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Attitudes Toward Parenthood, Partnership, and Social Rights for Diverse Families: Evidence From a Pilot Study in Five Countries

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ABSTRACT

Attitudes toward the civil and social citizenship rights of individuals in diverse family forms are underresearched. We use cross-national data from a pilot study among students in Denmark, Spain, Croatia, Italy, and the Netherlands to explore cross-country differences in beliefs about partnership, parenthood, and social rights of same-sex couples vs. heterosexual couples or married vs. cohabiting couples. The results suggest a polarization in students' attitudes between countries that appear more traditional (i.e., Italy and Croatia) and less traditional (Spain and the Netherlands), where the rights of married heterosexual couples are privileged over other family forms more so than in nontraditional countries. Moreover, equality in social rights is generally more widely accepted than equality in civil rights, particularly in relationship to parenthood rights and in more traditional countries. We discuss the implications of these findings and the implications for further research in this underexplored area of attitudinal research.

KEYWORDS

Citizenship rights; family diversity; gay and lesbian families; parenthood rights; partnership rights; social rights

Family forms have grown increasingly diverse in recent decades. Although heterosexual married households still dominate family structures across Europe, cohabitation and births outside of marriage are on the rise (OECD, 2013) as well as asexual or childfree couples, “living apart together” couples, and one-parent families or homosexual families (Ruspini, 2013; Saraceno, 2012). Some countries recognize this family diversity—for example, through new laws and regulations on registered partnership (of both homosexual and heterosexual couples) and same-sex marriages (Merin, 2010). However, the “second demographic transition” toward a chosen and dynamic family life-course (Lesthaeghe, 1983; van de Kaa, 1987) has clearly not been accompanied by a “universal” transformation of family laws and policies toward the equal recognition of diverse forms of partnership and parenthood. Indeed, the civil and social rights of

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same-sex and/or cohabitating couples have recently been accepted in some countries (e.g., Croatia, Finland, Ireland), whereas these rights are under new debate in other European countries (e.g., Italy, Portugal) and under threat or nonexistent elsewhere (e.g., Poland, Slovakia; see ILGA, 2015).

One crucial factor possibly hampering the realization of family-related citizenship rights is negative national attitudes toward the rights of cohabiting or same-sex couples (e.g., Kuyper, Iedema, & Keuzenkamp, 2013). Yet research examining these attitudes is rare and fragmented at best. On the one hand, the large body of research focusing on attitudes toward the redistributive role of the welfare state (e.g., Raven, Achterberg, van der Veen, & Yerkes, 2011; Sachweh & Olafsdottir, 2012; van Oorschot, 2007; Wright & Reeskens, 2013) does not address social rights connected to living in diverse family forms. On the other hand, the various studies focusing on attitudes toward homosexuality (e.g., Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; Kuntz, Davidov, Schwartz, & Schmidt, 2015; Kuyper et al., 2013; Takács & Szalma, 2013; van den Akker, van der Ploeg and Scheepers, 2013) or marriage and alternative forms of family formation (Treas, Lui, & Gubernskaya, 2014) have tended to address the general acceptance of “diverse family forms” or “diverse individuals” without addressing the issue of citizenship rights attached to this diversity. Exceptions to this include studies providing insights into attitudes toward the rights of same-sex couples in the United States (Doan, Loehr, & Miller, 2014; Miller & Chamberlain, 2013), Portugal (Costa et al., 2014), and Sweden and Norway (Jakobsson, Kotsadam, & Jakobsson, 2013). Yet few studies address attitudes toward parenthood rights or the issue of social rights for LGBT individuals or for alternative family forms, and almost none consider cross-national variation in these attitudes.

Using cross-national data from a pilot study among students in five European countries—Denmark, Spain, Croatia, Italy, and the Netherlands—this article explores cross-country differences in attitudes toward the social and civil rights of same-sex couples vs. heterosexual couples and married vs. cohabiting couples. The results presented here, while explorative in nature, provide an important foundation for future studies and theory building on the relationship between attitudes and citizenship rights in an increasingly diverse world.

Previous research

The definition of citizenship, particularly in relation to citizenship rights, is often traced back to T. H. Marshall’s seminal work on the subject (Marshall, 1950). Citizenship, in Marshall’s terms, centers on the rights of individuals

as recognized members of a nation state. *Civil rights* guarantee an individual's right to equality by due process of law. Marshall's work on citizenship rights was primarily progressive for conceptualizing *social rights* in the same terms as civil rights (as well as political and economic rights; see Stephens, 2010). His definition of social rights was quite broad, encompassing a wide cache of rights and benefits, such as the right to work (full employment), income protection, housing, education, and health care, in essence ensuring a minimum standard of living.

