

# Getting the Message Out: Media Context and Global Changes in Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

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## Abstract

Global attitudes involving homosexuality are changing rapidly. Tolerance toward lesbian and gay relationships has increased in almost every continent. More often than not, younger people have been at the forefront of this change. In this article, we explore explanations for this cross-national phenomenon. Specifically, we test to see whether contextual factors, those that allow lesbian women and gay men to freely express themselves or to gain cultural representation in the media, have driven this transformation. The results show that inter-cohort effects, or more liberal attitudes among younger people, are related to the pervasiveness of a nation's mass media and to the presence of press freedom. This research suggests a strong link between increasing mass support for minority rights and the factors that encourage and allow minorities to express their viewpoints to others. These findings have broad implications, in that they help us understand the growing global acceptance around gay rights.

## Keywords

sexuality and politics, public opinion, media, homosexuality, norm diffusion, mediated contact, globalization

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The rise in support for same-sex marriage over the past decade is among the largest changes in opinion on any policy issue . . . [M]uch of the shift is attributable to the arrival of a large cohort of young adults who are far more open to gay rights than previous generations.

—Pew Research Center, 2013

[A]ttitudes got steadily better, coinciding with greater visibility of lesbian and gay people in the media.

—Scottish gay rights activist, 2011

In the United States and beyond, few shifts in public opinion have been as durable, or shown such magnitude of change, as attitudes involving lesbian women and gay men.<sup>1</sup> One of the most prominent and consistent factors found to contribute to this change is the entry of a younger, more socially liberal cohort into the public arena (Lewis & Gossett, 2008; Loftus, 2001). Other prominent causes of more liberal attitudes include increased contact with gay people (Herek, 2003; Lewis, 2011), a rise in the portrayal of gay people in news and fictional media (Garretson, 2016; Riggle, Ellis, & Crawford, 1996; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2006), the proliferation of the idea that homosexuality has its roots in biology instead of lifestyle choice (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008), and favorable shifts toward gay people in the positions taken by political elites and state institutions (Ayoub, 2015; Reynolds, 2013). Although many studies have been rooted in the American experience, countries across the globe have experienced similarly impressive changes in attitudes toward homosexuality, notably in Latin America, Australia, Western Europe, and parts of Asia (Smith, 2011).<sup>2</sup> The trend toward attitudinal change, despite the active resistance it can provoke, has continued unabated in several unexpected areas—from Catholic countries such as Argentina, to newer democracies such as the Czech Republic—marking this a truly global phenomena (Asal, Sommer, & Harwood, 2013; Ayoub, 2016; Frank, Camp, & Boutcher, 2010; Kollman, 2007).

In this article, we explore the causes of this global sea change in individual attitudes toward gay people. The fact that it has extended—and also originated—in contexts far outside the borders of the United States raises new questions for attitudinal research on sexuality, a literature that has focused most of its attention within the American domestic context. The global trends we chart require rethinking what we know, and exploring the transnational factors that tie societies together and allow for interactions that ultimately lead to simultaneous changes across multiple contexts.

Within the scope of this study, we think of transnational interactions as the diffusion of ideas and images across borders. In this regard, we see a

strong role for the soft power that the media can play transnationally in shaping political attitudes toward sexuality and minorities in general, especially among younger, more impressionable individuals. There can be several pathways by which such issues enter the domestic debate. Here, we focus specifically on the media because it carries with it the types of transnational information flows that are important for encouraging contact and communication between groups; the same mechanism of mediated contact that has been shown to be crucial in the American context (Schiappa et al., 2006). Domestic media, which also often takes its inspiration from, or includes, foreign imports, tends to incorporate issues of popular culture that have captured the world's attention (Chan, 1994; Jensen & Oster, 2009).

An unparalleled increase in the representation of gay people in news, television, and movies occurred in the 1990s (Gross, 2002), possibly most prominently exemplified by Ellen DeGeneres' high-profile coming out on mainstream American television (as Ellen Morgen in the ABC-sitcom, *Ellen*). This trend in lesbian and gay portrayals has continued unabated over the two decades since as a key subject of popular shows such as *Will and Grace* and *Modern Family*, and has more recently extended to shows geared at teenage audiences, such as *Glee* and *Teen Wolf*. Beyond entertainment, the news media has increasingly covered gay rights topics as the issue has become politicized. In recent years, networks, from *Russia Today* to *Al Jazeera*, have extensively covered gay rights debates as diverse as Russia's "anti-gay Sochi Olympics" and Ireland's popular vote to introduce same-sex marriage. Although this shift in media visibility was pronounced in the United States and Western Europe, our data suggest that the influence of the media—an understudied dimension of norm diffusion—may not be contained within national borders and may transmit ideas about, and images of, gay people transnationally. Although more optimistic accounts linking media socialization to shifts in attitudes concerning minorities have come to dominate the American public opinion literature, little systematic evidence exists cross-nationally.

