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Abstract

Attitudes towards gay men and lesbians are generally more tolerant in western than in eastern Europe. This study uses data from the first five rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS) to examine acculturation amongst migrants moving from eastern Europe to western Europe in terms of attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. After controlling for background factors associated with attitudes towards homosexuality, we find evidence of acculturation, whereby attitudes become more tolerant – and more typical of those prevalent in western Europe – with longer residency in this region. This study builds on existing research into cross-national differences in attitudes towards homosexuality and extends the existing North American literature on acculturation to a European context.

Keywords: homosexuality, acculturation, European Social Survey, migration

Searching for Evidence of Acculturation: Attitudes Towards Homosexuality Amongst Migrants Moving From Eastern to Western Europe

Introduction

Attitudes towards gay men and lesbians continue to vary cross-nationally within Europe to a considerable degree. Differing national views on this topic have even been a source of disagreement between governments. For instance, during 2013 there was disagreement between a number of European Union (EU) countries and Russia regarding a new Russian law banning the promotion of homosexuality (London Evening Standard, 2013). In addition, the issue of legal discrimination towards gay men and lesbians was a key part of the accession negotiations between some former Communist countries and the EU with a focus on the issue of the age of consent. In the case of Romania, for example, this required a significant change in national law in 2001 in order to bring rights for gay men and lesbians in Romania in line with EU requirements (Gerhards, 2010). In a number of central and eastern European countries there is a clear political and sociocultural opposition to gay and lesbian rights. This is particularly notable in Poland and Romania, although the picture is mixed, with some countries such as Hungary and Croatia adopting unregistered same sex cohabitation in recent years. This is in contrast to most western European countries where gay men and lesbians now have the same rights as heterosexuals (Štulhofer and Rimac 2009).

This paper focuses on the divide between eastern and western Europe on attitudes towards homosexuality. In part, the more tolerant attitudes towards homosexuality in western Europe compared to eastern Europe are likely to reflect post materialist theory that greater economic development produces more tolerant attitudes towards gay men and lesbians as well as other out-groups (Andersen & Fetner, 2008). Some of the differences

between eastern and western Europe on this topic simply reflect that western Europe is more economically developed than eastern Europe. In addition, Inglehart and Baker (2000, in Andersen & Fetner, 2008) suggest that the legacy of communism and the post-communist economic collapse have left a “survivor” instinct. Andersen and Fetner found that those from post-communist countries have an average tolerance that is ‘14% less’ than those from countries without a communist history (Andersen & Fetner, 2008: 952). However, Štulhofer and Rimac (2009) found that a European country having a state socialist past was only a predictor of social distance towards homosexuals once GDP was omitted from regression models, perhaps suggesting that economic development is more important. Furthermore, Hooghe and Meeusen (2013) found that the correlation between ‘years of stable democracy since 1919’ and GDP per capita was so high that it was impossible to combine both in the same model, suggesting that the effects on tolerance of a state socialist past and subsequent economic development may be impossible to separate.

Historical developments in this area should also be considered. The 20th Century witnessed the impact of increased individualism and sexual permissiveness across western Europe (Štulhofer and Rimac 2009), including France decriminalizing homosexuality in 1810 (Kon 2009). This compares to an eastern Europe that was dominated by state socialism until almost the end of the century. As Kon (2009) highlights, the Soviet Union ‘same sex love’ was a crime under Article 121 of the criminal code of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, as well as being considered a mental disorder stemming from a ‘bourgeois lifestyle’, until the Article’s repeal in 1993. Kon further notes that the repeal was largely triggered by a desire to join the Council of Europe, rather than representing social transformation on this issue.

Although the gap between east and west has narrowed overall since 1981, east European countries remain very different from their western neighbours in terms of sexual attitudes,

including towards homosexuality (Andersen & Fetner, 2008). Štulhofer and Rimac (2009) point to only one non-western European country among the ten European countries most accepting of homosexuality, whilst all ten of the least accepting were non-western European, with most in eastern Europe.

