because they preferred to keep a safe distance as long as we were there - we realised that we had to find another way to get in touch with them. This was the beginning of a long and sometimes discouraging search, which ended in the prisons where such men - who were arrested and prosecuted on other charges - were serving out their sentences. From police information made available to us, we knew that these men were in prison for pimping, even though most of them had been convicted for violent offences, drug offences, or rape. The men were approached under the pretext of interviewing them on prison conditions. We found thirteen of them, all of whom were willing to speak to us in prison. The selection was made on the basis of our conversations with police officers who had been involved in individual loverboy cases. They described the thirteen cases as 'typical' loverboy cases, in which it was obvious that the young men had one or more girls working for them as prostitutes; the evidence presented in the court case included telephone taps; and the girls had eventually reported the boys to the police. We were unable to verify the information in the files, as the law in the Netherlands does not allow access to the criminal records of prisoners who are going to be interviewed. Therefore, we had to rely on the information we received from the police.

Our interviews with the pimps took place between the middle of June and the end of December 2004 and partly in 2005. All conversations lasted for about 2 to 3 h, were conducted using a topic list and were recorded on tape. In all cases, the conversation went relatively smoothly. At first, there was some suspicion but this soon melted away as the interview progressed. It was somewhat difficult to get the conversation going because we did not start off by asking our respondents about their pimping activities. The police had advised us against bringing up this topic immediately because in their experience these boys were usually reluctant to talk about their pimping activities and most of them would deny ever having been a pimp. In our experience, however, young men often enjoy talking about their criminal activities.

So, to get the conversation going we began by asking them about their experiences in prison and then quickly changed the subject to the various types of criminality they had been involved in. Given the fact that many of their activities (which were mainly drug-related) were linked to prostitution areas, it was relatively easy to steer the conversation to their pimping activities or to the practices of other pimps. As mentioned, most respondents denied ever having worked as pimps, but they did claim an intimate knowledge of the prostitution sector as a by-product of their drug-related activities. As the interviews progressed, the young men seemed to relish the opportunity to tell their story to a woman. They never mentioned the fact that the topic that was being discussed was not officially on the agenda. Apparently, the interviewer was able to build up enough trust to avoid any awkward questions. It should also be noted that most respondents had the ‘gift of the gab’, were quite charming and made frequent flattering comments regarding the female interviewer.

The young men were all between 21 and 24 years of age. Some of them were the children of Moroccan and Turkish guest labourers who had come to the Netherlands in the 1970s. Others had migrated at a young age with their parents from Surinam or Curacao, or were born in the Netherlands. They all belonged to the Dutch underclass. Their parents had come to the Netherlands to build a better future for themselves and their children, but judging from the young men’s stories, very few had succeeded. None of our respondents had completed their secondary education and none of them had a job. All of them had been involved from a young age in all sorts of criminality, such as street robberies, armed hold-ups, drug trafficking and prostitution. It was also found that their parents had received little to no education and belonged to the lowest income segment of the population.

Ways of seducing

The men were also willing to discuss our real questions on pimping, even if only to convince us they were *not* loverboys. They were initially suspicious but after some time, once they realized we really were interested in them and not just in confirming the stereotype loverboy story, they opened up. Of course their answers were self-serving and to start with, they had never been pimps themselves. In the criminal hierarchy, pimps occupy a much lower position than drug dealers or bank robbers. ‘But do you know anyone who is a loverboy?’ we asked. ‘Yeah, sure,’ they said, ‘so and so is a real authentic loverboy.’ After we suggested talking about ‘so and so,’ the rest of the conversation was implicitly about themselves. Several indicators revealed that they had personally lived through what they were describing. This was apparent from, among other things, the amount of detail in their stories (for example, how they had seduced a girl, how much the girls earned in a day, etc.)