Civil and social rights can differ across diverse family forms. It should be noted that the concept of *family diversity* differs from the concept of *plural families*. Pluralization of family forms is an expression elaborated on by second demographic transition (SDT) scholars (Lesthaeghe & Dirk, 1986) to indicate post-1965 changes in European family patterns toward sustained below-replacement fertility, low levels of marriage, and low levels of union stability, leading to a deinstitutionalization of the family and pluralization of living arrangements and lifestyles. Compared to second demographic transition accounts, the conceptualization of diverse families is more explicitly related to sexual orientation, and not just diversity in terms of marital status, gender roles, and household structure (Pailhé et al., 2014; Ruspini, 2013). The diverse families concept more explicitly points to a "normative reference point," that is, the ongoing transformation of the family, evidenced by the spread of family forms and living arrangements other than nuclear families of heterosexual (married) couples with children. It also refers to persisting differences in the pace and type of the transformation across countries and social strata (Saraceno, 2012; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008).

Few attitudinal studies explicitly address this family diversity in relation to citizenship rights. Attitudinal research has so far focused on three related themes: attitudes toward marriage and alternative forms of partnership, the reproductive rights of individuals, and the redistributive role of the welfare state. Important insights can be drawn from these three related streams of literature. In particular, cross-national studies on family attitudes, such as attitudes toward marriage and cohabitation (Aassve, Sironi, & Bassi, 2013; Treas et al., 2014; Yucel, 2015) or the acceptance of homosexuality (Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; Lottes & Alkula, 2011; van den Akker et al., 2013), have shown the importance of understanding individual variation in attitudes within differing national contexts. For example, Treas et al. (2014), by using pooled country data for 21 industrialized countries to analyze the decline in disapproval of alternatives to marriage (cohabitation, unmarried parents, and premarital and gay and lesbian sex), found that individual-level characteristics such as gender and age were important determinants of these attitudes, yet significant cross-country differences remained. Similarly, Gubernskaya (2010), when investigating changing attitudes toward family

formation in relation to both individual and country-level characteristics, concluded significant cross-country variation in attitudes remains unexplained once controlling for gender, educational level, employment status, marital status, and religiosity (frequency of attendance).

Studies that have broadened attitudinal research to include attitudes toward homosexuality have confirmed the need to account for contextual differences. For example, Gerhards (2010) and van den Akker, van der Ploeg, and Scheepers (2013) showed that in wealthier, well-educated countries, where postmaterialist values dominate and diversity is tolerated and where church attendance is lower, individuals tend to be more accepting of homosexuality and homosexual marriage. Hooghe and Meeusen (2013) concluded that lower-educated, older, religious respondents are more disapproving of homosexuality but also that national legislation is important. In countries where there is full recognition of homosexual family formation (i.e., marriage), disapproval of homosexuality is the lowest. By contrast, few studies have explored possible cross-country differences in attitudes toward the partnership rights of individuals living in diverse family forms. Indeed, among the few studies specifically addressing these types of rights (Costa et al., 2014; Jakobsson et al., 2013; Miller & Chamberlain, 2013), the focus is on the role of individual level factors such as gender and religion. Similarly, the small but growing literature that investigates attitudes toward the reproductive rights of gays and lesbians is based on single-country studies or datasets (with few exceptions, such as Präg & Mills, 2015). This literature shows, for example, that citizens are generally more accepting of adoption by lesbian couples than by gay male couples (Herek, 2002) or that religion is an important driver of attitudes toward homosexual adoption (Whitehead & Perry, 2014) and gay and lesbian parenting (Costa et al., 2014). However, the extent of and the reasons for cross-national differences in attitudes toward the partnership and parenthood rights of same-sex couples have received less attention.

The extensive research on attitudes toward general welfare state support also suggests significant within and cross-country variation in relation to normative ideals relating to equity and redistribution (Sachweh & Olafsdottir, 2012). For example, studies of welfare state attitudes have focused on the extent to which citizens feel immigrants are entitled to the same social, civil, or economic rights as natives (Wright & Reeskens, 2013). Yet whether individuals in diverse family forms “deserve” social rights has been asked only with regard to inheritance rights, social security benefits, or health insurance and other employee benefits (e.g., Brewer & Wilcox, 2005). Attitudes toward the right to family benefits, such as economic support for a partner or children, public child care, and paid parental leave, remain unexplored.

Contextualizing attitudes toward diverse families

Although not explicitly addressing civil and social rights attached to individuals living in diverse family forms, attitudinal research on related issues has so far shown important cross-country variation and the necessity to look at the role of macro-level cultural, economic, and institutional arrangements to account for it. We therefore start with a descriptive overview of our countries according to the relevant macro dimensions highlighted in the literature to offer a contextualization of our piloted, empirical findings.

The literatures reviewed have shown that in wealthier, well-educated countries, where postmaterialist values dominate and diversity is tolerated, and where church attendance is lower, individuals tend to be more accepting of homosexuality, homosexual marriages and parenthood, and “new” family forms including those deriving from cohabitation and divorce. Nontraditional attitudes toward diverse family forms are also fostered by high levels of gender equality, high levels of participation in social and voluntary activities, and laws allowing single women and men or homosexual couples to have access to partnership and parenthood rights.