As such, the central question driving our study is, does the specific nature and context of a nation's media influence the liberalization of attitudes toward homosexuality? In an increasingly interconnected world, we hypothesize that the effect of media exposure should hold cross-nationally, depending on the propensity for a nation's media to facilitate that contact. We expect its effect to vary by age cohort, because younger audiences, those in their "impressionable years" (Dinas, 2013), are less likely to have formed firm opinions toward gay people and are, thus, more likely to respond to new information transmitted through post-1990s media (Garretson, 2015). We develop a social theory that allows for positive attitudinal change via the transmission of new ideas and images in a process of norm diffusion, and test it using the combined World Values Survey (WVS) and European Values Study (EVS). The cumulative file

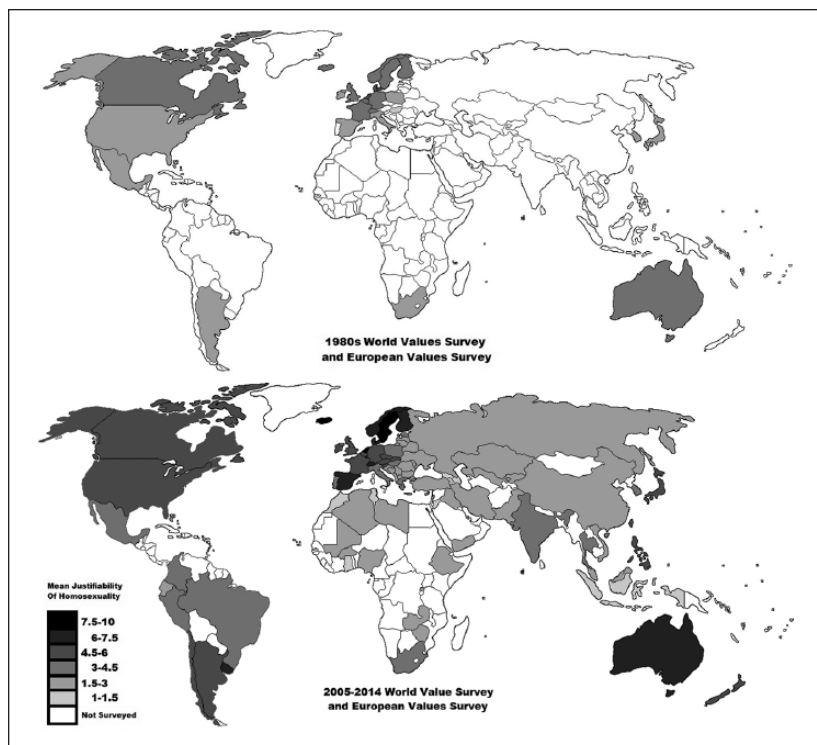
allows for a multilevel analysis of more than 200 different surveys, taken from more than 70 nations from the early 1980s to 2010, and asks a common question measuring the justifiability of homosexuality. We draw on a second data set based on a survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights organizations in 47 countries to contextualize the central findings.

The quantitative results show that inter-cohort differences are strongly associated with both the infrastructure of national media and the national political context (in terms of the level of freedom of the press). This suggests that access to ideas and images concerning gay and lesbian people does influence more liberal attitudes across multiple contexts, and does so much more strongly among the young. Our inquiry adds to our understanding of global shifts in public opinion, the diffusion of new norms, and the adoption of post-material values by highlighting their transnational nature and emphasizing the socializing power of mediated intergroup exposure.

## Mapping International Change in Attitudes on Homosexuality

Before developing our argument on attitudinal change toward homosexuality, we give a broad outline of the geographical breadth of the shift from the 1980s to today. This change in global attitudes is illustrated by Figure 1. As noted above, the WVS and EVS have both asked a standard question since the early 1980s, one that measures the justifiability of homosexuality. The question asks respondents to rate whether homosexuality is never or always justifiable on a scale from 1 to 10, with “1” representing more negative attitudes toward homosexuality and “10” representing more positive attitudes. The top panel of Figure 1 displays the average response in each nation in the 1980s, whereas the bottom panel displays surveys taken from 2005 to 2014. The different shades of gray represent average national responses in categories of 1 to 1.5 (lightest shade), 1.5 to 3, 3 to 4.5, 4.5 to 6, 6 to 7.5, and 7.5 to 10 (darkest shade).<sup>3</sup> The areas in white represent cases that were not included in the study, depending on the survey wave.

In the 1980s, only the Netherlands had average responses above 5.5—the midpoint of the scale, although Denmark was close at 5.48. Indeed, the Netherlands and Denmark, which were the first to adopt gay marriage and civil unions, respectively, are two states with longstanding homophile and gay rights movements.<sup>4</sup> No countries outside of Europe rated the justifiability over the midpoint. Contrast this with surveys from the past decade. Fifteen countries now have average responses above 5.5 and much of Western Europe has average responses above 7. With the exception of Africa and Asia, at least one nation on every continent has a society that rates the justifiability of homosexuality above the midpoint and Japan is rapidly approaching that