The European east / west divide in terms of attitudes towards homosexuality has been demonstrated by evidence from the European Values Survey (EVS) which clearly shows that non-discrimination towards gay men and lesbians is generally higher in northern and western Europe and lower in central, eastern and southern Europe (Gerhards, 2010; Kuyper, Ledema & Kuzenkamp 2013). The EVS tracks attitudes on this issue as far back as 1981 and suggests that, whilst tolerance has increased in general, an east / west divide in Europe clearly remains (Kuyper, Ledema & Kuzenkamp 2013). Analysis of the European Social Survey (ESS) further reinforces this divide: Findings from Round 5 of the survey (2010-11) demonstrate that whilst the vast majority of respondents in western European countries agreed with the statement that ‘gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish’, tolerance of homosexuality in eastern European countries was generally much lower. Furthermore, ESS data tracking attitudes to homosexuality between 2002 and 2010 provide evidence of a widening gap in more recent years on the issue between east and west. ESS data show that whilst some western and northern European countries have become more liberal regarding homosexuality, with increasing tolerance in recent years, attitudes elsewhere have been static or have even become less tolerant (European Social Survey, 2013). Takács and Szalma (2013:40) comment that “in the first decade of the 21st Century, the positive trend that could previously be observed in the post-socialist countries has changed into a broad spectrum of stagnation, reflecting that the ‘contest for the title of the most homophobic country’ (from post-socialist countries) is still an on-going event in the region”.

Findings from Round 5 of the ESS in 2010-11 demonstrate the rather clear east / west divide in European attitudes towards homosexuality. Figure 1 displays percentage agreement with the statement 'gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish' across different countries. Whilst the vast majority of respondents in western European countries agreed with the statement (e.g. over 90% in the Netherlands), tolerance of gay men and lesbians in eastern European countries is much lower (e.g. just under 30% in Russia). Whilst the differences between countries in the east and west are sometimes small (e.g. between the Czech Republic and Finland) a clear overall divide between east and west can be observed.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

This paper looks at the extent to which self-identity, including one's values and beliefs, is influenced by moving from one culture to another, using the issue of attitudes towards homosexuality as a case study. Using pooled data from the ESS, the paper explores the impact of migration from eastern Europe, where tolerance to homosexuality is generally lower, to western Europe, where tolerance is generally higher. It will do this by comparing attitudes towards homosexuality amongst people who were born in eastern Europe but moved to western Europe against the attitudes of those who were born and stayed in eastern Europe and those who were born and stayed in western Europe.

Age, gender, education and religiosity are closely related to attitudes towards homosexuality (e.g. Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Gerhards, 2010; Meston, Trapnell & Gorzalka, 1998; Scott, 1998; van den Akker, van der Ploeg & Scheepers 2013). Using data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), Scott demonstrates that the oldest age groups are most disapproving of homosexuality. Increased church attendance was associated with more condemning attitudes towards homosexuality, whereas education had a 'liberalising effect' (Scott, 1998: 837). Van der Akker, van der Ploeg & Scheepers (2013)

found in their detailed cross-national analysis using the ESS that those who participate in religious life more frequently, ‘comply’ with the anti-homosexuality norms of their religious institutions more than those who do not. Meston et al (1998) found that males were more negative towards gay men and lesbians than females, despite being more generally liberal about other sexual issues. This study will therefore control for these variables in order to try and identify the independent effect of migration on attitudes towards homosexuality. Although there may be many reasons for migrating, such as for work, family or political reasons, for the purposes of this paper and in the absence of relevant data, migrants are regarded as a homogenous group in this respect.

Theoretical Perspectives on Acculturation

The field of cross-cultural psychology asserts that the attitudes and behaviours of individuals who move from the cultural context in which they developed to a new cultural context are shaped by a ‘complex pattern of continuity and change’ (Berry, 1997: 6). This process is referred to as ‘psychological acculturation’. Within the acculturation process, attitudes, behaviours, and one’s sense of self, are modified according to experiences of and contact with individuals from the new (destination) culture. Referring to the 1936 work of Redfield, Linton and Herskovits, Ryder and colleagues describe this process succinctly: “When an individual moves from one culture to another, many aspects of self-identity are modified to accommodate information about and experiences within the new culture. This process, generally referred to as acculturation, involves changes that take place as a result of continuous and direct contact between individuals having different cultural origins” (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000, p. 49).