It is striking that the pimps claimed it was the girls who took the initiative rather than them. The girls offered their services, or a girlfriend they had had for years was so scared of losing her boyfriend that she begged him to let her earn money for him, if only he would not break up with her. The pimps’ stories indicate that prostitutes are not always such passive victims as they are portrayed in the standard version of the loverboy story. ‘They want it themselves, they really do. I just see to it that my girlfriend works in a safe way,’ one respondent said. They emphatically denied ever using any kind of violence.

Judging from the cell phone conversations tapped by the police, in a number of cases this was an outright lie. In other cases, the argument seemed convincing, since we have found it is rarely necessary to use violence with girls who are in love.

The men were sly and cunning and knew how to work selectively. They went for unstable girls with low self-esteem. 'First you look at the girl. How smart is she? Because there are girls who are dangerous. They might go to the police or do something like that. It is better if they are on the stupid side. Really not much more than a body.' They told us that it was easy to tell whether a girl could be manipulated into prostitution because their victims shared a similar characteristic: they had all sorts of problems at home, as a result of which they were unstable enough to be easily influenced. In the study of victimology circumstances such as these are referred to as *victim proneness* [7]. Some people run a higher risk of becoming victims of crime than others. It would appear that these young men had developed a sixth sense for detecting vulnerable girls. As one of them told us: 'Listen, these are mostly problem girls. They have problems with their parents or they have debts; a long-term relationship has recently ended or they just broke up with their boyfriend. They're at an all-time low, and then a loverboy comes along. Someone with a lot of money, who takes her out to all the right places, pays for everything, spoils her or what have you. Eventually, there comes a time when the girl who gets everything from her man is expected to do something for him in return, but they often don't know how. Sooner or later these girls are simply going to be manipulated'.

At bars and clubs, on the street or on the Internet, they kept an eye out for girls with a slutty look. These were girls who behaved in a certain way ('she talks tough and she smokes dope'), dressed in a certain way ('she wears a top and you can see half of her tits'), hung around in bars at night, and were easy to get into bed.

Their tactics worked best with white Dutch girls. They had a lot more trouble with the daughters of immigrants, 'because those families have respect for each other.' In their view, this was not the case with Dutch girls: 'Dutch girls really are the easiest. (...) Nowadays, there are girls of thirteen or fourteen years old who have already lost their virginity. They go to clubs and discos and stay away from home for a whole weekend. They want to go out, they want new clothes, but they don't have the money. When a loverboy comes along and the girl spots him and he seems like a nice boy, things happen... Meeting a loverboy is like hitting the jackpot, you know what I mean?' One pimp told us that it was not only easier to get Dutch girls into prostitution, but that they were worth less than other girls and therefore deserved to end up as prostitutes. 'Culturally and religiously, a Dutch girl is little more than a pig to a loverboy. She's nothing, she's of no value. When that's what you're thinking, you can completely block out your emotions.' As mentioned, most loverboys were reluctant to manipulate the daughters of immigrants into prostitution, especially when it came to girls leading a pious life. 'We are obligated to treat Moroccan girls as we would treat our own sisters; we can't treat them as rags. You can't just make a Moroccan girl work for you. (...) Listen, when a Moroccan girl wants to do it, that's different. But if she goes to school and wears a headscarf, it's just not right'.

In the beginning, they did their best to make the girls fall in love with them so they could manipulate them. They went out with them and made all kinds of promises ('the two of us are going to open a club together') and spent a lot of money on them. The next step was to break the girls' ties with their friends and relatives and

schoolmates. 'What you do is to isolate them and make sure that she only has contact with you. If you treat a girl well and give her the idea that her future is with you, she will abandon her family and everything else for you.'

'And then you act like you are suddenly broke,' one of the young men told us. 'The girls are so in love by then that they are willing to turn tricks just this once if I say I need the money. After a couple of days, it is like the most ordinary thing in the world.' The boys also told us about the fact that some pimps gave the girls drugs to force them into prostitution and there was also mention of voodoo techniques, but we never came across an actual example of the use of such techniques during our interviews. It seems indeed that voodoo is a somewhat illogical way of manipulating white Dutch girls. It was mentioned by the boys as a possible technique to manipulate girls, but there is no evidence that they had ever actually used it themselves.