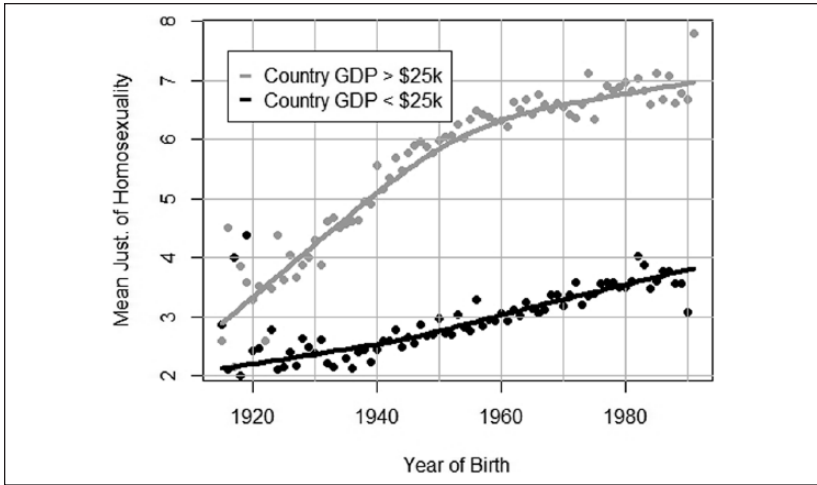


**Figure 1.** Average national responses to the justifiability of homosexuality question.

value with a mean rating of 5.1 in the most recent round. Relatedly, our research on the usage rates of words in five languages suggests that issues of homosexuality have entered the popular discourse of many languages since the early 1990s (see Online Appendix A). Attitudinal change toward gay people is not just an American or Western European phenomenon, but one that has broad reach—albeit at different rates—in various parts of the globe.

## Age Cohort, Contact, and Public Opinion on Homosexuality

The political science literature on public opinion related to sexuality has found multiple factors to correlate with attitudes toward gay people and their rights. Many of these findings relate to basic demographics. Most prominently, women (Wilcox & Wolpert, 2000) and the young (Andersen & Fetner,



**Figure 2.** Youth liberalism on homosexuality by GDP.

2008a; Lewis & Gossett, 2008; Loftus, 2001) tend to be more liberal in their attitudes. Scholars have pointed to changes in popular culture in the 1990s as a cause of the liberalization of attitudes within the United States, especially among younger individuals (Gross, 2002; Tropiano, 2002). Furthermore, interpersonal contact with gay people, usually in the form of a gay or lesbian friend, family member, or co-worker, has a particularly strong influence on support for gay rights and same-sex marriage (Herek, 2003; Lewis, 2011).

These two factors—year of birth and mediated contact—are central to this study, because they might explain the transnational interactions that tie individuals to each other in various domestic contexts. First, younger individuals have consistently been shown to have more liberal attitudes on issues involving homosexuality. In our data, we also note that the prominent gaps in attitudes toward homosexuality, across various contexts, tend to be between younger and older cohorts. Figure 2 shows the differences between cohorts, according to each group's average score on the justifiability scale and broken down by GDP per capita using waves of the WVS and EVS since 2003. Each data point represents the average response for those born in that year, whereas the curves represent the smoothed trends for those in high GDP and low GDP countries. For those born before 1930, attitudes are universally negative, regardless of GDP. However, among younger cohorts, a sharp divergence occurs, with younger people in high GDP countries being much more tolerant.<sup>5</sup>

With respect to some strands of academic literature, the finding on age has been counter-intuitive. Generally, most political attitudes are transmitted from parent to child (Jennings & Niemi, 1968), which has explained why

intergenerational differences in public attitudes are quite rare across policy issues (MacManus, 1996). Scholarship has taken note of this “intergenerational discontinuity” and generally attributes it to critical junctures and political changes within the nation-state (Eckstein, 1988; Mannheim, 1952; Mishler & Rose, 2007). Although the markedly liberal attitudes among younger respondents are usually given as a cause of changes in mass opinion in the popular press, political science scholarship has rarely tried to explain why younger people hold more liberal views in a cross-national perspective. This oversight becomes more interesting if we take into consideration that younger people in strikingly different political and cultural contexts show similarly pronounced generational gaps when it comes to the acceptance of sexual minorities.

We draw on the contact hypothesis, which posits that perceptions of out-groups become increasingly more favorable through interaction (Allport, 1954), as a mechanism through which media openness changes attitudes. Although Allport (1954) initially stated that four criteria need to be met for intergroup contact to result in more positive attitudes, subsequent studies have concluded that while these criteria—for example, working toward a shared goal or sustaining contact across an extended period of time—are conducive to intergroup contact, none is strictly required (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In line with this research, findings show that “imagined,” “parasocial,” or “vicarious” contact, transmitted via the media, has a similar effect on lowering prejudices and improving attitudes toward gay people in various contexts (Riggle et al., 1996; Schiappa et al., 2006). Critiques of contact theory in the context of gay rights have focused on selection effects—that gay people are more likely to come out to those already holding more positive attitudes. Yet, recent studies have shown consistent effects of contact using panel studies that track changes in parasocial or interpersonal contact (Garretson, 2015; Lee & Mutz, 2016). Below, after surveying the comparative literature for clues as to the origins of these attitudinal differences, we discuss how mediated contact with gay people may give rise to inter-cohort differences on gay rights.