Moving from one country to another often (though not always) involves direct contact between immigrants and ‘natives’. Berry (1997) emphasises that although acculturation is in principle a neutral term, in practice it usually refers to the greater

influence of one group by the other and most often immigrants being influenced by the natives. Furthermore, he outlines that acculturation is a quite a broad term, with a key distinction between group level acculturation and that at the individual level. Group level acculturation emphasises that not all members of a group are impacted to the same extent by the process of inter-cultural exposure (ibid). This article seeks to examine only group level acculturation, whilst acknowledging there may well be differences at the individual level.

Ryder et al. (2000) outline the two major theories of acculturation. A unidimensional model of acculturation assumes a continuum of assimilation, ranging from complete identification with the heritage culture, to complete identification with the destination or 'mainstream' culture. Within this model, the adjustment of an individual to a new culture requires both 'culture shedding' and 'culture learning'. Acculturating individuals are seen as giving up the attitudes, culture and behaviours of their origin country and adopting those of their new home. The alternative approach is to view acculturation as bidimensional. Ryder et al. (2000) developed the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA), which takes into account both heritage acculturation, in which migrants retain a sense of identification with their heritage culture (culture of origin), as well as mainstream acculturation, in which there is an independent increased identification with the destination culture. In a study comparing sexual function and attitudes in Asian women living in Canada with Euro-Canadians, Brotto, Chik, Ryder, Gorzalka & Seal (2005) found evidence in support of the more complex operationalisation of acculturation. An effect of bidimensional acculturation (measured using the VIA) on sexual function was found to be independent of the effect of a unidimensional (length of residency) measure. This paper applies a unidimensional measure of acculturation, which is available on the ESS, since a more complex measure is not available.

Other studies have used the ESS to look for evidence of acculturation amongst immigrants on other issues. One study, for instance, found that after twenty years, migrants were as likely or even more likely to participate in civic life compared with people born in the country (Aleksynska, 2011). Another study found that immigrants adapt their gender ideology to the standards of their destination country as the origin country culture loses its impact over time (Röder & Mühlau 2014). This paper looks specifically at attitudes towards homosexuality.

Acculturation and attitudes towards homosexuality

There are few empirical studies about the process of acculturation on sexual attitudes and tolerance in the intra-European context. Most studies looking at acculturation and homosexuality have been limited to the North American context (e.g. Leiblum, Wiegel & Brickle, 2003; Luu & Bartsch, 2011; Meston et al., 1998). A study by Luu and Bartsch (2011) amongst the Vietnamese American community, found greater tolerance towards gay men and lesbians amongst those with greater levels of acculturation. A study of students who had migrated to Canada from Asia showed that those who had moved most recently held more conservative views towards homosexuality than those who had moved longer ago (Meston et al., 1998).

This study seeks to examine whether a unidimensional process of acculturation has taken place amongst those migrating from eastern to western Europe in terms of their attitudes towards homosexuality. In particular two hypotheses will be tested:

- a) Migrants in western Europe who originated in eastern Europe are more tolerant of homosexuality than those who were born and stayed in eastern Europe
- b) The longer eastern European migrants have lived in western Europe, the more similar their attitudes become to those who were born and stayed in western Europe.

Methodology

Data and sample

The data for this paper come from the European Social Survey (ESS). Established in 2001, the ESS is a biennial cross-national general social survey that is nationally representative of those aged 15 and over (Jowell, Kaase, Fitzgerald & Eva, 2007). Respondents are selected using probability sampling methods and interviewed face to face in their national language. Translations are also made available for those languages spoken as a first language by more than 5% of the country population. Interviews are not conducted in other languages in order to avoid deviations from the principles of standardised interviewing. Data files including countries who have participated are made freely available via the ESS website (www.europeansocialsurvey.org).