Policy and legislative changes are intertwined with cultural changes. On the one hand, institutions in the form of policies and regulations not only define the set of opportunities and constraints in which women, men, and couples act but also their beliefs, contributing to dominant interpretations of gender, family, and parenthood. There is indeed evidence that the enactment of legislation that provides equal rights to married and unmarried parents has contributed both to an increase in nonmarital childbearing and to a wider acceptance of this phenomenon (Delgado, Meil, & Zamora-López, 2008). Similarly, there is evidence that the opening up of marriage and other legal arrangements to two persons of the same sex in a growing number of countries has changed the visibility and acceptance of homosexuality and homosexual families, including homosexual parenthood (Waalwijk, 2013). On the other hand, the diffusion of nonstandard practices and their increasing “coming out,” such as the establishment of filiation outside marriage and the search—especially by homosexuals—for new forms of parenthood, such as multiparenting and surrogacy, have made such practices more normal, resulting in a push for their legal recognition and calling for a new perspective on parenthood, even heterosexual parenthood (Bertone, 2009; Segalen, 2012).

Looking at these relevant contextual features, we see there are important differences across our five countries (see Table 1).

From a cultural perspective, religion seems most important in Italy and Croatia, less so in Spain, and much less important in Denmark and the Netherlands. By contrast, the diffusion of postmaterialistic values, the prevalence

Table 1. Profile of case countries according to various institutional, economic, and cultural indicators.

	Denmark	Netherlands	Spain	Italy	Croatia
<i>Factors shaping attitudes towards family rights</i>					
<i>Cultural factors</i>					
Religiosity index ^a	−0.46	−0.25	−0.06	0.49	0.55
Cohabitation percentage ^b	11.5%	9.3%	3.3%	2.0%	2.6%
Autonomy levels ^c	85.26	70.73	53.00	49.67	57.45
Educational levels ^d	79.6%	76.0%	56.6%	59.3%	82.9%
Participation in social and voluntary activities ^e	34%	44.7%	35%	29.2%	..
Post-materialist values ^f	16%	20%	8%	6%	5%
<i>Institutional factors</i>					
Law on registered partnership yes/no ^g	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Registered partnership also for homosexuals ^h	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Legalized same-sex marriage ^h	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Adoption possible for homosexuals ^h	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Assisted reproduction legislation					
- access for single women ⁱ	Y	Y/N	Y	N	Y
	Y	Y	Y	N	N
- access for lesbian couples ⁱ	Y	Y/N	Y	N	Y
	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Gender inequality index ^j	0.056	0.057	0.100	0.067	0.172
<i>Economic factors</i>					
GDP per capita, relative to the EU-28 (set at 100) ^k	124	131	94	99	61

Sources.

^a Verbakel and Jaspers (2010). Their index is based on a factor analysis of eight items from the European Values Study (EVS, 1999/2000) measuring the importance of religion in one's life and religious denomination. The higher the score, the more religious the country.

^b OECD (2013). Data for Denmark, Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands are from 2010 and refer to individuals 20 years and older. Data for Croatia are for 2011 and refer to individuals aged 15 and older (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

^c Verbakel and Jaspers (2010). Data are based on aggregated individual scores on the following item from the European Values Study (EVS 1999/2000): Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, and other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Please use the scale to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out?

^d Eurostat (2014a); percentage of the population aged 25–64 who have completed at least upper secondary education.

^e ESS (2012); own calculations, taking an aggregate individual measure of the percentage of individuals that does some voluntary work at least once every six months versus those who do voluntary work less often or never. Data for Croatia are not available.

^f Eurobarometer (2008, p. 69); data refer to population aged 15 and older who fall in the postmaterialistic group based on Inglehart's (1977) four-item materialism/post-materialism value index.

^g http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/family/couple/registered-partners/index_en.htm.

^h Pew Research Centre, (2015): <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/06/26/gay-marriage-around-the-world-2013/>; Jones Day law firm information, 2014: <http://www.samesexrelationshipguide.com/>.

ⁱ Busardo, Gulino, Napoletano, Zaami, and Frati (2014) and NVOG (2010). In the Netherlands, single women and lesbian couples do not have explicit access to assisted reproductive technology under the law. Current legislation is ambiguous, particularly on the position of single women. It is unclear whether clinics or hospitals can refuse ART to single women (NVOG, 2010). A recent newspaper article suggests half of Dutch hospitals continued to refuse single women access to ART in 2015 (Stoffelen, 2015). The Equal Treatment Committee in the Netherlands has, however, ruled it illegal to refuse ART to lesbian couples under the Equal Treatment Act.

^j United Nations Human Development Report, (2014); data are for 2013: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-4-gender-inequality-index>. The Gender Inequality Index is a composite measure of women's reproductive health, empowerment, and economic position in society. For more information, see <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>.