## Transnational Interaction and Socialization

The findings we cite on age cohort and context—mainly derived from studies on the American context—are illustrative, but they leave us with little analytic leverage to explain why attitudinal change has occurred across multiple domestic contexts. A shift to a transnational perspective, by providing more variation in political and cultural contexts, should allow for stronger evidence of what factors contributed to positive attitudinal change. In this vein, the extant literature on cross-national attitudes toward homosexuality, taking inspiration from Inglehart’s post-materialist thesis, has often focused on

national development and the economic context (Andersen & Fetner, 2008b; Hadler, 2012; Inglehart, 1990; Lottes & Alkula, 2011).

According to Inglehart's thesis, as more people in a country have their material needs met, they move from a politics that is primarily concerned with (re)distributive issues to a politics that involves conflict over individualistic values, morality, and self-actualization. This later, post-materialist phase allows for political conflict over—and more liberal positions on—gay rights. Inglehart's framework has inspired studies related to issues of sexuality. For instance, Andersen and Fetner (2008b) found that higher national values of GDP are associated with more liberal responses toward homosexuality among those who describe themselves as managers, professionals, and non-manual workers, and that higher values of a nation's Gini coefficient were associated with lower levels of liberal responses among all respondents.<sup>6</sup> Hadler (2012) and Gerhards (2010) also showed that a higher GDP was associated with more positive feelings toward homosexuality nationally.

Although these perspectives offer many valuable insights on the conditions under which attitudinal change can take place cross-nationally, they do little with respect to understanding the transnational mechanisms through which change occurs. For one, the studies only partially explain the finding that younger cohorts change their attitudes much more quickly than their parents' generation. Aside from the fact that these cohorts are often born into more affluent societies, the transnational channels that have led younger cohorts to embrace gay rights have not been explored. Here, we shift the focus to the transnational factors related to cultural contact with gay and lesbian people, which we predict to be heavily influenced by the media and, as we theorize below, may lead to inter-cohort differences in opinion.

Scholarship in international relations has long theorized explanations for the political salience of new identities, ranging from international human rights institutions (Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999) to international security communities (Deutsch, 1954; Katzenstein, 1976), that take into account the effect of social transaction flows and cultural communication. Interaction also explains the internalization of new political identities at the individual level, for example, the cross-border social contact and transactions that contribute to the support of European integration (Lijphart, 1964). These interactions, including those that are "symbolic, economic, material, political, [and] technological" (Adler & Barnett, 1998, p. 41), can lead to socialization processes of learning (Deutsch, 1954) that can "change beliefs or alter our confidence in those beliefs because of new observations, interpretations, or repertoires of practice" (Brake & Katzenstein, 2013, p. 747).

In the research on transnational dynamics that change the political conditions for gay people in their respective domestic contexts, Kollman's (2007) work has shown that the globalization of the idea of same-sex unions has



become strengthened as an international norm that shapes—albeit in different ways, according to the domestic context—the politics of partnership rights in various states. A core premise of this line of constructivist research is that international norms can spread ideas from areas where they are more accepted to areas where they are not (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998); this is related to the world society approach (Frank et al., 2010; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997), which holds that “a network of governmental and nongovernmental institutions propels ideas at a global level, and these ideas influence social organizations and actors within any given nation” (Hadler, 2012, p. 211). This approach emphasizes international factors that influence public attitudes within the nation, or potentially influence elites and other media gatekeepers who, in turn, influence public attitudes.

We see a role for the media in building channels that lead to such interactions in societies and ultimately the diffusion of new norms. Access to mass media, including televisions and newspapers, has been used in several studies as a mechanism of diffusion via contact, because it allows for cross-border interaction, the exchange of ideas, and exposure to other cultures (Koopmans, 1993; Kopstein & Reilly, 2000; Soule, 2004). Although they are less concerned with diffusion, Norris and Inglehart (2009) conducted one of the rare projects to seriously consider the influence of media consumption on liberal attitudes. Rooted in the post-materialist tradition, their findings show a correlation between media consumption and more liberal social and moral values, in general. They argue that individuals internalize media messages and ultimately shift their worldviews in ways that are distinguishable from their lived reality. Although we build upon their theoretical framework, we differ by exploring the transnational nature of media images and their differing effects on various age cohorts.

## **Theory: How Media Contact Influences Social Tolerance Among the Young**

Few existing explanations of change in attitudes have explored the interconnectedness of states and the various transnational channels that diffuse popular culture—a culture that has increasingly come to include discussions of gay issues and portrayals of gay people. Furthermore, explanations based on single case studies overlook the simultaneous changes that occur among very different states and societies. The few studies that do compare multiple contexts have focused on domestic economic modernity, instead of the media variables that capture transnational socialization processes. We thus bring together two rich parallel literatures that are rarely in dialogue—one on contact and one on transnational socialization. In making our case, we do not refute the important findings of previous research, but instead maintain that our focus on transnational

media contact is a compelling and authoritative lens with which to understand the concurrent changes that occur in a multitude of contexts.