The respondents told us that the lifestyle of some pimps in the towns where they lived made it obvious to anyone that they were involved in prostitution. Certain girls were attracted to these young men and they would do anything to curry their favour. 'Some girls get to know you and then they just call you. They think it's the 'tough thing' to do. They'll tell you: I need money and I want to be with you. (...) When you're the one calling the shots, they want to be your girlfriend. 'The boys would give fate a helping hand by presenting themselves in a way designed to make an impression on the girls. As they saw it, it was important for a pimp to build up status. Status can be acquired by wearing designer clothes, driving fancy cars and spending money like water. When these conditions are met, the girls will flock to them, or so the pimps told us.

The pimps were smart enough to have insight into the girls' weaknesses and they exhibited considerable self-control in pretending to be madly in love for weeks or sometimes even years before they made their move. Then the hard thing was to have the girls accept sharing their fate with other girls. Well-known techniques in this world (see also the techniques of *Black Players in the Secret World of Pimps* described in the classical American ethnography by Christina and Richard Milner [14]) are to stimulate the rivalry among the girls and appoint a favourite bottom woman, i.e. the pimp's most experienced or trusted prostitute. One of them told us: 'One of the most important things is that you make sure that she is competing with someone else. You have her, but you also have another girl, and then you do little things to keep her thinking for weeks, you know. Or you make sure that she sees you with the other woman. You tell her that the other one works for you, whether that's true or not, and then she will automatically want to compete. At some point, they will accept anything from you. The girl will be thinking: he is also going out with this girl and that girl, but that's alright as long as I can also be his girlfriend. It seems he really doesn't need me anymore. When he wants money, he can also get it from her and her and her. But the thing is, this will only make the girl try harder.' All of this is strikingly similar to the findings of the physician A. Heijmans more than half a century ago. Heijmans [9] described exactly the phenomenon we encountered in the behaviour of present-day loverboys: a pimp will pit the various women working for him against each other in order to bind them to him. Heijmans concluded that 'the prostitute can be stimulated to compete with other prostitutes to gain the procurer's favour. This explains in part the prostitute's bondage to the procurer, notwithstanding the disdainful characterization of him as a parasite, brute etc.'

The most striking aspect of our interviews was the great variety in the statements about the pimps' lives and how they justified their conduct and style of operating. The scientific stage model made by psychologists and used by the courts to recognize the loverboy methods was too general. The fact remains though that these men, even when they were telling their own personal stories, constantly referred to the stereotype media image of loverboys. It was as if they had started to believe in it themselves. This could be the result of the used research methods, mainly talking *about* pimping with the pimps. It could be the case that these pimps are not only talking about themselves but mentioning everything they have heard about pimping. This could also explain why they referred to voodoo. A link was also repeatedly drawn with the dominant image whenever they talked about girls who left the life of prostitution, sometimes after a lengthy period of animosity. According to these men, the girls followed the fixed pattern so forcefully presented by social workers when speaking to their mothers, the police or their old networks. In reality, their own role in what was now called a violent relationship of exploitation was much larger. As one of the pimps said, 'After 4 years with me, she suddenly turned around and said I was a loverboy. She must have seen that movie or heard those stories. She wanted to get rid of me and she thought that was a good way to get at me.'

The boys naturally gave us their own version of events and did everything to present themselves in a positive light in the interviews, but at least some girls appear to have played a more active role than we might think at first. A review of the relevant literature (see e.g. [6]) shows that girls working as prostitutes often find it difficult to leave the business because they have trouble distancing themselves from the men who exploit them. It would appear that girls not only play an active role when they enter the world of prostitution, but once they have started also often participate in perpetuating their own exploitative situation. In the end, the prostitution environment – and there comes a point when this is the only environment they know – offers the girls a sense of security and as a result, they cannot or will not break away from their situation. There is no need for a pimp to supervise his girls around the clock, because he knows they are not likely to run away. It became apparent from the interviews that the pimps are rarely in the vicinity of the prostitution windows when the girls are working. They usually spend their time going to coffee shops, visiting relatives, dealing drugs, or working out in the gym. On occasion they take the girls to work or pick them up afterwards, but these chores are usually taken care of by the helpers.

