

Sex to the Max – excerpts

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Back cover

Fifteen-year-old Max Wouda has to do a research project next year at school – and he decides to do it on sexuality. It's a subject that fascinates him. With an open mind, he wants to investigate how exactly it all works for gay people and straight people, how sexuality has changed throughout the centuries and in different cultures, and why so many people still find it difficult to talk frankly and honestly about sex. He's already started his research, in various different ways.

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This book was written by Max Wouda himself, before he experienced everything that can be seen in the *Jennifer to the Max* vlog.

Firstly, a note for you,

Max is dead. It's a tragedy. We – Max's parents – can't understand it. How could this happen? And how are we supposed to go on without Max? We don't know what effect his death will have on the rest of our lives, we don't know what it will do to his friends, or what significance it will have for you.

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He died in Berlin, on that fatal school trip that he was so excited about. But he couldn't resist the peer pressure, and it put him in a position he really didn't want to be in. And so things ended up taking a terrible turn for him.

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Shortly after his death, we found all kinds of things he was working on in his room. After the summer, when he was going to start his exam year at school, he wanted to write a research project on sexuality. There were notes on his desk, and we found a folder on his laptop where he'd written down everything he already knew and what he wanted to research, some pretty personal stuff. And letters he wrote to Sylvia, his childhood friend. Letters that he never sent. On his laptop there was also a transcript of a number of conversations he'd had with Gerard Zuidersma, an old man who used to be a teacher in our village. And on his iPhone we discovered a series of videos that he'd made at the home of Sylvia's father, Jan, and Jan's girlfriend, Else. It all said a lot about Max's attempts to explore his sexuality.

It belongs to Max and so it's very private. And it's about sex. Sometimes he describes things carefully, sometimes with a sense of humour, sometimes in a way that's very direct and to the point. We wondered for a long time about whether to make this public. After all, sex and sexuality are very personal. Besides, we have no idea if the questions that were on Max's mind are your questions too, or whether his search is the same as yours. Maybe you've already done way more than Max or perhaps you haven't reached the

same stage yet. That's something we don't know. But after hesitating for a long time, we decided to make this book about Max's search. Because it was so important. Not just for him, but ultimately for all of us – and that means for you too.

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We hope the book helps. Good luck!

Jacob and Nellie Wouda,
Max's father and mother

Letter from Max to Sylvia

Unsent letter number 8

Hey Sylvia,

Want to do your research project with me next year? I already have a theme. Sexuality. It'd be great to do it with you. (The project, I mean. Well, actually, I mean... If I'm being really honest... but I'm not, because I don't even dare to ask you this question out loud.)

If you don't want to do it, then just say no (that's if I ever really dare to ask you), because otherwise maybe I can do it with Marcel (I mean... hmmm, well... :-))

Project folder on Max's laptop

Sexuality research project

Main question: Why are we always so secretive about our sexuality?

Sub-question 1: Do people in other cultures and other countries talk and think differently about sexuality?

Sub-question 2: Can a person's sexuality change?

Sub-question 3: If sexuality is really that important, why can't we just talk about it?

Plan:
Collect information (Wikipedia, Google, forums)
Interview with Gerard Zuidersma (record and transcribe)
Think about my own sexuality
Ask/chat up Sylvia or Marcel

Note

Girls are 13.5 years old on average when they realize they like girls. Boys are 12.6 years old on average when they realize they like boys. (langlevedeliefde.nl)

Shit, I'm late!

File in Max's 'PrivateSpace' folder

Yesterday I watched Austin and Aaron Rhodes' coming-out video. They phoned their dad to tell him they're gay. Stuttering, shame, tears. What I liked best was their dad's reaction when Aaron tries to explain to him that he's still the same normal boy, even though he's gay now. The dad immediately shouts, 'You *are* normal! What do you mean?!' I thought that was great. 'Hey, it is what it is! You're living your lives, and that's all anyone can do in life.' What a cool dad.

I couldn't sleep all night after watching it. Well, first I gave my princely pole a quick polish while I thought about those two pretty-boys (Sylvia made me come yesterday, by the way! Well, at least thinking about her...). But then I thought for a long time about that video. About the dad. 'You *are* normal! What do you mean?!' What he was really saying was that there was no need for his sons to make such an issue about being gay.

And then I thought: if it's normal to be gay, then coming out of the closet is nonsense, isn't it? Because when you come out of the closet, you're actually saying to the people around you: 'Hey, I just wanted you to know I'm different from you.' It's good to be honest about it and it must be a relief not having to be secretive about it anymore, but it's still weird. Because what you're actually saying is that it's not normal to be gay.

Perhaps it's more of a relief for the heterosexuals when a gay person comes out of the closet. Then they can say: 'You see, we always suspected it, but now we're sure. You see, we were right. You see, he's different – and we're normal.' So maybe gays coming out of the closet is more important for straight people than for gays themselves. Weird.

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PDF transcript of interview with Gerard Zuidersma

'Coming out'? We didn't use that many English words back then, son. And we didn't do that kind of thing either. If you were gay, you sought one another out. And outside that circle of homosexuals, you kept quiet.

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When I started paying attention to it, homosexuality really was still seen as a problem. Worse than that – as a disease! Honestly. You still got sent to the doctor because of it. My mother had one of those medical encyclopaedias in the bookcase, and I once looked up the word. Do you know what it said under 'homosexuality'? 'Please consult your general practitioner.' Ha ha ha haa!

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Project folder on Max's laptop

The last Dutchman to be sentenced to death for being gay was Jillis Bruggeman from Schiedam. They whipped him until he was dead. The verdict stated that he had to die for 'filthy fornication'. That was on 9 March 1803.

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File in Max's 'PrivateSpace' folder

If you look up 'homosexuality and Islam' online, you'll find some fascinating articles. The Arab world is a very masculine society. Like the Greeks and the Romans, in fact. Everything revolves around the man. So the man has to prove his masculinity by penetration. And if women aren't that important, then penetrating a woman isn't much of a big deal. If you look at it that way, it's much more of an achievement for a man to penetrate another man. Then he's conquered something that's much bigger and stronger than a woman, and that makes him a superman. That's how it worked in ancient Athens and Rome, and much later in the Arab world too, I think.

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I find it hard to understand. It's partly because we always think that Muslims are all anti-gay. And that we're so very tolerant here in the West and they've got some catching-up to do. But maybe that's not quite right. In Pakistan, they recently did a study into the sex lives of truck drivers there. And what did they discover? Half of them regularly have gay sex. Even though nearly all of them are married to women. But now and then they add a guy into the mix too. Half of them!

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If you ask me, it's all just a big misunderstanding between the West and Muslims. We in the West think we're much more gay-friendly, but by making homosexuality so visible and by pigeonholing an entire group, we're just creating more resistance among people from a culture that's never made such a distinction between homosexuals and heterosexuals.