Based on the evidence that the media carries vastly larger amounts of lesbian and gay imagery than ever before, we expect it to serve as an avenue for mediated cultural contact, and ultimately socialization among the young. The historical context allowing for this test is the marked transnational increase in the global news media's engagement of lesbian and gay issues in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and subsequently, dialogues on the lives of gay people more generally in fictional media. With gay liberation movements emerging in many countries in the 1970s, gay politics took a pronounced departure from the cautious private sphere politics of the previous homophile movement (Weeks, 2015). Yet, although liberation movements moved gay people into the streets, their coverage in the media was minimal and dictated by their opposition (Fetner, 2008).

To combat AIDS in the 1980s, however, lesbians and gays dramatically increased their levels of political activism to draw attention to the crisis. With governments from Germany to the United States remaining mute on the crisis, much of this activism was squarely aimed at the mainstream news and entertainment media, which had previously ignored or used coded language to speak about homosexuality. As deaths from AIDS mounted, intense pressure to cover the crisis—via new transnational networks and the innovation of visible tactics such as the “die in”—from groups such as AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in the United States, the Terrence Higgins Trust in the United Kingdom, and ACT UP-Paris in France resulted in a sharp increase in coverage of gay people and their issues (Broqua, 2015). Media outlets did react, opening a space for the depiction of gay people in mainstream media. With growing discourse in news media, fictional representation of gay people in film and on television followed in the mid-1990s with increasing depth and frequency (Walters, 2003; Garretson, 2016). For instance, in Hollywood, the number of recurring lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) characters on broadcast television increased from less than three annually until the late 1980s, to 13 in 1995 and roughly 20 from 2005 onward (GLAAD, 2014). The growth of media representation bears out cross-nationally in data from our survey of LGBT rights organizations, in which groups described the explosive turn in the early 1990s in qualitative terms (see “Discussion” section).

Theoretically, the changes in popular culture that media currents make visible may be responsible for the increased social tolerance of gay people cross-nationally. If so, part of the prior increase in more tolerant attitudes, traditionally associated with development and higher levels of GDP, may be due to higher amounts of television, film, radio, and Internet media, all of which convey political and social information. Furthermore, media exposure is more likely to be responsive to new social, cultural, and political developments if freedom of the press and speech are sacrosanct in the domestic context.

We argue that the effect of the media, because it transmits popular culture across borders, is a likely cause for the more positive perceptions younger cohorts have of sexual minorities.<sup>7</sup> The clear shift in the portrayal of gay people in the popular media provides a platform with which to isolate this effect methodologically. Since then, more positive information on, and portrayals of, gay people have become common in the Western television industry (Gross, 2002; Tropiano, 2002), especially in countries with global positions of power in terms of their capacity to disseminate culture across borders.<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that we expect such dissemination to be localized without contestation in many contexts (Rohn, 2009). The introduction of these images can clash with domestic norms in several countries within this study, countries where sexuality has only recently entered the domestic discourse. Yet, as we develop in the discussion, younger cohorts are in a unique position (as opposed to earlier generations) to evaluate homosexuality according to several sources of information during their formative years. Not only are they exposed to these portrayals and a discourse on gay rights through electronic media and film, but they are also generally less exposed to past models of the etiology of homosexuality that stressed sickness, poor mental health, criminality, and poor parenting—the frames that dominated both psychiatry and mass culture in the 1950s and early 1960s, and in many respects persisted through the early 1980s HIV/AIDS crisis.

Our argument concerning younger cohorts is, thus, linked to two primary ideas: that younger people are both more impressionable (Dinas, 2013) and that they have access to more diverse—including positive—information on homosexuality. We expect that mediated contact via news and entertainment media will be particularly impactful on younger people. This is because the effects of contact have been found to be mediated through group-based affect that tends to stabilize the more an individual is exposed to information on a specific group (Lodge & Taber, 2013), including information gained through various forms of mediated intergroup contact.

Research into unpacking how intergroup contact specifically results in improved attitudes has implicated affectively laden mechanisms. Specifically, contact works to reduce prejudice by reducing anxiety about future interactions with out-groups and by encouraging individuals to see positive aspects of themselves in those they are interacting with via empathy (Hewstone & Swart, 2011). Because these mechanisms implicate positive and negative affect directly, and affect toward groups is less stable in younger individuals—who have generally been exposed to less information on social groups (Lodge & Taber, 2013)—this leads to the theoretical prediction that stronger intergroup contact effects occur among younger individuals.

Indeed, using quasi-experimental data from the mid-1990s, Garretson (2015) found that mediated contact with a gay person changed young

people's attitudes on gay rights. Respondents on the 1994-1995-1996 American National Election Studies (ANES) panel study saw their support for gay rights increase considerably from the 1994 wave to the 1996 wave (30 points on average on a 100-point feeling thermometer) if they could correctly answer a question on the 1995 wave pertaining to the show *Grace Under Fire*. The program lacked prior gay content, but had a character come out as gay shortly after the 1995 wave. Because younger individuals generally had less exposure to prior negative etiologies on homosexuality, their affect toward gay people was less stable, resulting in large increases in positive affect as compared with older individuals in the presence of mediated contact.<sup>9</sup> It is such a theoretical contact mechanism that we have in mind here on a cross-national scale.