Lastly, it struck us that these men were definitely not handsome boys, in fact they looked more like the older men in the rogues' gallery the Amsterdam police had compiled. For the first time, we were hearing first-hand information about the social organization of the modern pimping system. It was now finally clear to us what we had observed at night in the Red Light District and at the police station. It turned out that most of them knew each other from small prostitution areas all over Holland. Within these areas, there were clearly two different kinds of pimps. There were the older ones who did not actually come to the prostitution districts that much, and there were the young men, often still teenagers, whom they sponsored and supervised. These young men spent time in the prostitution districts, where they 'protected' the prostitutes from the police – in fact, to prevent the girls from reporting them to the police – and even more importantly, to make sure they did not switch to the crew of a different pimping boss. One of the boys told us: 'Pimps don't watch their girls' every move. They have people

for that. (...) The worst that can happen to a pimp is that his girl is snatched away by another pimp. *Because you lose a source of income?* No, because you lose face.’

Rival pimps pose a real danger but according to the boys the girls themselves pose the biggest risk. When a pimp runs off with another girl, his former girlfriend will not hesitate to make false statements against him, or so the boys told us. ‘They turn to prostitution with dreams of a nice future and when they see their prince on his white horse ride off with another princess, they want to get back at him. I for one don’t believe any girl who says she was forced to work somewhere for 2 years. If she says: I was forced to work there for a week, I’ll believe her, because you can’t do much in a week. But if she says: I was forced to work for a year, then I’ll just laugh in her face and tell her she’s lying’.

Imitating the pimp and ho culture

The research on which this article is based was designed to examine the perspective of young men who enter into relationships with the aim of exploiting girls as prostitutes. The stories of these young men remind us of the autobiographies of famous American pimps like Iceberg Slim [12] or the world of pimps described by K-flex Nasheed in *The Art of Macking* [15]. “Women are made to be humiliated, they have to obey and if they don’t, we need to take measures” and so on. What emerged from our interviews was that the classic loverboy story as told by the media rarely happened in the real world. Although we did find examples of young men purposely looking for women to start a relationship with, shower them with gifts, and then force them into prostitution we found that there were many different ways in which girls ended up as prostitutes. Some girls were already working as prostitutes and only later came in contact with a pimp. In some cases, it was the girl who showered her loverboy with gifts in order to prevent him from leaving her. Other girls entered into a business relationship with a young man and subsequently went on to work as prostitutes (see for research on relationships between pimps and prostitutes in Amsterdam and in particular business relationships also [21]: 42–49, 160–161). In short, there are many variations to the stereotypical story about loverboys that are constantly being repeated in the media (see [3]). Some instances of behaviour consistent with the stereotype of the loverboy appeared to have been inspired by either the popular media or the example of other more successful pimps. The pimps we interviewed were obviously motivated by the desire to exonerate themselves, but there may well be some truth to their statements about women who attempt to extricate themselves from the world of prostitution by resorting to the discourse of popular media accounts. Some were convinced that the girls had been inspired by these stories to phrase their complaint to the police in such a way as to make it seem as if they had experienced the standard loverboy story.