^k Eurostat (2014b). This measure provides an indication of GDP per capita at in purchasing power standards in 2013, relative to the EU-28 zone. Using this value allows for a comparison of our countries relative to each other within the Eurozone. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:GDP_at_current_market_prices,_2003%E2%80%932014_and_2012%E2%80%932014_YB15.png.

of cohabitation, and a sense of freedom and autonomy in developing one's own life are highest/high in Denmark and the Netherlands, lower in Spain and Croatia, and lowest in Italy. From an economic perspective, Denmark and the Netherlands are also wealthier countries in terms of GDP per capita, followed by Spain and Italy, whereas Croatia has the lowest GDP per capita.

From an institutional perspective, Denmark and the Netherlands offer those features that have been identified in the literature as promoting less traditional attitudes: they have higher levels of gender equality, and they legally recognize rights to marriage, adoption, and assisted reproductive technology for gay and lesbian couples or single women. Spain occupies a middle position: levels of gender equality are lower than in Nordic countries, looking more similar to those in Italy and Croatia. Yet unlike Croatia and Italy, Spain has permissive laws concerning partnership and parenthood rights for diverse family forms. These cross-country differences can be kept in mind as we turn to our empirical results and the possibility of future research in understanding attitudes toward the rights of diverse families.

Method

Sample

Between December 2014 and March 2015, we conducted a pilot study among 991 undergraduate students in the humanities and social sciences using convenience sampling in five countries: Denmark (DK, $N = 148$); Spain (ES, $N = 220$); Croatia (HR, $N = 208$); Italy (IT, $N = 202$); and the Netherlands (NL, $N = 193$). The students, who were recruited in classes taught by the authors and their colleagues, came from various disciplines within the humanities and social sciences: 44% from the social and behavioral sciences, 18% from social services, and 12% from education. Given the predominance of women in the humanities and social sciences, the sample is composed in large part of women (74%). Moreover, the large majority of the sample was born after 1990 (78%), with a minority born before 1990 (22%). More than 90% of students were native to the country in which the questionnaire was distributed. Although some differences across countries emerge in the profile of these youth, they are very minor and do not suggest compositional differences, allowing us to explore possible differences in attitudes across countries. Table A1 in the online supplementary material presents summary statistics of the demographic variables by country and overall.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed as part of a larger EU FP7 project on citizenship rights and barriers to European citizenship. Among other aspects, the

questionnaire aimed at capturing whether individuals in certain types of families are considered more entitled to certain rights than individuals in other types of families. To this end, we used the concept of diverse families, and throughout the survey we systematically compared attitudes toward heterosexuals vis-à-vis homosexuals and married vis-à-vis cohabitating couples.

Measures

The first set of civil rights indicators measure attitudes toward rights pertaining to partnership. Items measured whether respondents believed heterosexual and homosexual couples should have the same right to (1) get married or (2) enter into a registered partnership. Students were presented with a number of statements and were asked whether, on a scale from 0 to 10 (where 0 stood for *completely disagree* and 10 for *completely agree*), they agreed or disagreed with a statement. For example, to measure attitudes toward partnership rights, respondents were asked whether they agreed with statements such as: "Homosexual couples should have just as much right to get married or to form a registered partnership as heterosexual couples."

A second set of civil rights relates to parenthood rights. We focus on the right to adopt a child and to use assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs). In this case, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that different types of couples, namely married heterosexual, married homosexual, cohabitating heterosexual, and cohabitating homosexual couples, should be allowed to adopt or use ARTs: "The following individuals should have the right to adopt children or to use assisted reproductive technology: married heterosexual couples; married homosexual couples; cohabitating heterosexual couples; cohabitating homosexuals couples." As previously, agreement and disagreement were expressed on a scale ranging from 0 (*completely disagree*) to 10 (*completely agree*).

Our measurement of social rights combines a Marshallian conceptualization of access to three "classical" social rights (housing subsidies, financial support for partners, and financial support for children) with an extended interpretation of social rights that reflects the recognition of a variety of family forms and the social rights attached to this recognition (i.e., access to public child care and entitlement to paid parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child). To measure attitudes toward social rights, respondents were presented with statements such as: "In times of economic crisis when public resources are scarce, married couples should have a greater right than cohabitating couples or heterosexual couples a greater right than homosexual couples to various benefits: state-funded housing subsidies; economic support for a dependent partner; economic support for dependent children; access to public childcare; entitlement to paid parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child." Students were asked to indicate to what extent they disagreed (0 = *completely disagree*) or agreed (10 = *completely agree*) with these statements.

In addition to these measures, we collected information on the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, including the country of residence, age, gender, field of education, current living situation, whether the respondent has children, employment status, the parents' level of education and employment status, how many times the respondent has been to a foreign country, and whether he or she has lived abroad.

