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Homophobia and same-sex partnership legislation in Europe

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to answer the practical question whether the institutionalisation level of same-sex relationships can affect the social acceptance of lesbian women and gay men in Europe, and highlight some of the factors that can potentially determine the incidence of homophobia in 26 European countries.

Design/methodology/approach – The study contributes to the literature on acceptance of lesbian women and gay men in Europe by using the European Social Survey dataset, focusing especially on a key variable measuring the agreement level with the statement that gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish. For data analyses, explanatory models were constructed by applying multilevel mixed-effects linear regression.

Findings – The study presented empirically tested arguments that the introduction of same-sex partnership legislation can lead to a decrease of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes, as has happened in the European countries examined in this study.

Research limitations/implications – Future research in more societies is needed to examine the long-term effects of the introduction of same-sex partnership legislation on homophobia.

Social implications – A key policy implication of highlighting that the provision of equal rights for gay and lesbian citizens in the form of same-sex marriage and registered partnership can positively influence attitudes, is to urge policy-makers to introduce these legal frameworks in order to create a more inclusive society.

Originality/value – The content presented in this paper is based on the authors' own original research.

Keywords Sex and gender issues, Laws and legislation, Europe, Discrimination

Paper type Research paper



1. Introduction

By the beginning of the twenty-first century decriminalisation of same-sex sexual activity of consenting adults had become a legal norm cultivated by the European Union as well as the Council of Europe. However, there are still some problem areas in the field of legal emancipation of lesbians and gay men, including the legal treatment of same-sex couples and their parenting rights, even though present day European social practices reflect a growing awareness concerning the problems of defining marriage exclusively

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Countries	Same-sex marriage	Registered partnership	Joint adoption	Same-sex partnership legislation
Austria	–	2010	–	357
Belgium	2003	2000	2006	
Switzerland	–	2004	–	
Czech Republic	–	2006	–	
Germany	–	2001	2004 ^a	
Denmark	–	1989	2007/2009	
Spain	2005	–	2005	
Finland	–	2002	2009 ^a	
France	–	1999 (PACS)	–	
UK	–	2005	2002 ^b	
Hungary	–	2009 ^c	–	
Iceland	2010	1996	2006	
Latvia	–	–	–	
The Netherlands	2001	1998	2001	
Norway	2008	1993	2009	
Portugal	2010	–	–	
Sweden	2009	1994	2003	
Slovenia	–	2005	–	

Notes: ^aOnly second parent adoption, i.e. adoption of the biological child(ren) of one's partner;

^bAdoption & Children Act – England & Wales; 2009 Scotland; ^cin Hungary, the legal institution of registered partnership was introduced already in 2007 (2007./CLXXXIV. törvény a bejegyzett élettársi kapcsolatáról), but it came into operation only in the summer of 2009 (2009./XXIX. törvény a bejegyzett élettársi kapcsolatáról, az ezzel összefüggő, valamint az élettársi viszony igazolásának megkönnyítéséhez szükséges egyes törvények módosításáról)

Table 1.
Same-sex marriage,
registered partnership
and joint adoption
in Europe

as a heterosexual procreative unit. Recently, the legal institution of same-sex marriage exists in seven European countries and there is a growing number of countries where registered partnership is a legal option for same-sex couples. Table I provides an overview of the introduction of same-sex marriage, registered partnership and joint adoption in European societies.

Political scientists also emphasize that the social exclusion and marginalisation of subordinate groups and persons, including lesbian women and gay men, is a wrong and harmful social practice not only because it undermines promises of equal opportunity and political equality implied in democratic commitments, but also because more inclusion of currently under-represented social groups can help a society confront and find some remedies for structural social inequality (Young, 2000). This recognition is reflected by the European Parliament's resolution of 2006 on homophobia calling on the member states of the European Union to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are protected from homophobic hate speech and violence and that same-sex partners enjoy the same respect, dignity and protection as the rest of society. The resolution defines homophobia as an "irrational fear of and aversion to homosexuality and to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people based on prejudice" (European Parliament, 2006), comparing it to racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and sexism, and strongly condemns any discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Since the publication of Weinberg's (1972) book on *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*, it has become a widely shared idea that it is not homosexuality that is to be seen as a disease, but homophobia. However, the term operating with a notion of a

specific, new kind of phobia, i.e. the irrational fear of homosexuals, has been heavily criticised already from the 1970s as being a misnomer focusing mainly on individual traits, and neglecting socio-cultural contexts where hostility towards homosexuality can be deeply embedded (Plummer, 1975, 1981; Kitzinger, 1987). For example, in 1980 homophobia was proposed to be interpreted only as a dimension of "homonegativism", a larger, multidimensional "domain or catalogue of anti-gay responses" (Hudson and Ricketts, 1980, p. 358).