The public discourse around pimps is usually dominated by the perspective of the victim, but this approach stands in the way of a better understanding of the problem. Not only does it strip the girl or prostitute of her individuality – victimhood is, after all, no more than a condition or a status - but it also reduces the problem to the cliché of the pitiful and innocent victim exploited by a brutal villain. In reality, according to Weitzer [23], young prostitutes often contribute to their own situation. The prevailing image of

the current pimping problem, namely that the pimp is always a ruthless perpetrator and the prostitute a helpless victim, represents a step backwards in light of the insight gained by victimologists that the problem usually lies in the relationship between two people. Ine Vanwesenbeeck, a Dutch researcher and feminist scholar of international repute, likewise warned against taking for granted victim stories about girls working as prostitutes. “When researchers have difficulty understanding rational, not to mention positive, reasons for choosing sex work and find it easier to think of prostitutes as victims, it is understandable that sex workers will rather stress their victim status and negative motivations for working” ([19]: 259).

Given the fact that the Dutch loverboys and their prostitutes had been, until recently, regular school students, we continued our research by focusing on the mechanism of obsessive infatuation to explain these charged relationships. However, we gradually realized that there might be a link between the contemporary practices of young people at the age where they become sexually active and the choice to become a prostitute. This is not so much about sexual acts as it is about sex education, the degree to which coercion in relationships is considered acceptable, the role of the internet, and the effect of nudity and pornography on television. It should come as no surprise that young people growing up in families where sex is a taboo subject may turn to pornography for their sex education – as was true of most of the pimps we interviewed – and that their ideas about sex differ from those of young people raised in other types of families. Our next question addressed the extent to which the dominant American video clips distributed daily around the globe influence the sexual behaviour of young people in other countries. Many of these music videos glorify sexually promiscuous women (‘bitches’) and overdressed macho men wearing copious amounts of gold jewellery. The Afro-American pimp and ho culture centred around flashy pimps has been with us since the beginning of the 20th century, but it is only in recent years that this culture has become mainstream, as a result of popular hip hop artists such as Snoop Doggy Dog, Ice T, and 50 Cents promoting themselves as pimps. Dutch music channels too are responsible for disseminating music videos portraying ‘pimps’ and ‘sluts’ as role models. The obvious assumption here is that the images from the video clips are being copied by young people in the Netherlands. The young men we interviewed were all familiar with this culture: growing up as adolescents in the Netherlands, they had been inundated by the various music channels with images of successful pimps with ‘sluts’ at their beck and call. It would appear that ‘the style’ they adopt to look like real pimps is largely based on what they see in these video clips. One of the young men described how a successful pimp is supposed to present himself: ‘These pimps are all dressed in the same style. They wear a coat with a fur collar in winter and all that, they dress like pimps. (...) When you go out, you make sure to have a stack of bills in your hip pocket. (...) And many of these guys put their head forward, like this (*he demonstrates*). And for example, when you go out, you don’t talk much, but you act as if you are a serious person. (...). Everyone comes to greet you and give you respect and the girls notice that. And most of these girls are simply stupid. They will think these boys are making a lot of money. But they aren’t. They are making all their money off her. But the girls don’t realize that. Even when the girl is working for him, she will still think that he has his own business and that he makes a lot of money, but that’s not true. So all you have to do is act tough and the girls will come to you’.

However, it has never been conclusively demonstrated that television images directly influence human behaviour. The academic literature on the subject has little more to offer than a study by Collins et al. [5], which showed that watching sex on TV may precipitate the sexual initiation of young people between the ages of twelve and seventeen. The effect can also be indirect, such as when young people adopt hip hop music and the accompanying pimp and ho style. There is no doubt that black ghetto culture has entered Dutch teenage bedrooms. Young girls are trying their best to emulate sexy superstars such as Beyoncé by gyrating their hips and shaking their buttocks on the dance floor.

The moral panic about the behaviour of young pimps in the Netherlands is also undoubtedly ethnically charged. Regardless of the diverse ethnic origins of both perpetrators and victims, public opinion is mainly concerned with Moroccan (or Antillean) perpetrators overpowering white, innocent girls with their charms in order to exploit them ruthlessly [2, 3]. The popular music of famous rappers and the violent and promiscuous youth culture coming from the American ghettos to the Netherlands via the media have created an atmosphere where the sons of immigrants feel justified to ‘make their move’. All initiatives to draw attention to the scourge of the young pimps are designed to warn against men with bad intent and the moral message is always that ‘our women’ are under threat. But there is something else going on here too. The undercurrent of the moral panic about pimps in the Netherlands is closely related to one of the failures of the Dutch multicultural society, namely the love market.