Procedures

The questionnaire, which was distributed to students in one university in each country between December 2014 and March 2015, was developed in English and then translated into the national language by each national research team. Students were given a participant information sheet explaining the study and informing them that participation was voluntary and that responses would be treated anonymously. Participants were asked to provide written consent. With the exception of Denmark, which used an online submission because students had already completed their coursework, the questionnaire was distributed to students in class by class instructors. These mixed forms of survey collection proved unproblematic in our exploratory research setting given similar response rates.

Results

Attitudes toward civil rights

Figure 1 indicates some clear cross-national differences regarding attitudes toward civil rights. This figure reports predicted values¹ and 95% confidence

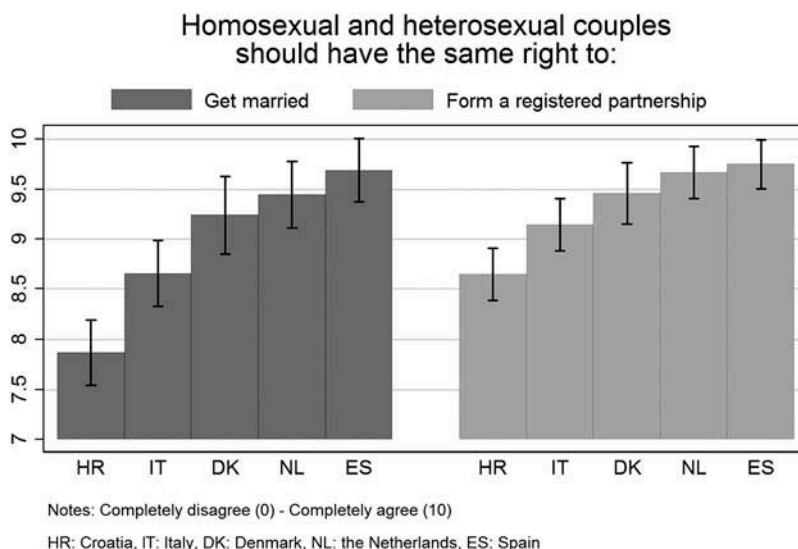


Figure 1. Equality in partnership rights by sexual orientation and type of couple. Predicted values by country with 95% confidence intervals.

intervals for the statements regarding whether heterosexual and homosexual couples should have the same right to marry or form a registered partnership. The predicted values indicate that students in Spain, the Netherlands, and Denmark display more favorable attitudes toward equality for heterosexual and homosexual couples in terms of both forms of family formation than students in Italy and Croatia. Moreover, in all countries, there appears to be greater support for equality in access to registered partnerships as opposed to marriage. However, the countries with higher values on both indicators are also the ones where the difference between the two is the smallest. For example, Spanish students support equality in marriage and in registered partnerships with a score of about 9.7. In contrast, in Croatia the average score for equality in registered partnerships is considerably higher (8.6) than the one for marriage (7.8). The results are not surprising considering that in Spain, the Netherlands, and Denmark, marriage among homosexuals is regulated by law. By contrast, Italian law did not allow same-sex marriage nor any form of civil union either for homosexuals or heterosexuals when the data were collected. Croatia, instead, has a law allowing homosexual couples to unite in what are called “life partnerships.”

It should be noted that most of the cross-national differences outlined above are not statistically different from 0, as indicated by the overlapping confidence intervals. Although the nonsignificance of the results can likely be attributed to our very small sample sizes (i.e., approximately 200 observations per country), caution is required in interpreting the cross-national differences. More research with larger samples is needed to investigate cross-national differences further.

As for parenthood rights, [Table 2](#) reports the results for a factor analysis on our two indicators—the right to adopt a child and the right to use assisted reproductive technologies (ART)—for couples with different marital status and sexual orientation. The eigenvalues indicate the presence of two factors. However, the factor loadings show that the results are not uniform across countries. Note that although a factor loading is generally considered sufficiently high if it exceeds 0.3, in [Table 2](#) and following we have used a higher threshold (0.6), considering that the loadings are very high overall.

First, with the exception of Spain, the item on adoption for married heterosexual couples does not load highly on either of the two factors. Moreover, in Croatia, Italy, and Spain, the items seem to load along the lines of sexual orientation and marital status. This would justify the aggregation of adoption and use of ARTs into a single indicator of “parenthood rights.” However, the results for Denmark and the Netherlands indicate exactly the opposite, with the items loading onto adoption and use of ARTs without discriminating among the type of couple. This is an interesting result, considering that Denmark and the Netherlands are rather progressive

Table 2. Factor analysis for parenthood rights by country. Two retained factors. Rotation: orthogonal varimax.