Nowadays the term "homophobia" can be seen as a useful awareness raising tool about heterosexist, heteronormative oppression, rather than simply the denomination of a specific individual phobia targeting homosexuals – being similar to, for example, arachnophobia, the fear of spiders. Heterosexism and heteronormativity are used here as synonyms since both terms refer to the "authoritative construction of norms that privilege heterosexuality" (Fraser, 1997, p. 18), and to a specific form of cultural imperialism, i.e. the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm by projecting their own experience as representative of humanity as such (Young, 1990). The heteronorm can also be seen as the cultural ideology perpetuating sexual stigma, i.e. the "shared knowledge of society's negative regard for any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community" (Herek, 2004, p. 15). Systemic violence against gay men and lesbian women, such as violent attacks in many Eastern European cities witnessed during recent Gay Pride events, is a symptom of heteronormative social functioning, as in many Eastern European societies institutionalized social practices encourage, tolerate, or enable the perpetration of violence against gays and lesbians. Heteronormative oppression implies that gay men and lesbian women suffer disadvantage and injustice because of everyday practices resulting from unquestioned norms and assumptions underlying institutional rules.

Previous quantitative studies focusing on macro-level determinants of homonegativity and attitudes towards homosexuality in Europe, employed comprehensive theoretical frameworks including modernization, postmodernization, and cultural heritage theories, and found that more modernized, urbanized, postmaterialistically oriented countries with less religious influence tend to manifest more tolerant attitudes toward homosexuality (Inglehart, 1997; Štulhofer and Rimac, 2009; Gerhards, 2010). Our present study also relies on the main assumptions of these theoretical frameworks, and our empirical results will be shown to fit well with previous findings. However, our goal is to go a few steps beyond theory testing. The aim of our paper is to seek answers to the practical question whether the institutionalisation level of same-sex relationships can affect the social acceptance of lesbian women and gay men in Europe, and to highlight some of the factors that can potentially determine the incidence of homophobia in 26 European countries.

Providing legal frameworks for the institutionalisation of same-sex relationships in the form of same-sex marriage and registered partnership is obviously a very modern social phenomenon, having just a 21-year-old history in Europe. The legal institution of registered partnership for same-sex couples was first introduced in 1989 in Denmark, while it was 2001 when same-sex marriage became possible for the first time in Europe by The Netherlands "opening up"[1] the previously exclusively hetero-marriage for the use of same-sex partners, too. However, it is often debated especially in Eastern European countries, whether the legal institutions providing equal, or almost equal rights, for same-sex couples with different sex couples in the field of family and social

policies, can be introduced if homophobia prevails in a country. In fact, the politically opportunistic argument that society is “not mature enough yet” thus there is “no need to rush” in providing equal rights for lesbian and gay citizens, is most probably a very familiar one for many. The present article introduces an empirically tested argument that the institutionalisation of same-sex marriage or registered partnership can lead to the decrease of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes, as has happened in the European countries we have examined. A key policy implication of highlighting that the provision of equal rights for gay and lesbian citizens in the form of such legal instruments as same-sex marriage can positively influence attitudes is to urge policy-makers to introduce these legal frameworks in order to create a more inclusive society – even if they seem to be forerunning social attitudes at present.

Additionally, our study contributes to the literature on acceptance of lesbian women and gay men in Europe by using the European Social Survey (ESS, 2010) dataset, focusing especially on a key variable measuring the agreement level with the statement that “gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish” (where freedom of lifestyle is meant as being free and/or entitled to live as gays and lesbians). This is an ESS core question, which has been included in the core module of the main ESS questionnaires since 2002 in all four data collection waves already completed.

This ESS core variable, which served as our dependent variable, is also in use as a component of the “learning to live together,” dimension of the European lifelong learning indicators index, being identified as one of the four major dimensions of learning, with a special focus on the strengthening of cooperation and social cohesion (FRA European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2008; Saisana, 2010). It has also been applied in national research projects measuring levels of social acceptance of gays and lesbians. For example, in The Netherlands, it has been used several times, and was perceived as a general acceptance question, the results of which usually indicating the highest level of public support in comparison with questions on specific gay and lesbian policy issues such as same-sex adoption, for example (Keuzenkamp, 2010).

One of the advantages of using this ESS core variable derives from the relative clarity regarding its wording and content – even though there are no empirical results available about the possible range of interpretations and connotations attached to the statement it contains. However, it is most probably a much less ambiguous utterance than, for example, the one included in the World Values Survey and the European Values Study (EVS) measuring participants’ “approval of homosexuality” (Štulhofer and Rimac, 2009, p. 4) by their agreement level on a 1-10 scale whether “homosexuality is never or always be justifiable” – as it is hard to deduce what kinds of concept, behaviour, identity the respondents might have had in mind when answering.

It should also be noted that in present day survey research using the term “homosexuality” can be problematic for several reasons. “Homosexuality” can refer to specific forms of homosexual behaviour and identity at the same time, while there is no necessary connection between the two: as there are homosexually active people who do not identify as gay (Weeks, 1987), and there are (homo)sexually inactive people with gay or lesbian identity. There is also a possibility that the homosexual wording will lead respondents to think mainly of males (Herek, 1984). Additionally, even though the term was originally coined in the context of political resistance[2], from the late nineteenth century it became heavily medicalised, reflecting a pathological perception of homosexuality and people labelled by others as homosexuals. Thus, the present day

use of such a loaded term might imply the assumption of a larger social distance between society and the homosexual category, by showing the lack of respect for the self-definition of people with same-sex attraction.