There are three key aspects of the ESS which make it a suitable survey to examine the impact of migration on attitudes. Firstly, all those aged 15 and over in residential accommodation are eligible – regardless of their citizenship status. Secondly, it provides information on the respondent's country of birth and how long they have lived in their current country of residence. Finally, it is a large cross-national study – with data available for multiple rounds – providing sufficient cases to allow sub-group analysis of migrants based on a random probability sample.

This paper focuses on those who stated that they were born in an eastern European (ESS) country and who were interviewed in a western European country. Definitions of 'eastern' and 'western' are based on geographical location (see below). To ensure a sufficiently large sample, analysis was conducted using the ESS cumulative data file, pooling data across the first five rounds of the ESS (2002-03, 2004-05, 2006-07, 2008-09 and 2010-11). The analysis includes 24 countries which had participated in at least three of

the first five rounds of the ESS¹: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom (defined as ‘western Europe’), and Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine (defined as ‘eastern Europe’). Whilst we recognise that there is country variation within the eastern and western European countries in attitudes towards homosexuality (see Figure 1), sample sizes were not sufficient to allow separate analysis of migrants based on their specific destination and origin country. Data from Israel and Turkey were excluded as neither can be classified as either eastern or western Europe. Portugal, Cyprus and Greece were also excluded from the analysis because they had low levels of tolerance towards homosexuality compared with other west European countries. Where potential respondents had a missing value on the dependent or independent variables they were excluded.

The final sample of 1,291 ESS respondents who moved from eastern to western Europe is described in more detail below. In the analysis, the attitudes of this group were compared against two groups of non-migrants, i.e. respondents who were born and interviewed in the same east European country (n=56,403) and respondents who were born and interviewed in the same west European county (n=106,475). All other respondents (for example those who were born in western Europe and migrated to eastern Europe, who moved between countries within eastern or within western Europe, or who were born in non-ESS countries) were excluded from the analysis.

Of the respondents who moved from eastern to western Europe, the largest proportions came from Poland, Russia or Croatia. The most common destination countries were Austria, Germany, Ireland and Switzerland. This pattern was consistent across rounds (country participation varies across rounds with full details on the ESS website).

¹ Number of countries included for each round of the ESS: ESS1 = 18; ESS2 = 21; ESS3 = 21; ESS4 = 23; ESS5 = 23.

A quarter (25%) of respondents had migrated to western Europe within the last five years before the interview was conducted, 40% between six and 20 years ago and just over a third (34%) more than 20 years ago. In Round 5 – but not in earlier rounds – the exact length of time the respondent had been living in their destination country was recorded. This variable can be used to give an indication of the ages of respondents when they moved. The majority of Round 5 respondents (90%) moved when they were under the age of 40. A third moved when they were aged between 15 and 24 (34%), or when they were aged between 25 and 40 (34%). Just under a quarter (22%) moved when they were less than 15 years old.

Measures

To measure attitudes towards homosexuality (the key dependant variable of this analysis), the ESS item on tolerance towards gay men and lesbians was used. This asks *‘Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement: Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish’*. Responses are coded on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = agree strongly; 2 = agree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = disagree; 5 = disagree strongly). Although reliance on a single measure is not optimal to measure a concept in a cross-national survey, earlier research suggests that prejudice towards gay men and lesbians is one-dimensional (Hooghe and Meeusen 2013) and that this ESS measure is an effective indicator for measuring homophobia (Takács and Szalma, 2013).

To ensure that data from all five rounds of the ESS were included in the analysis, the continuous measure of length of residency available in Round 5 was harmonised with the categorical variable on length of time since migration included in Rounds 1-4. To test the effect of acculturation on attitudes, respondents were classified into one of five groups depending on a) whether they had migrated from eastern to western Europe b) how long

ago they had moved to western Europe. The categories are: those who were born and stayed in eastern Europe (n=56,403); those who were born in eastern Europe and migrated to western Europe within the last five years (n=308); those who were born in eastern Europe and migrated to western Europe between 6-20 years ago (n=527), those who were born in eastern Europe and migrated to western Europe more than 20 years ago (n=456); and those who were born and stayed in western Europe (n=106,475).