The Dutch love market

The emergence of the Dutch multicultural society came about relatively smoothly during its initial stages. Immigrants arriving in the early 1960s from the former Dutch East Indies, the Moluccan Islands, Surinam, the Dutch Antilles and, later on, immigrant workers from eight countries around the Mediterranean and the Cape Verde Islands were fairly easily accepted by the indigenous population. This can be deduced from the number of members of the majority entering into relationships with members of ethnic minorities. The number of interethnic marriages is sometimes used as a tool to measure the level of mutual tolerance and amalgamation. Van der Most van Spijk [18] calculated that, at the end of the 1980s, one in three Surinamese (male and female) and two in three Antilleans were married to a Dutch partner. Veenman [20] found that 51 % of all Moluccans were involved in a ‘mixed relationship’. Van Praag [16] reported that almost 50 % of all South-European heads of households were married to a Dutch spouse and in the case of Italians the number was as high as 80 %. It should be noted that these developments took place in a country where only a generation ago marriages between partners from different Christian denominations were frowned upon. The history of interethnic mixing was until recently part of the success story of the Dutch integration policy. However, all this changed in the early 1990s.

Turkish and Moroccan guest labourers had begun to arrive in the Netherlands at end of the 1960s, early 1970s. These men were either unmarried or ‘acting single’, i.e. they were married but their wives had stayed behind. They lived with other men in boarding-houses and at first they seemed quite willing to join the prevailing ‘interethnic’ trend in the Netherlands. Exact numbers are not known, but many

entered into relationships with Dutch women. Voets [22] noted a significant number of marriages between Turkish and Moroccan men and Dutch women. Half a decade later, the situation was dramatically reversed. In 1994, Veenman found that only 4 % of Moroccans and 2 % of Turkish men were married to a Dutch woman.

So what had happened in the meantime? One of the major factors was the Dutch government's decision that there was no longer a need for the constant renewal of short-term labour contracts and work permits. Anyone who had spent enough time in the Netherlands on a residence permit was now allowed to reunite with his family or fiancée. Almost half of all those who had worked in the Netherlands as guest labourers returned to their country of origin, but those who stayed took advantage of the opportunity to effectuate a primary or secondary family reunion. This policy decision had a profound (unintended and unforeseen) effect on the character of Turkish and Moroccan immigrant communities in the Netherlands. The 'guest labourers' who had always been living in boarding-houses were now in a position to buy a house of their own and settle down with their families. However, the workings of the housing market resulted in most of them ending up in traditional Dutch working class areas. As members of cultures where honour plays a major role, they subsequently turned inwards and became focused on protecting the reputation of their women and other family members. Relationships with the outside world, intimate or otherwise, were abruptly severed. The indigenous residents would have perhaps been able to tolerate the 'newcomers' if only they had been more willing to participate in neighbourhood activities. But they were not, and that was what made the resident Dutch communities feel rejected. The most often heard complaint was not that the foreigners were 'different', but that they did not participate [4].

As it turned out, most of the immigrants were also unwilling to participate in the Dutch love market. Hooghiemstra [10] calculated that no less than 75 % of both first and second generation Moroccans and Turks married a wife from their country of origin (so-called 'import brides'). Another 18 % found a marriage partner within their own ethnic group in the Netherlands while only 4 % married outside their own ethnic group. The life stories of these youngsters may be very different from those of their parents, but they still seem to opt almost exclusively for partners from their own background and religion.