In the present study, first, we have identified demographic predictors for social acceptance and rejection towards gays and lesbians at the individual level. When studying individual-level determinants of homophobia, a functional theory of attitudes was applied (Herek, 1984), focusing on three major needs that appear to be met by individuals' attitudes towards lesbian women and gay men:

- (1) Experiential attitudes are based on past interactions with gays and lesbians, and can be generalized to all gays and lesbians.
- (2) Defensive attitudes can have ego-protective functions (Duckitt, 1992) by helping to cope with one's anxieties, especially in the form of externalizing inner conflicts.
- (3) Symbolic attitudes, deriving from socialisation experiences, express important values in the context of developing one's concept of self and in the process of (publicly) identifying with important reference groups.

In our present study, we mainly relied on those symbolic functions of anti-gay/lesbian attitudes, which made them connected to religious and political socialisation outcomes, traditional gender ideologies and prejudice against other social minority groups, such as immigrants. It was also taken into consideration that declining living standards can play an important role in making people more vulnerable to prejudice and discriminative attitudes towards social minority groups, including gays and lesbians (Smith, 1994).

It was also an important goal of ours to identify country-level homophobia indicators, being connected to characteristic features of the examined societies, and not (just) to the personal traits of respondents. One of the most important such indicators are the institutionalisation level of same-sex partnerships, depending on whether the legal institution of same-sex marriage and/or registered partnership exists in a given country.

Satisfaction with democracy seemed to be also a suitable indicator to predict the level of homophobia in a given country as the non-oppression and the rights recognition of social minorities are basic democratic principles (Petrovic, 1999, 2002). For example, in a recent article Igor Kon (2010), a leading Russian researcher on sexuality, referred to homophobia as a litmus test for democracy and tolerance in Russia, and interpreted sexual minority rights as contributing to the well-being of all citizens, irrespectively of their sexual orientation. We have assumed that this litmus test feature could be applied not only to Russia but to other European countries, too.

As previous research has shown that negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women are associated with traditional views regarding the roles of women in society (Herek, 1984; Agnew *et al.*, 1993; Simon, 1998; Kite and Whitley, 1998), acceptance of traditional gender roles was an additional country-level indicator we applied. In this context, social acceptance or rejection of gays and lesbians were seen to be rooted in a broader gender belief system focusing on the appropriate, and usually not at all overlapping, paths of women and men in society.

In the following sections, first we will present our methodological toolkit and three sets of hypotheses about predictors of tolerance towards gays and lesbians both at the individual and at the country levels, as well as the impact of the introduction of same-sex marriage or registered partnership on the tolerance level towards gays and

lesbians. Our results will include findings gained by descriptive statistics, by applying multilevel mixed-effects linear regression models, and paired samples *t*-test statistics. Finally, in the conclusion we will summarize our main findings and state our empirically tested argument about the link between the introduction of same-sex partnership legislation and attitudes towards gay and lesbian citizens.

2. Data and methods

Our dataset derives from the fourth round of the ESS, conducted between the autumn of 2008 and the spring of 2009 in 30 European countries and Israel, following multistage probabilistic sampling plans, approved by ESS. However, data of three countries (Austria, Ireland and Lithuania) were not included in the main integrated ESS data file, we have worked with – either because of their missing design weight or because their sampling plan was not approved by the ESS sample team. The present study examines only 26 European countries, including Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Ukraine, and the UK, as we wanted to concentrate mainly on European Union member states and Eastern European countries. Another reason for omitting Israel and Turkey from the original set of countries the integrated ESS data file contained was the significant cultural differences between these two countries and the other ones, especially regarding religious traditions.

The ESS is a large-scale, cross-national longitudinal survey initiated by the European Science Foundation in order to study changing social attitudes and values in Europe. The first round of ESS data collection was completed in 2002. Since ESS is a repeat cross-sectional survey, in each round of data collection, following each other every two years, a core module and two rotating modules (focusing on specific academic and policy concerns, being repeated not in every ESS round, but only at certain intervals) are used. Our dependent variable is an ESS core question, which has been included in the core module of the main ESS questionnaires since 2002 in all four data collection waves already completed[3]. Thus, we were also able to examine the temporal changes concerning anti-gay/lesbian attitudes as measured by our dependent variable between 2002 and 2008.

The main questionnaire of the fourth round ESS data collection was administered by interviewers, who asked altogether 50,082 respondents aged 15 and over from the 26 selected countries. The national sample sizes ranged between 1,215 (in Cyprus) and 2,751 (in Germany). Our dependent variable measured the agreement level with the statement that “gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish” on a 1-5 scale, where the score of one meant strong disagreement, signalling a low level of social acceptance of gays and lesbians, while score of five meant strong agreement, signalling a high level of social acceptance of gays and lesbians[4]. Figure 1 shows an illustration of the mean values of our dependent variable in 26 European societies.