The ESS data is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal; therefore individual respondents cannot be tracked over time to understand the effect of their migration on their attitudes. It is possible that individuals from eastern Europe choosing to migrate to western Europe have different characteristics from those who remain. Therefore it could be these initial differences, rather than the process of acculturation as a result of migration, which account for any the variation in attitudes observed between eastern Europeans who migrated and those who remained. However, it is possible to control for various socio-demographic variables to try and single out the predictive effect of emigrating on attitudes towards homosexuality.

To take account of the key drivers of attitudes, a number of demographic and other variables were controlled for. These included age, gender, years of education and religiosity which are known to correlate with attitudes towards homosexuality (Gerhards, 2010). As previous cross-national research has highlighted a relationship between religiosity and attitudes towards homosexuality (Scott, 1998) two variables measuring religiosity were also added: a self-declared measure of religiosity (measured on an 11 point scale, where 0 = not at all religious; 10 = very religious) and a measure for religious attendance, distinguishing those who attended religious services at least once a week compared to those who attended less frequently or never. Since those emigrating from eastern to western Europe might be very different in their underlying values from those

remaining in the East and since human values are known to correlate with attitudes towards homosexuality (Heaven & Oxman, 1999; van den Akker, van der Ploeg & Scheepers, 2013) we also controlled for some of the key human values. Four human value constructs (Schwartz, 1992) from the 21-item Portrait Values Questionnaire fielded in each round of the ESS (Davidov, Schmidt and Schwartz, 2008) were therefore included in the model. The items were tested for cross-national equivalence by Davidov and colleagues (Davidov et al. 2008). The questions are tailored to the gender of the respondent and only the female form is included here for illustrative purposes. All items used to compute the centred mean scores for each human value construct have the same response scale: very much like me (01); like me (02); somewhat like me (03); a little like me (04); not like me (05); not like me at all (06). Lower scores indicate closer identification with the construct.

The first value included is **Tradition**, measured by two items: 1 - *“It is important to her to be humble, she tries not to draw attention to herself”* and 2 - *“Tradition is important to her, she tries to follow the customs handed down by her religion or her family”*. The second value included is **Conformity**, measured by two items: 1 - *“She believes that people should do what they’re told. She thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching”* and 2 - *“It is important to her always to behave properly. She wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong”*. The third value is **Universalism**, measured by three items: 1- *“She thinks it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally. She believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life”*. 2 - *“It is important to her to listen to people who are different from her even when she disagrees with them, she still wants to understand them”* 3 – *“She strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to her”*. The final value included is **Security**, formed by two items: 1- *“It is important to her to live in secure surroundings. She avoids anything that might endanger her safety”* and 2 – *“It is*

important to her that the government ensures her safety against all threats. She wants the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens”.

Given that attitudes to homosexuality have become increasingly tolerant in some ESS countries over this time period (ESS, 2013), ESS round was controlled for using dummy variables for each round. The data were weighted to account for unequal probabilities of selection (*dweight*) and varying population sizes (*pweight*).

Results

Figure 2 displays respondents’ attitudes towards homosexuality across the five different ‘migration groups’. Compared to those who were born and stayed in eastern Europe, there is higher agreement with the statement ‘gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish’ amongst those who migrated from eastern Europe and amongst those who were born in western Europe. Agreement increases slightly with length of residency, but the three ‘length of residency’ groups do not differ significantly from one another.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

Table 1 displays the results of an ordinal logistic regression analysis, used to model the effect of migration on attitudes to homosexuality controlling for various background characteristics. The dependent variable – measured on a five point Likert scale – is coded so that higher values indicate more positive attitudes towards homosexuality. Model 1 is an initial model including background characteristics only. Model 2 (the final model) includes the key variable of interest, migration status. The addition of this variable in the final model represents a significantly improved fit of the data compared to model 1 (LR test: $\chi^2(20) = 28903.58, p < .001$).