Thus, according to our explanation, the fact that younger people in various national contexts are particularly prone to more liberal attitudes is due in part to the exposure of younger cohorts to more diverse international images and ideas about gay people, and also to a greater receptiveness to changing their attitudes based on these new ideas.<sup>10</sup> These images are increasingly more accessible across borders. Specifically, we expand upon and test two key theories: (a) that more liberal attitudes toward homosexuality transnationally are caused in a large part by popular culture transmitted via free, electronic media, and (b) that the effect of this contact with popular culture (as measured by living in an area with a media system conducive to such exposure) should vary according to age cohort, with attitudinal change more likely to take place among the young. We expect these trends to hold across multiple domestic contexts. This leads to our two core hypotheses, which are prefaced on a general permeability of younger cohorts to new norms on homosexuality transmitted by media cross-nationally.

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** The higher the level of media pervasiveness in a country, the more likely that an individual will be more tolerant of homosexuality, especially in younger cohorts.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** The more free a society is in terms of speech and the press, the more likely that a country's citizens will be more tolerant of homosexuality, especially in younger cohorts.

## Data

### *Individual Level*

To test these hypotheses, we draw on the combined cumulative WVS and EVS (World Values Survey 1981-2014, 2014). More than 70 countries were surveyed, with many nations being surveyed in four or five waves. As mentioned

above, these surveys have regularly asked a question involving the justifiability of homosexuality. The text (in English) reads “Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card: Homosexuality.” The response options range from 1 (*never justified*) to 10 (*always justified*). This question forms our dependent variable and was asked of 378,926 respondents in total, although fewer are used in the analyses below because of missing data, mostly at the aggregate level. We left this variable in its original coding with higher levels representing more tolerance. It should be noted that this question has been found to be a valid measure of prejudice toward homosexuals in multiple studies (Andersen & Fetner, 2008b; Hadler, 2012; Reynolds, 2013).

The key independent variable at the individual level is birth year. Birth year is coded as the year of birth minus 1920 and divided by 100. This variable ranges mostly from about  $-.2$  to  $.7$ , with most values between  $.0$  and  $.6$ . Higher values represent younger cohorts. We also include a series of control variables at the individual level based on the findings of previous research, described in Online Appendix B.

### *Aggregate Level*

Gathering uniform data cross-nationally on the prevalence of electronic media—such as film, radio, television, and computers—is generally difficult. We do, however, have access to the Banks Media Scale (BMS), which is a combined measure of four components: (a) radios per capita, (b) televisions per capita, (c) newspaper circulation per capita, and (d) Internet penetration (Banks & Wilson, 2014). These four subcomponents of the scale were also available and we use them in subsequent analyses below. Access to such media taps into a core understanding of diffusion; it allows for interaction with ideas that are more present in other contexts (Kopstein & Reilly, 2000). Second, Freedom House’s rating for the freedom of the press was gathered to have an aggregate measure for each country and year on how free the press (and other aspects of mediated culture) is to respond to global developments, including increased portrayals of gay people and discussions of gay issues. This variable was coded to range between 0 and 1, with 1 representing more freedom of speech in the press, and was available from 1994 onward. Importantly, the freedom of press variable taps into the idea that citizens in contexts with greater access to flows of information—because they are less prone to state censorship—should be richer in transnational images of homosexuality, as well as an increased likelihood that domestic sources have the space to present more balanced descriptions of homosexuality. Taken together, the freedom of the press and the BMS, with its four components, should be a theoretically sound measure allowing for the direct test of media

effects. We also use GDP per capita and an index of political, economic, and social globalization as control variables for a country's economic development and its integration into the international system. GDP is coded as 1,000s of U.S. dollars. The *Konjunkturforschungsstelle* (KOF) Index of Globalization (Dreher et al., 2008) was rescaled to range from 0 to 1, with high values representing greater international integration. In Online Appendix C, we include histograms of our key independent variables to more clearly convey their range and distribution. To ease the estimation and interpretation of our interactive models below, we also mean-centered several of our key aggregate independent variables. This allows the main effect of a variable appearing in an interaction to be easily interpreted as the effect of that variable when the other variable in the interaction is fixed at its mean value.

## Method

We use a set of multilevel models to test for media effects, in which our unit of analysis is both the individual country survey and the individual respondent. Starting from the basic model of Andersen and Fetner (2008b), we include variables measuring religion, children, population of the place of residence, marital status, education, occupation, and year of birth in all the models. We include the aggregate measures of GDP, our measures for media, and, in keeping with Andersen and Fetner (2008b) and the post-materialist thesis, we include interactions between GDP and occupation. In the first model, we also include interactions between the year of birth and GDP, and the year of birth and the BMS to test the interaction portion of H1. In the second and third models, we replace the BMS with variables derived from its components to more accurately determine exactly what sectors of the media correlate with the emergence of liberal views on homosexuality among young people. In Model 4, we test H2 by adding our measure of the freedom of the press and its interaction with the year of birth to our base model. Finally, in Model 5, we include both variables measuring media pervasiveness and freedom of the press. In the models reported below, we allow the intercept and the coefficient on the year of birth to vary by survey. This controls for correlated errors at the aggregate-survey level. Although some of these variables are closely related, we show in Online Appendix D that multicollinearity does not affect our results.