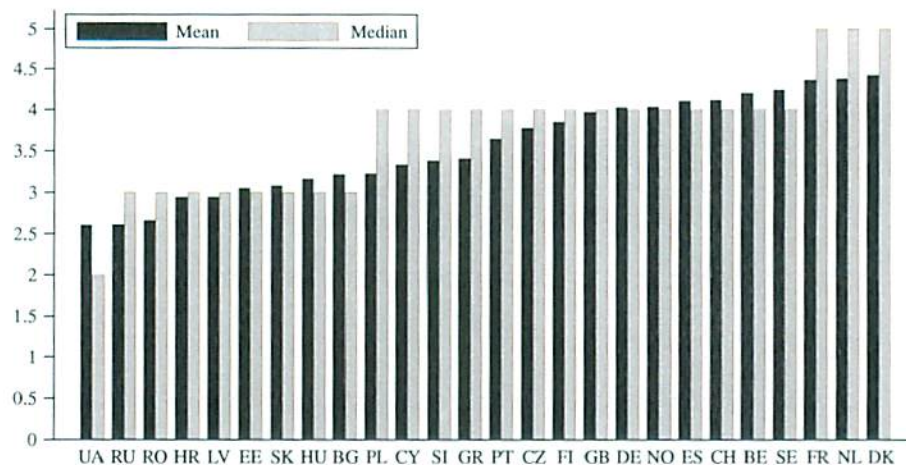
Regarding this variable the average response rate was 94 per cent in the 26 countries. In the analysis of descriptive statistics a design weight variable (provided by ESS) was applied in order to correct for the non-response bias and improve the accuracy of the survey estimates.

Our control and outcome variables included basic demographic and other sociological features such as the respondents' gender, age, highest level of education,

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Figure 1.
Average level of social
acceptance of gay men and
lesbian women in
26 European societies



settlement type, religiosity in three dimensions, political views, attitudes towards immigrants and traditional gender roles, satisfaction with democracy and satisfaction with own life. Table II provides a detailed description of all of the used variables.

For analysing our data sets multiple methods were applied. First, we interpreted descriptive statistics by constructing contingency tables and comparing mean values. At the next stage, an explanatory model was constructed by applying multilevel mixed-effects linear regression. Our regression analyses were conducted by the STATA 11.1 statistical program.

The statistical argument for using multilevel – or hierarchical linear – regression models is that citizens of a given country would not necessarily form views independent from each other according to the dimension of the dependent variable. For example, if same-sex marriage is a legal option in a given country, it is possible that a citizen of this country will manifest a higher level of tolerance towards gays and lesbians than the same citizen would manifest in another country where same-sex partnerships are not at all institutionalized. In this case, it cannot be guaranteed that the independence of observations, being a basic assumptions of standard regression models, is fulfilled, thus estimate results can become distorted. Applying multilevel models have the advantage of recognizing the partial interdependence of individuals within the same group – or citizens within the same country in our case. Multilevel models are useful for analysing data characterised by a complex variance structure, where this complexity of variance is caused by individual observations being nested in groups. During data analyses the total variation in the dependent variable is decomposed into within-group variance and between-group variance, while the two sources of variation can be studied simultaneously. Therefore, at this stage of our analysis we have introduced several individual- and country-level outcome variables into our model (Table II).

In the final state, there were only three country-level outcome variables remaining: the institutionalization of same-sex partnerships, satisfaction with democracy, and acceptance of traditional role of women in society. Institutionalization of same-sex partnerships is a dummy variable, where the value of one signifies that same-sex marriage and/or registered partnership is a legal institution in a given country, and the

Variable	Scale range	Description
Attitude towards gay men and lesbian women – dependent variable	1-5	B31: gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish. (Freedom of lifestyle is meant, “free/entitled to live as gays and lesbians”) 1 – disagree strongly; 5 – agree strongly
Institutionalisation of same-sex partnerships – country level, categorical, outcome variable	0-1	0 – same-sex marriage and/or registered partnership is not allowed 1 – same-sex marriage and/or registered partnership is allowed
Satisfaction with democracy country level, continuous, outcome variable	0-10	B27: how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country? (The democratic system “in practice” is meant, as opposed to how democracy “ought” to work.) 0 – extremely dissatisfied; 10 – extremely satisfied
I. Acceptance of traditional role of women in society – country level, continuous, outcome variable	1-5	D3: a woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work (i.e. work fewer hours) for the sake of her (nuclear) family 1 – agree strongly; 5 – disagree strongly
Gender of respondent – individual level, categorical, control variable	0-1	F2: 0 – male; 1 – female
Age of respondent – individual level, continuous, control variable	15-105	Age between 15 and 105
Highest level of education – individual level, categorical, control variable	1-5	F6: 1 – primary or first stage of basic; 2 – lower secondary or second stage of basic; 3 – upper secondary; 4 – post secondary; non-tertiary; and 5 – tertiary
Settlement type – individual level, categorical, control variable	1-5	F5: settlement, where respondent lives: 1 – a big city; 2 – the suburbs or outskirts of a big city; 3 – a town or a small city; 4 – a country village; 5 – a farm or home in the countryside
Religion I. Being religious regardless belonging to any religion – individual level, continuous, outcome variable	0-10	C21: regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are? 0 – not at all religious; and 10 – very religious
Religion II. Denomination – Individual level, categorical, outcome variable	1-6	Belonging to a particular religion or denomination: 1 – Roman Catholic, 2 – Protestant, 3 – Eastern Orthodox, 4 – Muslim, 5 – other, 6 – not belonging to any religion or denomination (created on the basis of C17 and C18)

