

Same-sex attracted women and social integration into the neighbourhood: exploring the role of normativity around homosexuality

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Introduction

A large body of sociological studies has emphasized the importance of the normative climate (often on the country level) for individual well-being when studying behaviour which either aligns or is at odds with dominant norms in society. Examples are getting divorced in countries where divorce is relatively common versus countries where this is less common (Kalmijn, 2009) or being childless in countries that vary in terms of their pervasiveness of pro-natalist norms (Huijts, Kraaykamp, & Subramanian, 2013). In this study we examine to what extent this principle can be translated to (potential) differences in social integration between heterosexual women and women who report same-sex attraction in the Netherlands. In an earlier study, we have shown that the normative climate with regard to homosexuality on the country-level has consequences for social dimensions of well-being for persons who are in same-sex relationships compared to persons in heterosexual relationships (Fischer, Kalmijn, & Steinmetz, 2016). In this study we want to zoom in on smaller contextual units, namely municipalities. The advantage of testing this principle on a more disaggregate level is that we can do justice to the variation within countries, which could arguably be more relevant to individuals' daily experiences.

The Netherlands is an interesting case to examine such differences as the country is highly diverse despite its small geographic scale. Religiosity and church attendance vary strongly across municipalities. In 2006, the proportion of non-religious persons ranged from 3% to 80% across municipalities (Schmeets, 2009, p. 129). Accordingly, attitudes towards social and political issues, social cohesion and life styles vary as well (Schmeets, 2009). While the people in the Netherlands are relatively accepting of homosexuality in international comparison the society is internally polarized. There is a clear geographical component to this divide: the protestant north is traditionally more conservative on issues such as same-sex marriage than the predominantly Catholic south; individuals in the highly urbanized centres are generally far more accepting of homosexuality than individuals in the rural areas. We focus on comparing same-sex attracted women and not men for practical reasons as we have reason to doubt the quality of the Safety Monitor data for gay and