Resistance to the multicultural society at the personal level has come from two sides. Many immigrant parents still consider it unthinkable that their sons or daughters would ever bring home a girl or boyfriend from another ethnic group. Conversely, Hondius [11] reported that most Dutch women married to Muslims are also faced with rejection from their own social environment. Until this day, relationships between Dutch women and Moroccan men are frowned upon by many and there is always the fear that a Dutch girl who falls in love with a Moroccan man has been snared by a loverboy.

This public perception constitutes the undercurrent of the moral panic about loverboys. The various immigrant groups have produced second and third generations of descendants and there are still groups among them who appear to be unable or unwilling to participate in the mainstream of society. It is precisely these groups of young men at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy that are causing particularly annoying problems of criminality [1]. Such groups have been the focus of a range of policies aimed at minorities, but instead of seizing their chances many have opted for short term criminal careers over the long hard slog of getting ahead in society via education and

work. These young men also appear to be irresistible to a certain type of Dutch girl. The young men we interviewed all told us in their own words about the tensions in the Dutch love market and about the fears of Dutch parents about their daughters hooking up with a foreign boyfriend. As one respondent put it succinctly: 'Most girls here in the North had better not bring home a foreigner. It's really bad here in Friesland. But those girls, before they start to work or come into contact with a loverboy, already have problems at home. (...) I know a guy who met a girl, but her parents are real peasants, you know, they really don't like Moroccans. But what do you know, he gets invited to their house and the mother becomes really fond of him. He was acting a bit like a Dutchman, you know: drink beer with them, go to their parties. And that girl was totally nuts about him. She came to me saying: yes, I'll do anything for him, and that's when I thought, ok girl, you are going down (he laughs). Within two months she was working for him. But some girls are just taken away from their parents. They may have a good relationship with their parents but they are just taken away.' *But how do you manage to do that?* 'Some parents don't like foreigners much. They usually ask: are you still in school? No. Do you have a job? No. Are you on welfare? Yes. And then they'll say: he's not right for our daughter and this and that. But the boy will make sure that the girl is completely crazy about him. The girl ends up fighting with her parents, and there will come a time when she will just say to her parents: screw you, I don't care'. This respondent's story is exemplary of other stories told to us. Most of the young men made mention of their difficult relationships with the parents of their Dutch girlfriends. In their eyes, this had everything to do with the parents' prejudices against them. All of them mentioned the prejudice and the discrimination they were faced with as representatives of the Dutch underclass, and the reaction of the parents to the relationships they struck up with their daughters was, in their eyes, a variation on the same theme. In the words of one of our respondents: 'Her stepmother doesn't like Moroccans, even though she has a foreign daughter of her own (the stepmother's adopted daughter was born in Colombia). So, on one occasion me and my girlfriend (*who works as a prostitute*) arranged to meet them in the weekend, but when I phoned them I was supposed to call myself 'Michael'. Because when I say 'Said', she'll know it's a foreign name. Then the mother said: yes, you come and visit, as if everything was ok. But of course I couldn't go'.

Reasoning from the ghetto-idiom adopted by many of today's young adults, being a pimp is a form of revenge for social exclusion and discrimination. This revenge motif also comes up in Milner's ethnographic description of African-American pimps [14]. The customers of the ho's are usually white, which means that the pimps make their money off white customers. However, the highest status goes to pimps who are in the business of exploiting white prostitutes. These pimps have become the symbol of resistance against the subordinate position of the immigrant underclass. As one of our respondent summarized his position eloquently: 'What if you've been expelled from school because you have two gold teeth in your mouth? What if you can't get a traineeship because of that? What do you do when they keep sending you from pillar to post? They all look down on you. When I apply for a job by telephone they always invite me to come by, but as soon as they see my face, they'll say no, this person is not right for the position. So when you're always being dismissed and disrespected but you must survive in this country, what are you supposed to do? Such a person will think: you know what? If you spit on me, I'll spit on you. I'll make your girls work for me and I'll laugh in your face. That's how these guys end up thinking'.