	HR		IT		DK		NL		ES	
	Fa1	Fa2	Fa1	Fa2	Fa1	Fa2	Fa1	Fa2	Fa1	Fa2
Eigenvalue	4	1.5	3.4	2.1	2.8	2.8	3.2	3.1	3.5	2.8
	Factor loadings									
Adopt married heterosexual	.15	.32	.087	.39	.22	.37	.15	.5	.13	.72
Adopt married homosexual	.92	.19	.9	.076	.28	.68	.41	.8	.88	.17
Adopt cohabitating heterosexual	.49	.66	.21	.55	.24	.79	.22	.88	.26	.8
Adopt cohabitating homosexual	.89	.33	.9	.2	.29	.92	.35	.91	.78	.44
ART married heterosexual	.25	.43	.25	.81	.87	.028	.91	.098	.33	.8
ART married homosexual	.93	.21	.88	.24	.77	.43	.79	.44	.96	.16
ART cohabitating heterosexual	.54	.72	.26	.89	.78	.44	.87	.34	.31	.85
ART cohabitating homosexual	.91	.32	.9	.29	.74	.56	.8	.53	.93	.3
N	182		183		141		185		215	

Notes. Fa1: factor 1. Fa2: factor 2. Data in bold indicate a factor loading larger than 0.6.

HR: Croatia, IT: Italy, DK: Denmark, NL: The Netherlands, ES: Spain.

countries in terms of parenthood rights. Given the cross-country variation evident here, it is not fully justifiable to consider adoption and use of ARTs as a joint set of parenthood rights. Nonetheless, given that the factor loadings are very high overall and for the sake of parsimony, we have built an average measure of parenthood rights for the four types of couples. Using the four measures we obtained through this operation as dependent variables, we once again calculated predicted values by country with 95% confidence intervals using linear regression while controlling for year of birth and gender. The results are plotted in [Figure 2](#). The full results from the regression models are reported in Table A2 in the supplementary material (Models 3 to 6).

Most respondents agree that parenthood rights should be granted to married heterosexual couples. By contrast, students are less in favor of parenthood rights for cohabitating homosexual couples. However, large cross-national differences appear. Spanish students are most in favor of parenthood rights for cohabitating homosexuals, followed by the Netherlands and Denmark, while the least in favor of such rights are Italian and Croatian students. Large, cross-national differences also emerge for other types of couples. For example, in Croatia, the predicted level of agreement for parenthood rights for cohabitating heterosexuals and married homosexuals is significantly lower than in the other countries. Overall, it appears that in Spain, the Netherlands, and Denmark, students agree that parenthood rights should be granted to all types of couples, regardless of sexual orientation and marital status. The overlapping confidence intervals in these countries support this interpretation. By contrast, Croatian and Italian students find that married and, in particular, married heterosexual couples are more entitled to parenthood rights than other couples.

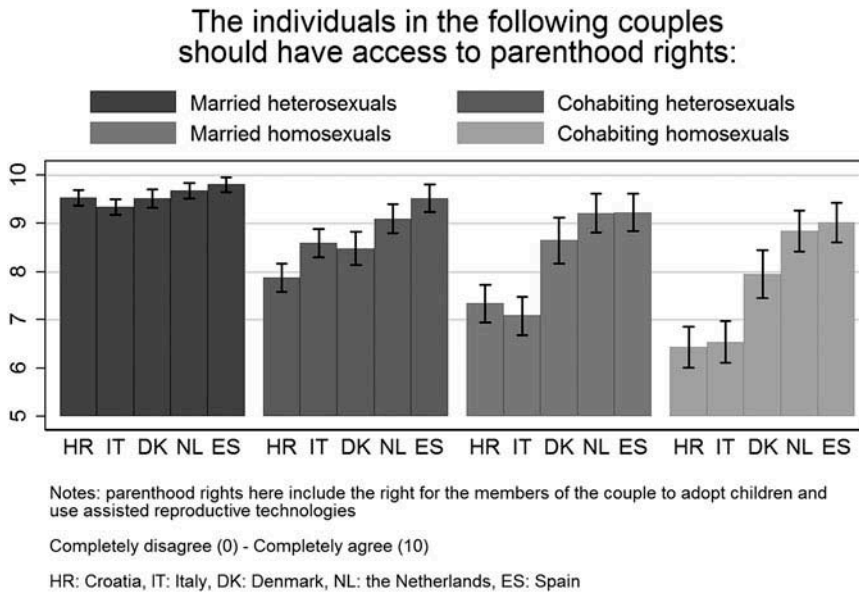


Figure 2. Equality in parenthood rights by sexual orientation and type of couple. Predicted values by country with 95% confidence intervals.

Attitudes toward social rights

Table 3 reports the results from a factor analysis investigating the presence of a latent variable identifying social rights for couples with different marital status or sexual orientation. The results indicate that, in all countries, the items for social rights load onto two factors, one for the contrast between married and cohabitating couples and one for the contrast between heterosexual and homosexual couples. Hence, an argument can be made in favor of evaluating this set of social rights together while separating along the lines of marital status and sexual orientation. Accordingly, two average scores are calculated, and, as previously, two linear regression models were used to obtain predicted values and confidence intervals by country, which are plotted in Figure 3. The full results from the regression models are reported in Table A2 in the supplementary material (Models 7 and 8). Overall, the values are rather low, indicating that students disagree with the notion that some couples should have more social rights than others. This is especially evident in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Spain. However, respondents seem to discriminate by type of union more so than by sexual orientation: in all countries, the predicted values for the statement contrasting married vs. cohabitating couples are higher than the ones contrasting heterosexual vs. homosexual couples. Indeed, particularly in Italy and Croatia, being

Table 3. Factor analysis for social rights by country. Two retained factors. Rotation: orthogonal varimax.