The relationships between the control variables and attitudes towards homosexuality are all in line with previous research. Tolerance of homosexuality increases

slightly with years of education, is lower in males, decreases slightly with age, and is negatively related to religiosity, both in terms of (at least) weekly attendance at religious services (religious activity) and self rated religiosity on an 11 point scale. Of the human values, tradition, conformity and security are, as expected, associated with less positive attitudes towards homosexuality, whereas universalism is associated with more positive attitudes. The dummy variables for ESS round (with ESS5 as the reference category) display an interesting pattern. In model 1, attitudes towards gay men and lesbians in ESS1 and ESS2 were less positive compared to those in ESS5, whereas those in ESS3 and ESS4 were more positive than in ESS5. However, when migration status (length or residency) is added to the final model, the coefficients for ESS1 and ESS2 compared to ESS5 change direction, with attitudes becoming more positive compared to ESS5. This may reflect the relationship between the varying countries participating in each round and the migration status variable. As noted earlier in the paper there were small differences in the countries participating across rounds – with an increasing number of eastern European countries joining the ESS over the first five rounds.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

There is support for both acculturation hypotheses, albeit to a lesser extent for the second hypothesis, related to length of residence. Migration status is a significant predictor of attitudes towards homosexuality, holding constant the control variables detailed in Table 1. The odds of those who were born and stayed in western Europe having more positive attitudes towards homosexuality are almost six times those of respondents who were born and stayed in eastern Europe. The odds of those who migrated from east to west more than 20 years ago having more positive attitudes are just over four and a half times higher than for those who were born and stayed in eastern Europe.

A gradient is observed, whereby the odds of having more positive attitudes towards homosexuality (relative to people remaining in eastern Europe) increase with length of residency in western Europe. In comparison to those who stayed in eastern Europe, the results show a slightly more positive effect on attitudes of having moved to western Europe 6-20 years ago than having migrated in the last 5 years. However the difference between these migration periods is not statistically significant. This suggests that there is initial change in attitudes as a result of migration but that more substantial change happens only after a 20 year period. After 20 years the odds of those who migrated from eastern Europe holding positive attitudes to homosexuality (compared with those who remained in eastern Europe) are approaching the odds for those who were born and stayed in western Europe.

Cox & Snell's R^2 suggests that 28% of the variance in attitudes towards homosexuality is explained by the model and Nagelkerke's R^2 puts this at 30%.

Due to the uneven group sizes in the length of residency measure, a model using random subsamples of those who were born and interviewed in east Europe, and those who were born and interviewed in west Europe was also fitted. The results of the full model and the subsamples model were comparable, with only minor differences in the coefficients of the significant predictors. The results presented here therefore use the full sample.

As is often the case for models run with large sample sizes, tests indicate that – although it explained a reasonable amount of the variance in attitudes to homosexuality – the ordered logit model violates the assumption of proportional odds, i.e. the assumption that the relationship between each pair of outcome groups is the same ($-2LL\ 469598.993$, $\chi^2(51) = 2904.832$, $p < .001$).

As an additional test of the acculturation hypotheses, a binary logistic regression analysis was therefore conducted (table not shown but results available from the authors), whereby the original variable, with the scale 'agree strongly' to 'disagree strongly', was re-

coded so that 0 = 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly' with the statement, and 1 = 'agree' or 'agree strongly' with the statement. The 'neither agree nor disagree' category may be considered problematic for analysis due to its ambiguous interpretation as either the mid-point of a scale or a proxy 'don't know' response. Therefore, respondents who answered 'neither agree nor disagree' with the statement were excluded from the analysis (Kalton, Roberts & Holt, 1980). The direction of the effects of each control variable was the same in both this binary logistic regression and the ordinal model discussed previously.

Essentially the binary model reinforces the ordinal model with the same overall patterns. In the binary model, migration status remains a strong predictor of attitudes towards homosexuality, holding constant the control variables detailed above. In the binary model, the odds of those who were born in eastern Europe and migrated either within the last five years, or 6-20 years ago, having positive attitudes towards homosexuality are three and a half times higher compared with those who remained in eastern Europe. The odds of those who migrated from east to west more than 20 years ago having positive attitudes are over six and a half times higher. These findings confirm those obtained from the ordinal model (Table 1) i.e. that moving to western Europe has an effect on attitudes, but the largest effect is seen after people have lived in western Europe for more than 20 years.