Open Access This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits any use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and the source are credited.

References

1. Bovenkerk, F. (1993). Crime and the multi-ethnic society. A view from Europe. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 19(3), 271–280.
2. Bovenkerk, F., van San, M., Boone, M., Boekhout van Solinge, T., & Korf, D. (2006). *Loverboys of modern pooierschap*. Amsterdam: Augustus.
3. Bovenkerk, F., & Van San, M. (2011). Loverboys in the Amsterdam Red Light District: a realist approach to the study of a moral panic. *Crime, Media, Culture*, 7(2), 185–199.
4. Bruin, K., Wouters, H., Brunt, L., & Bovenkerk, F. (1985). *Vreemd volk, gemengde gevoelens. Etnische verhoudingen in een grote stad*. Meppel: Boom.
5. Collins, R. I., et al. (2004). Watching sex on television predicts adolescent initiation of sexual behavior. *Pediatrics*, 114(3), 280–289.
6. Dalla, R. L., Baker, L. M., DeFrain J. & Williamson C. (eds.) (2010). *Global Perspectives on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking: Europe, Latin America, North America and Global*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
7. Goody, J. (2005). *Victims and victimology: Research, policy and practice*. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.
8. Haveman, R. (1996). *Voorwaarden voor strafbaarstelling van vrouwenhandel*. Deventer: Gouda Quint.
9. Heijmans, A. (1956). *Vrouw en man in de prostitutie. Een sociologisch-psychologische studie*, Van Keulen: 's-Gravenhage.
10. Hooghiemstra, E. (2003). *Trouwen over de grens. Achtergronden van partnerkeuze van Turken en Marokkanen in Nederland*. Den Haag: SCP.
11. Hondius, D. (1999). *Gemengde huwelijken, gemengde gevoelens. Aanvaarding en afwijking van etnisch en religieus verschil sinds 1945*. Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers.
12. Iceberg Slim. (1969). *Pimp. The story of my life*. Los Angeles: Holloway House Publishing Co.
13. Fijnaut, C., et al. (1998). *Organized crime in the Netherlands*. The Hague: Kluwer Law International.
14. Milner, C., & Milner, R. (1972). *Black Players. The secret world of black pimps*. Boston: Little, Brown and Cy.
15. Nasheed, T. (2000). *The art of macking*. Chicago: Frontline Distribution Int'l, Inc.
16. van Praag, C. S. (1989). Huishoudens en huishoudvorming bij etnische minderheden in Nederland. *Migrantenstudies*, 3, 25–35.
17. Reitman, B. L. (1931). *The second oldest profession. The study of the prostitute's 'business manager'*. New York: The Vanguard Press.
18. Spijk van, M. van der Most. (1991). *Allochtone vrouwen in Nederland: een inventarisatie van onderzoek*, Adviescommissie Onderzoek Minderheden.
19. Vanwesenbeeck, I. (2001). another decade of social scientific work on sex work: a review of research 1990–2000. *Annual Review of Sex Research*, 12, 242–289.
20. Veenman, J. (1994). *Participatie in perspectief. Ontwikkelingen in de sociaal-economische positie van zes allochtone groepen in Nederland*, Bohn Stafleu Van Loghum, Houten/Zaventem, Koninklijke Vermande, Lelystad.
21. Verhoeven, M. A., van Gestel, B., & de Jong, D. (2011). *Mensenhandel in de Amsterdamse raamprostitutie. Een onderzoek naar aard en opsporing van mensenhandel*. Den Haag: Boom Juridische Uitgevers/WODC.
22. Voets, S. (1989). *Allochtonen in Nederland*, Stichting NIDI, rapport nr. 10, Den Haag.
23. Weitzer, R. (2005). 'New directions in research on prostitution'. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 43(4/5), 211–235.
24. Young, J. (2009). Moral panic: its origins in resistance, resentment and the translation of fantasy into reality. *British Journal of Criminology*, 49, 4–16.