	HR		IT		DK		NL		ES	
	Fa1	Fa2	Fa1	Fa2	Fa1	Fa2	Fa1	Fa2	Fa1	Fa2
Eigenvalue	4.4	3.8	4.5	4.4	4.3	3.9	4.7	4.2	4.6	4.6
Married vs. cohabitating:					Factor loadings					
Access to housing subsidies	.26	.77	.24	.89	.22	.79	.27	.86	.36	.83
Economic support for partner	.23	.78	.26	.88	.21	.72	.14	.85	.35	.91
Economic support for children	.32	.84	.26	.92	.27	.85	.26	.91	.33	.92
Public childcare	.35	.85	.29	.9	.25	.91	.33	.89	.35	.9
Paid parental leave	.34	.84	.3	.89	.24	.9	.36	.88	.3	.92
Heterosexual vs. homosexual:										
Access to housing subsidies	.87	.28	.88	.32	.87	.35	.94	.27	.86	.37
Economic support for partner	.87	.28	.86	.3	.87	.37	.96	.27	.92	.33
Economic support for children	.91	.34	.95	.24	.95	.23	.96	.26	.93	.32
Public child care	.91	.35	.94	.25	.94	.22	.92	.3	.91	.31
Paid parental leave	.88	.34	.93	.26	.87	.18	.86	.27	.86	.35
N		183		175		134		183		208

Notes. Fa1: factor 1. Fa2: factor 2. Data in bold indicate a factor loading larger than 0.6.
HR: Croatia, IT: Italy, DK: Denmark, NL: The Netherlands, ES: Spain.

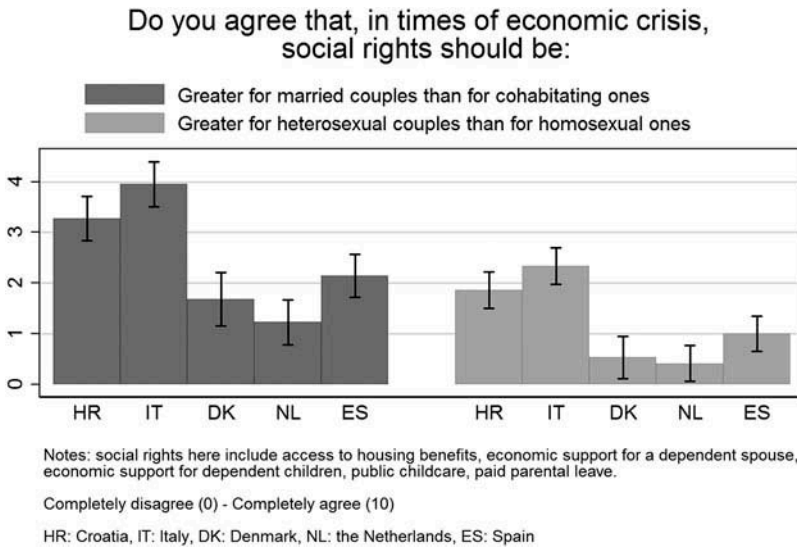


Figure 3. Equality in social rights by sexual orientation and type of couple. Predicted values by country with 95% confidence intervals.

married vs. cohabiting seems to matter more than sexual orientation for attitudes toward deservingness of social rights.

Conclusion and discussion

This article addressed a shortcoming in current attitudinal research by providing an initial exploration into cross-national differences in attitudes toward social and civil rights for individuals living in diverse family forms. Evidence from our five-country pilot study among students demonstrates a number of important findings. First of all, when comparing couples with different sexual orientation and marital status, students living in more traditional countries (Italy and Croatia) tend to privilege the rights of married heterosexual couples over the rest to a larger extent than in nontraditional countries (Spain, Denmark, and the Netherlands). Interestingly, in terms of country differences, Spain appears to belong to the less traditional countries—actually being the least traditional in several aspects. This result is in line with previous streams of research showing that, for example, respondents generally have more favorable attitudes toward homosexuality in countries that are more progressive in terms of family formation laws and the regulation of same-sex marriage (Gerhards, 2010; Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013).

Second, there is general agreement that married couples are more entitled to *social rights*—such as housing benefits and economic support for a dependent partner—than cohabitating couples. Remarkably, students found sexual orientation less relevant than marital status in allowing access to social rights.