Discussion

Self-identity, values and attitudes are shaped by acculturation. This paper aimed to explore the impact of acculturation on attitudes towards homosexuality amongst those migrating from eastern to western Europe. Since eastern European countries have lower levels of tolerance than most western European countries, a natural experiment on the impact of acculturation was possible.

Data from five rounds of the biennial ESS were combined to generate sufficient samples of those who migrated from eastern to western Europe, who were compared with

‘natives’ in western Europe, as well as with those who were born and stayed in eastern Europe.

The first hypothesis put forward was clearly confirmed. Migrants to western Europe who originated from eastern Europe are more tolerant of homosexuality than those who were born and stayed in eastern Europe, even after controlling for a range of background variables known to be closely associated with attitudes towards homosexuality. The second hypothesis was also confirmed. The longer eastern European migrants have lived in western Europe, the more similar their attitudes become to those in that region, and the less like those in eastern Europe. However, there appears to be little change between very recent and medium to long-term migration, with the most substantial change identified only after 20 years of living in the western European destination country. This suggests that whilst a process of acculturation clearly takes place, it takes a considerable period of time.

Whilst these findings broaden the field of acculturation and attitudes towards homosexuality to a European context, and are a promising first step in the use of ESS data to explore acculturation processes, the study’s limitations must be acknowledged. First, the ESS excludes those who cannot undertake an interview in a language spoken by at least 5% of those in the country of interview. Immigrants who cannot speak the language(s) in which the survey is fielded in that country – and who are therefore likely to be less acculturated to western European culture – are thus excluded from this investigation. Acculturation requires ‘continuous and direct contact between individuals having different cultural origins’ (Ryder et al 2000; 49), which arguably requires a level of shared language. The results of this study therefore cannot be generalised to immigrants who are unable to speak the language(s) spoken by more than 5% of the population in the destination western European countries.

Second, there may be limitations to using length of residency as a measure of acculturation. However, in the absence of a detailed bidimensional measure of heritage and mainstream acculturation (see Ryder et al., 2000), this study must rely on length of residency in the destination country as a rather blunt measure. Furthermore, for Rounds 1-4 of the ESS, length of residency is available only as a categorical variable (*'How long ago did you move to this country? Within the last year; 1-5 years ago; 6-10 years ago; 11-20 years ago; more than 20 years ago'*). From Round 5, this question changed to 'What year did you first come to live in [country]?' Future studies of acculturation using the ESS should benefit from the increased detail available on length of residency, with a larger sample.

Third, the absence of panel data requires us to be cautious about claims of causality. However, the inclusion of length of residency rather than a dichotomous measure of migration, and controlling for various demographic factors and human values (which are typically reasonably stable over time), should help to control for the possibility that those respondents in our sample who migrated from eastern to western Europe were already more tolerant of homosexuality than those who remained behind.

Finally, the model might be improved with the addition of country-level variables. Previous versions of both models included a dummy variable to discriminate between those countries which had any form of legal recognition for same sex couples at the time the respondent was interviewed, and those which did not. Although this variable had a statistically significant effect on attitudes towards homosexuality, it was removed from both models to negate the need for a multilevel approach. Exclusion of this variable had no effect on the key substantive findings of our analysis, or of the variance explained by the models. However, a further extension of this study might benefit from more detailed exploration under a multilevel framework.

Despite these limitations, our findings strengthen the existing North American literature on acculturation and attitudes towards homosexuality by providing empirical evidence in the European context. The effect of migrating from eastern to western Europe on attitudes towards homosexuality is one of increasing tolerance. Attitudes become closer to those typically found in the more tolerant western European destination countries, and over time, depart further from the less tolerant attitudes towards homosexuality that prevail in eastern Europe.

Future research using the ESS should benefit from increased cumulative sample sizes, making possible extensions such as exploring the effect of emigrating from western or southern Europe on attitudes towards homosexuality, or indeed the effect of acculturation on other attitudes and values amongst migrants within Europe.

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