(continued)

Variable	Scale range	Description
Religion III. Attendance at religious services – individual level, categorical, outcome variable	1-7	C22: apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays? 1 – every day; 2 – more than once a week; 3 – once a week; 4 – at least once a month; 5 – only on special holy days; 6 – less often; and 7 – never
Political views – individual level, categorical, outcome variable	0-10	B23: in politics people sometimes talk of “left” and “right” – where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right? Recoded into five categories (0-2 = Left; 3-4 = rather left; 5 = neutral; 6-7 = rather right; 8-10 = right) and those who did not answer to this question (8,305 respondents) are also included as the sixth category; 1 – left; 2 – rather left; 3 – neutral; 4 – rather right; 5 – right; 6 – not answering
Xenophobia – individual level, continuous, outcome variable	0-10	B40: is your country made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries? 0 – worse place to live; 10 – better place to live
I. Acceptance of traditional role of women in society – individual level, continuous, outcome variable	1-5	D3: a woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work (i.e. work fewer hours) for the sake of her (nuclear) family 1 – agree strongly; 5 – Disagree strongly
II. Acceptance of traditional role of women in society – individual level, continuous, outcome variable	1-5	D6: when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women 1 – agree strongly; and 5 – disagree strongly
Satisfaction with democracy – individual level, continuous, outcome variable	0-10	B27: how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in your country? (The democratic system “in practice” is meant, as opposed to how democracy “ought” to work.) 0 – extremely dissatisfied; 10 – extremely satisfied
Satisfaction with own life – Individual level, continuous, outcome variable	0-10	B24: all things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays? 0 – extremely dissatisfied; 10 – extremely satisfied

value of zero refers to the lack of institutionalization. Satisfaction with democracy and acceptance of a traditional role of women in society are variables with values on a scale of 0-10 and 1-5, respectively. Thus, these were interpreted as continuous variables, where the centrally adjusted mean values of countries could be compared.

However, we have tried to include several other country-level outcome variables such as having the legal option for joint adoption of children by same-sex couples, or having the historical experience of state-socialism, both being constructed as dummy variables. We have also tried to measure the effects of country-level xenophobic attitudes, by applying a variable of the main ESS questionnaire focusing on the attitudes towards immigrants, asking respondents whether the given country is made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live there from other countries. Finally, we have taken into consideration the possible effects of the general human development level of the examined countries as reflected by their human development index (HDI) scores (International Human Development Indicators, 2010), as well as the possible influence of unemployment as measured by (F8, F31) variables of the main ESS questionnaire.

Additionally, we have examined, by applying paired samples *t*-tests, how the level of acceptance of lesbians and gays changed in the countries where the legal institutions of same-sex marriage or registered partnership were introduced between 2002 and 2008. Thus, regarding these countries, we were able to conduct a kind of impact monitoring, too.

2.1 Hypotheses

We have constructed three sets of hypotheses on the basis of previous research findings including assumptions that negative attitudes towards gay men and lesbian women are associated with traditional views regarding the roles of women in society; religiosity factors such as membership in traditionally conservative religions and frequent attendance at religious services; as well as being older and having relatively little education.

According to our first set of hypotheses, focusing on descriptive statistics, we had the following assumptions:

- H1.1.* Women, younger people, those with higher level of education and living in more urbanized environments are more tolerant towards gays and lesbians than men, older people, those with lower level of education, and living in smaller settlements.
- H1.2.* Concerning religiosity we assume that beside the self-assessment of one's own religiosity (i.e. being religious irrespectively of belonging to any denomination), membership in certain churches or denominations can have more significant influence on manifesting homophobic views than not belonging to any denomination. Additionally we also assume that higher frequency of attending religious services can negatively affect attitudes towards lesbians and gays.

Concerning political views, xenophobia, acceptance of traditional role of women in society, satisfaction with democracy, and satisfaction with one's own life we assumed the following relationships between the variables:

- H1.3.* Extreme right wing supporters are more homophobic than others.

H1.4. Negative attitudes towards immigrants correspond with negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians.

H1.5. Acceptance of traditional role of women in society can correspond with homophobia.

H1.6. Higher level of satisfaction with democracy and one's own life correspond with higher level of acceptance towards lesbians and gays.