This result contrasts with our third major finding, that students were less inclined to agree on equality in *civil rights* and in particular *parenthood rights* for homosexual couples—married or not—in traditional countries. A similar result emerged in a pilot study among students in Portugal, another traditional country (Costa et al., 2014). Fourth, although further research is required to validate these scales over a wider pool of countries, the results from our preliminary factor analyses suggest respondents distinguish between parenthood, partnership, and social rights across diverse family forms. These distinctive items could thus be integrated into existing questionnaires on attitudes toward diverse families, such as the Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage Scale (Pearl & Galupo, 2007), the Attitudes Toward Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Scale (Costa et al., 2014) or large-scale comparative surveys such as the European Social Survey.

Although our five-country pilot study provides much-needed insights into an underexplored area both in attitudinal research and research on family diversity and citizenship rights, it has its shortcomings. First of all, having only five countries limits our understanding of attitudes toward civil and social rights in international perspective. More cross-national variability would allow, for example, more sophisticated methods of analysis, such as multilevel analyses that can statistically account for the importance of institutional and cultural factors discussed above. Furthermore, multigroup confirmatory factor analyses should be run to further test the comparability of the results between countries. Similarly, we were limited by the nonrepresentativeness of our sample of students, by the relatively small sample sizes across countries, and by a limit of questionnaire length that impeded us from exploring other key issues, such as gender constructions in the approval of partnership and parenthood rights (for example, comparing attitudes toward lesbians versus gays) or differences according to type of parenthood (for example, comparing attitudes toward surrogacy versus IVF treatments).

Despite these limitations, our explorative study provides promising findings and suggests important insights on possible drivers of cross-national variation, making it a sound base for further research. Indeed, if we contextualize our findings within the cultural, economic, and institutional profile of our countries, we find, in line with previous research (Gerhards, 2010; Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; van den Akker et al., 2013; Yucel, 2015), that attitudes are more traditional in countries where a diffusion of new types of families and postmaterialistic and secularized values is lower, and where, at the same time, laws do not allow homosexuals access to partnership and parenthood rights. Further, in countries that have liberal laws in terms of who can marry, form a civil partnership, and adopt or access ART techniques, acceptance of rights for diverse families, including homosexual parenthood, is higher.

Such findings, although based on relatively small, nonrepresentative country samples, suggest that individuals in progressive countries may be more likely to support equal partnership and parenthood rights for gay, lesbian, and cohabiting couples than individuals embedded in countries with less progressive cultural norms. We would expect the same to be true in other countries with similar legislation (Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; van den Akker et al., 2013; Waaldijk, 2013). As various authors have argued, institutions and culture are strongly intertwined. On the one hand, the implementation or absence of a specific policy affects the set of opportunities and constraints in which individuals and couples make their choices, thus affecting the possibility to practice diverse models of partnership and parenthood. The more diverse models of partnership and parenthood are practiced, the more “normal” they become. The presence or absence of a certain type of policy also affects cultural norms because it assumes and produces specific definitions of who deserves support, how much support they deserve, and why, thereby creating and reinforcing ideals around motherhood, fatherhood, parenthood, and the “best interests” of the child. On the other hand, changes in micro-level practices and in the cultural approval of such practices can precede or lead to institutional change (Pfau-Effinger, 2005; Szinovacz & Davey, 2008). Research on the policy–culture nexus in relation to LGBT rights is limited. Yet previous attitudinal research on support for welfare state redistribution shows that redistributive norms shape policy in new and emerging policy fields, whereas policies shape norms in more embedded policy areas (Raven et al., 2011). Further research is needed to determine whether a similar policy–attitudinal relationship exists in relation to LGBT rights. Our results for Spain, however, would suggest that when economic wellbeing, overall gender equality, and new forms of families are still relatively infrequent but institutions support family diversity, attitudes, at least among students, are in line with the laws and regulations, making Spain seem more similar to the well-known Nordic “progressive” countries.

Less clear is the role of the economic context in shaping attitudes toward the rights of diverse families. It seems that in wealthier countries, acceptance of civil rights of individuals living in diverse family forms is more widespread, but this idea needs further empirical testing. Expected cross-country differences in attitudes toward social rights for diverse families are also not clear-cut. However, based on the welfare state attitudes literature (van Oorschot, 2007; Wright & Reeskens, 2013), macro-level drivers of support for parenthood and partnership rights described above might be similar to those shaping attitudes toward social rights: respondents in traditional countries lacking institutional acceptance of diverse family forms are likely to demonstrate the lowest levels of support for equal social rights for gay, lesbian, and cohabiting couples.

Further research into the regulation of and attitudes toward the civil and social rights of diverse families is greatly needed to fully understand the relationship between institutional support for diverse families and attitudes toward these diverse family forms.

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Note

1. The predictions were obtained by simple linear regression with country dummies used as predictors. Dummies for gender and year of birth were included as controls. While the predicted values are well above 7 in all countries for both types of partnership (indicating most respondents strongly agree), these very high values can be accounted for by the young age of the sample (about 80% born after 1990), by their level and type of education (that is, being university students in the humanities and social sciences), and by being primarily female. The full results from the regression models are reported in Table A2 in the supplementary material (Models 1 and 2).

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