Our key theoretical expectations are that the effect of media pervasiveness and press freedom will be positively related to tolerance of homosexuality through the interaction between these variables and year of birth. These findings would provide evidence that media pervasiveness and a free culture are key factors in explaining the relative liberalism of younger individuals toward homosexuality globally. For our control variables, and keeping with prior research, we expect negative effects for adherents of religion, especially

practicing adherents, and number of children. We expect positive effects on the variables that measure education, GDP, the occupational dummies (and their interactions), year of birth, living in cities and urban areas, and the status of never having been married.

## Results

The results for all models are displayed in Table 1. Beginning with Model 1, we see a clear correlation between media density (BMS) and more liberal attitudes toward the justifiability of homosexuality for younger respondents. The direct effect of the BMS is insignificant, whereas the interactive effect of the BMS with year of birth is highly significant, both statistically and substantively. This means that greater values of the BMS have an insignificant effect on attitudes of older respondents but a significant effect for younger respondents, as predicted. GDP and its interaction with the year of birth are also significant predictors of liberal attitudes.

To ease the substantive interpretation of the interaction, Figure 3 presents the predicted marginal effect of year of birth given different values of the key contextual variables for each model. The marginal effect is essentially the coefficient on the year of birth estimated by the model. However, the multilevel model allows this coefficient to vary, depending on the various aggregate variables representing national contexts in the model. The figure is standardized to represent the estimated effect of 60 years of age in the justifiability of homosexuality given various values of the aggregate variables, meaning that the estimated coefficient was multiplied by 60 years of age. One can think of this as the gap difference between a respondent born in 1920 and in 1980, two extreme values that still occur with frequency in the data set. These values are only given as an example to ease the interpretation of the effect sizes in the graphic. The aggregate variables on the left side of the figure show differences between national context, based on economic wealth and the levels of media pervasiveness or press freedom. For example, a context with a per capita GDP of US\$40,000 and BMS of 55 would be an affluent state with high media pervasiveness. Confidence intervals for the marginal effects were calculated according to Kam and Franzese (2007). Model 1 predicts an average gap of slightly more than one half of a point for countries low in both GDP (= US \$1,000) and the BMS (= 10) on our scale, which only ranges 9 points. Countries high in one of these two measures, but low in the other, average a gap of between 1 and 3 points. Countries high in both are estimated to have an inter-cohort gap of more than 3 points. Thus, approximately 3 points of country-specific change along the 9-point scale is explained by media system variation and GDP in the year of birth effect.

**Table 1.** Media and the Cross-National Activation of Youth Liberalism on Homosexuality.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Intercept	2.003	0.276***	1.749	0.268***	2.032	0.283***	2.345	0.284***	2.247	0.411***
Male	-0.504	0.015***	-0.512	0.015***	-0.581	0.018***	-0.479	0.014***	-0.511	0.018***
Education	0.034	0.001***	0.034	0.001***	0.038	0.002***	0.032	0.001***	0.031	0.002***
Never married	0.132	0.022***	0.136	0.023***	0.109	0.028***	0.088	0.020***	0.155	0.026***
Divorced or widowed	-0.065	0.032*	-0.071	0.032*	-0.100	0.037**	-0.112	0.031***	-0.054	0.040
Residence: medium town	0.117	0.026***	0.115	0.026***	0.089	0.030**	0.197	0.025***	0.163	0.032***
Residence: medium city	0.384	0.028***	0.385	0.028***	0.379	0.033***	0.398	0.027***	0.393	0.034***
Residence: big city	0.489	0.031***	0.497	0.031***	0.494	0.036***	0.560	0.029***	0.558	0.037***
Protestant	-0.407	0.033***	-0.403	0.033***	-0.402	0.038***	-0.441	0.033***	-0.323	0.042***
Catholic	-0.434	0.025***	-0.433	0.026***	-0.480	0.029***	-0.375	0.029***	-0.342	0.032***
Other religion	-0.675	0.031***	-0.673	0.032***	-0.716	0.040***	-0.548	0.030***	-0.613	0.036***
Practicing protestant	-1.052	0.043***	-1.058	0.043***	-1.322	0.055***	-0.954	0.035***	-1.046	0.051***
Practicing Catholic	-0.566	0.025***	-0.592	0.025***	-0.626	0.028***	-0.513	0.026***	-0.518	0.032***
Children	-0.063	0.006***	-0.065	0.006***	-0.075	0.007***	-0.066	0.005***	-0.064	0.007***
Non-manual	0.117	0.034***	0.118	0.034***	0.128	0.042**	0.124	0.033***	0.103	0.040**
Manager	0.119	0.035***	0.123	0.036***	0.097	0.047*	0.118	0.030***	0.115	0.039***
Professional	0.174	0.035***	0.179	0.036***	0.274	0.047***	0.181	0.030***	0.155	0.038***
Year of birth	1.385	0.282***	1.363	0.240***	1.586	0.310***	1.594	0.236***	1.800	0.299***
GDP per capita (in US\$1,000s)	0.048	0.013***	0.053	0.015***	0.048	0.013***	0.031	0.008***	0.038	0.013**
Globalization index	2.421	0.490***	2.812	0.509***	2.849	0.537***	1.976	0.503***	1.925	0.735**
BMS	0.007	0.008								
Log (televisions per capita)			-0.028	0.157					-0.092	0.177