A second set of hypotheses focused on country-level effects:

H2.1. Having same-sex marriage and/or registered partnership as a legal institution in a given country has a positive effect on the social acceptance level of gay men and lesbians.

H2.2. Satisfaction with democracy has a positive effect on the social acceptance level of gay men and lesbians, too.

H2.3. Acceptance of traditional role of women in society can correspond with homophobia.

Finally, according to our third type of hypothesis, we have made the following assumption to be tested by impact monitoring:

H3.1. The members of societies become more tolerant towards gays and lesbians after the introduction of same-sex marriage or registered partnership.

3. Results

3.1 *Social acceptance of gays and lesbians in Europe*

In accordance with previous research findings on the relationship of basic demographic variables and tolerance towards gays and lesbians (Herek, 1984; Agnew *et al.*, 1993; Smith, 1994; Dunn, 2010), we have found various predictors of homophobia at the individual level.

According to the gender of respondents in the examined European societies women tend to be more tolerant towards gays and lesbians than men: 63 per cent of women and 60 per cent of men expressed their agreement with the statement. The proportion of disagreement was not very different between women and men, and the whole examined population was characterised by a relatively low level of disagreement (23 per cent for men, 22 per cent for women). According to the age of respondents younger people tended to be more tolerant towards gays and lesbians than older ones. There was a linear correspondence between the (younger) age of respondents and the (higher) level of acceptance they expressed. In the examined societies 60 per cent of people aged 55-64, and half of the population over 65 tended to be supportive towards lesbians and gays. According to the highest level of education people with a university degree expressed the highest level (71 per cent) of acceptance towards gays and lesbians – however, more than half (51 per cent) of those having only primary education also expressed tolerant views.

According to the type of settlement the highest level of acceptance towards gays and lesbians was expressed by respondents living in suburbs or outskirts of big cities (74 per cent), while the lowest level of acceptance was manifested by large city dwellers (59 per cent). These results, which might come as a surprise for some, can be explained as a reaction to the concentration of a gay and lesbian population in the less

directly controlled urban environments, having a more developed infrastructure for gay and lesbian social life, characterised by an increasing visibility of especially the gay male subculture in larger Western cities since the 1970s (D'Emilio, 1993 [1983]; Castells, 1997). For similar reasons, i.e. because of less direct social control and better infrastructure for maintaining social ties, there is also a growing concentration of immigrants in larger Western cities, some of whom might be characterised by cultural, especially religious, views rejecting gays and lesbians. However, this aspect should be examined more thoroughly in order to provide a satisfactory explanation.

Regarding religiosity we have focused on three dimensions, as religiosity factors were shown to be very influential on attitudes towards lesbians and gays by previous research findings (Larsen *et al.*, 1983; Herek, 1984; Agnew *et al.*, 1993; Ward, 2005; Stulhofer and Rimac, 2009; Dunn, 2010; Gerhards, 2010). One dimension of religiosity is being self-identified as religious regardless whether one belongs to a particular religion. According to this dimension the less religious one was, the more one tended to have a more tolerant attitude towards gays and lesbians.

Another dimension of religiosity we have examined was belonging to a particular denomination. In the 26 examined societies Protestants (72 per cent) and those not belonging to any denomination (73 per cent) expressed the highest level of agreement with the statement that "gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish", while Muslims (43 per cent) and followers of the Eastern Orthodox Church (42 per cent) expressed the lowest level of agreement.

The frequency of attending religious services was the third aspect of religiosity we have examined. According to our findings the higher frequency of attending religious services corresponds with higher level of disagreement about rejecting the idea that gay men and lesbians should be able to live their own life freely as gays and lesbians.

According to political views right wing supporters expressed the most homophobic views, while moderate left wing supporters tended to be the most tolerant ones[5]. Homophobic tendencies of right-wing extremists were already highlighted by previous research (Herek, 2004; Kon, 2010): for example, Haddock and Zanna (1998) emphasised the connection between homophobic attitudes of right wing authoritarianists and their perceptions of gay men and lesbian women violating values seen by them as inviolable.

The relationship between homophobia and racism as well as attitudes towards other outgroups[6], such as immigrants, has been also established by previous research (Larsen *et al.*, 1983; Agnew *et al.*, 1993; Herek, 2004; Ward, 2005; Kon, 2010). According to our results those with higher levels of rejection towards immigrants are characterised by higher levels of rejection towards gays and lesbians, too. In the examined 26 societies more than 70 per cent of the not at all xenophobic and only 47 per cent of the very xenophobic respondents agreed that gay men and lesbians should be able to live their own life freely as gays and lesbians.

The interrelationship of homophobia and attitudes regarding traditional gender roles has a well-documented research history, too (Herek, 1984; Agnew *et al.*, 1993; Simon, 1998; Kite and Whitley, 1998). Our findings also highlighted this connection by showing a high level of tolerance towards lesbians and gays (85 per cent) by those European respondents who strongly disagreed with the statement that a "woman should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family" and a much lower level (47 per cent) of tolerance towards lesbians and gays on behalf of those strongly supporting traditional gender beliefs.

According to the satisfaction level with one's own life the higher satisfaction level of one's own life corresponded with a higher level of acceptance of lesbians and gays. About 71 per cent of those who were satisfied with their own life also agreed that gay men and lesbians should be able to live their own life freely as gays and lesbians.

Acceptance of gay and lesbian lifestyles was shown to be connected to satisfaction with the way democracy works in a given country, and there was strong correlation found between the variables measuring satisfaction with democracy and satisfaction with one's own life (Sig. = 0.000). In the examined 26 European societies tolerant attitudes towards lesbians and gays were expressed by 75 per cent of those who were satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country and 53 per cent of those who were not (really) satisfied with it.

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the social acceptance of gays and lesbians and the satisfaction with democracy in 26 European societies, shows that Northern and Western European countries are much more tolerant towards lesbians and gays and at the same time much more satisfied with the functioning of their democratic systems than the post-socialist countries. In the democratic-tolerant corner of the examined social space we can find Denmark, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Spain, Belgium, Germany, France and the UK – all of these countries having a certain degree of institutionalisation of same-sex partnerships, either in the form of same-sex-marriage, registered partnership or both. While in the opposite corner, characterised by homophobia and dissatisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system, we can find the Ukraine, followed by the Russian Federation, Romania, Croatia, Latvia, Hungary and Bulgaria – all of these countries having a state-socialist past and not having any form of legally institutionalised same-sex partnerships. In between the

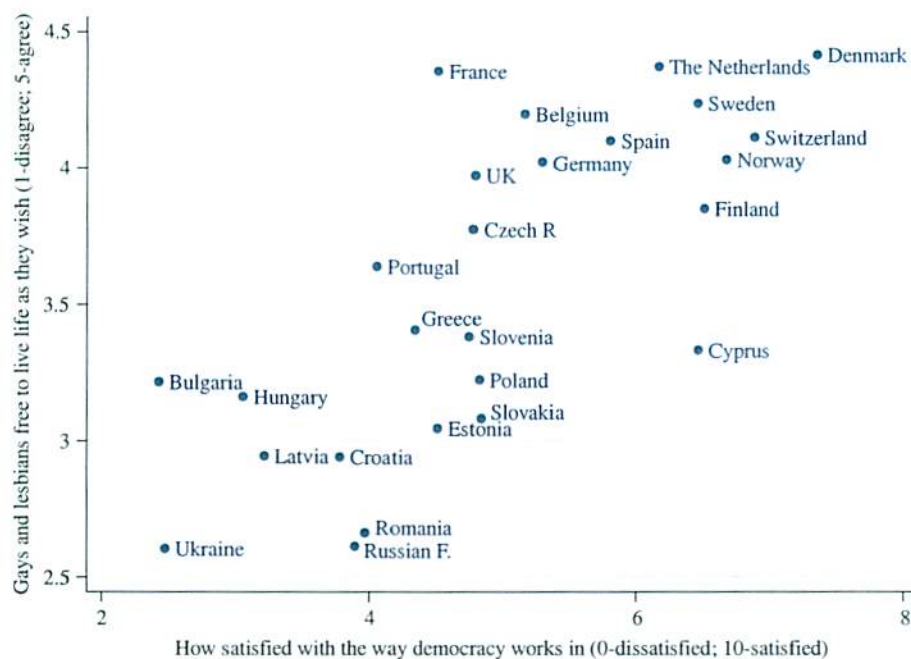


Figure 2.
Social acceptance of gays
and lesbians according to
satisfaction with
democracy in 26 European
societies

two corners there are three Southern European and five post-socialist countries: Estonia, Slovakia, Poland, Cyprus, Slovenia, Greece, Portugal and the Czech Republic – two of them (Slovenia and the Czech Republic) having same-sex registered partnership as a legal institution. Thus, it seems that at the level of individual perceptions a democracy deficit, expressed most of all in the former state-socialist countries, can contribute to the development of homophobic social environments. On the other hand, satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system can contribute to the increase of social acceptance of lesbians and gays, manifested also in having legally institutionalised forms of same-sex partnerships. Figure 3 shows the level of satisfaction with democracy and the institutionalisation of same-sex partnerships in the 26 examined societies.

3.2 Results of multilevel regression models

Applying multilevel regression enabled us to examine the effects of different level outcome variables within a model. After running our empty model in order to check whether the between-country variance level is sufficient for examining the effects of country-level outcome variables at all (Bickel, 2007), we have found that more than 20 per cent of the total variation in the dependent variable derives from between-country variance. This being a sufficiently large proportion [7], we have proceeded in trying to draw various country-level variables into our model. Effects of the given country's HDI score as a general human development indicator, unemployment rate, state-socialist past, prevalence of traditional gender beliefs in the population, the institutionalisation of same-sex partnerships and joint adoption, as well as satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system have been examined because most of these variables were shown to be influential regarding social acceptance towards gay men and lesbian women

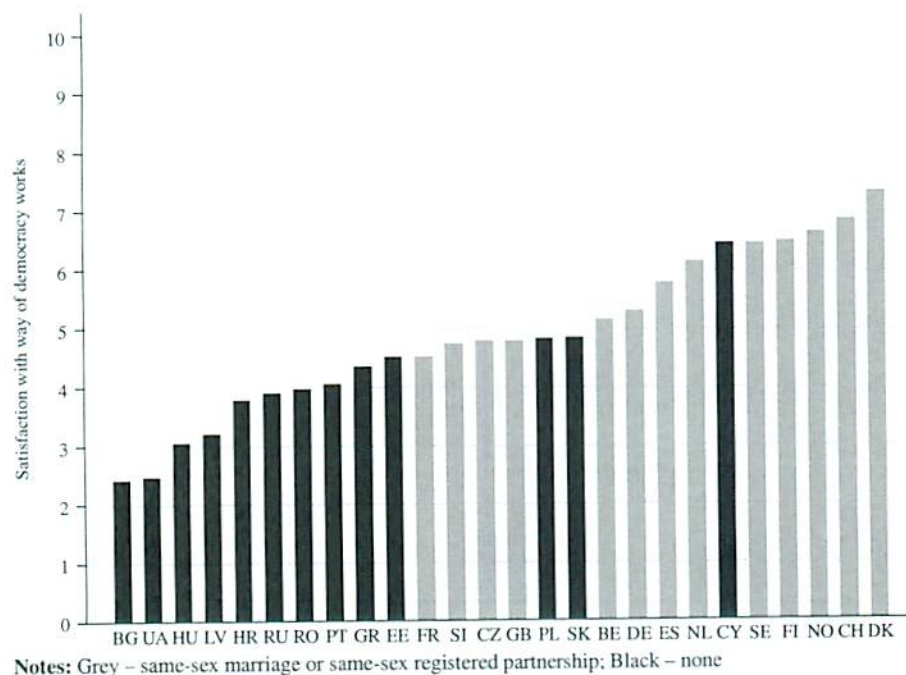


Figure 3.
Satisfaction with
democracy and the
institutionalisation of
same-sex partnerships

by previous research (including Herek, 1984, 2004; Agnew *et al.*, 1993; Simon, 1998; Kite and Whitley, 1998; Stulhofer and Rimac, 2009).

All of these country-level outcome variables one by one manifested a significant effect on the dependent variable, i.e. their significant effect was exhibited only in the case if just one of the country-level variables was included into the regression model. Thus, it can be stated that a country having a lower HDI score or a state-socialist past or a high level of unemployment or is characterised by the acceptance of traditional gender roles or is not characterised by satisfaction with the democratic system or not having institutionalised forms of same-sex partnerships and joint adoption is likely to be characterised by a lower level of social acceptance of lesbian women and gay men.

However, we wanted to develop a multilevel regression model by involving a country-level outcome variable that would have a significant effect on the dependent variable together with the institutionalisation of same-sex partnerships. Thus, in our next model there were two country-level outcome variables measuring the satisfaction with the democratic system together with the dummy variable of having or not having institutionalised forms of same-sex partnerships. Both of these country-level outcome variables kept their significant effect within this regression model, we called the democracy model, explaining the variance between the countries. At the same time, they also had a significant relationship with each other: societies having institutionalised forms of same-sex partnerships manifested significantly higher degrees of satisfaction with democratic functioning than those without institutionalised forms of same-sex partnerships. Table III provides an overview of the findings deriving from the application of the different regression models.

In another model, which we called the gendered model, we focused on the effects of traditional gender beliefs on homophobia. According to our findings in those countries where women are expected to put higher priorities on family life than on paid work, social acceptance of gays and lesbians tended to be lower than in more gender-egalitarian societies. In this model, beside the one country-level outcome variable measuring an aspect of traditional gender beliefs, there were several individual-level variables included, such as respondents' gender, age, education level, settlement type, self-assessed religiosity, political views, satisfaction with democracy and traditional gender beliefs – all of which together manifested significant effects on the level of homophobia.

Our fourth, complex model included the two country-level outcome variables of the previous (second) democratic model as well as almost all of the already examined individual-level control and outcome variables, except those measuring traditional gender beliefs. Both country-level outcome variables of the democratic model (i.e. satisfaction with the democratic system and institutionalisation of same-sex partnerships) as well as the already examined individual-level control and outcome variables manifested significant effects on the dependent variable within this regression model, too. Table III provides an overview of the detailed findings within our complex model, too.

3.3 Impact monitoring

The longitudinal feature of the ESS enabled us not only to examine the temporal changes concerning anti-gay/lesbian attitudes as measured by our dependent variable between 2002 and 2008 but also to conduct impact monitoring in a quasi experimental setting[8] focusing on attitudinal changes following the introduction of the legal institutions of same-sex marriage or registered partnership. In 2002, during the first round of ESS data