(continued)

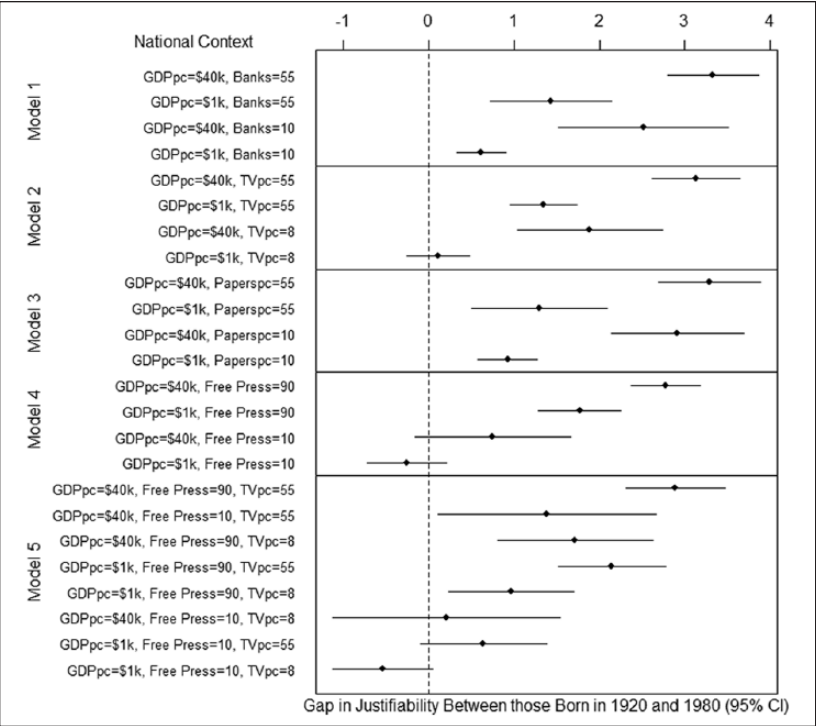


**Table 1. (continued)**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Paper circulation per capita										
Freedom of the press										
GDP x Non-manual	0.022	0.002***	0.022	0.002***	-0.003	0.008	2.626	0.494***	2.534	0.674***
GDP x Manager	0.013	0.002***	0.013	0.002***	0.023	0.002***	0.017	0.002***	0.018	0.002***
GDP x Professional	0.039	0.002***	0.039	0.002***	0.016	0.002***	0.013	0.001***	0.013	0.002***
GDP x Year of birth	0.081	0.022***	0.076	0.016***	0.037	0.003***	0.028	0.001***	0.036	0.002***
BMS x Year of birth	0.030	0.013**	0.076	0.016***	0.085	0.019***	0.043	0.014**	0.032	0.021
Log (TVpc) x Year of birth			1.073	0.237***					1.018	0.266***
Paper circulation x Year of birth					0.014	0.014				
Free press x Year of birth							4.221	0.825***	3.139	1.075**
N (surveys)	119		117		89		127		75	
N (respondents)	129,588		127,595		96,755		144,196		85,028	
$\sigma$ (respondents)	2.541		2.540		2.679		2.514		2.486	
$\sigma$ (Intercept Survey)	1.029		1.020		0.968		0.968		0.973	
$\sigma$ (Year of birth Survey)	1.692		1.580		1.662		1.696		1.563	
AIC	610,550		600,959		466,076		676,251		396,858	
Log likelihood	-305,163		-300,373		-232,930		-338,019		-198,326	

BMS = Banks Media Scale; AIC = Akaike information criterion.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



**Figure 3.** Media, GDP, and the activation of youth liberalism on homosexuality (based on Table 1 results).

Exactly what aspect of the media predicts the emergence of inter-cohort differences in opinion? To determine this, we estimated a series of models (not shown due to limitations of space but available upon request) using the components of the BMS. We also used the log of these components, because the number of devices (radios, TVs) per capita may experience diminishing marginal returns on attitudes at higher levels. For instance, there might be a larger effect in moving from countries with five TVs per capita to 15 TVs per capita on our measure than moving between countries with 55 and 65, respectively. Higher numbers are more likely to represent devices that are no longer in regular use in a household. The best fitting variable is the log of the TVs per capita component. This is displayed in Model 2 of Table 1 and Figure 3. This finding makes theoretical sense. Images of gay people and discussion of their issues have become commonplace in soft news and fictional programs. We also display Model 3, which uses the newspaper circulation per capita component as a variable. This is of interest as newspaper circulation may

come the closest to representing pure news effects divorced from any effect of entertainment media. Newspaper circulation is not a significant predictor of age cohort gaps in attitudes (as well as the radio component of the BMS), suggesting that television may better measure the disparate types of programming in which individuals can learn about lesbians, gays, and their issues. All other variables in these models perform as expected.

In Model 4, we test for the effect of freedom of the press: H2. Freedom of the press emerges as a powerful predictor of the justifiability of homosexuality. Not only is there a significant interaction between the year of birth and press freedom, suggesting a relationship between this measure and the attitudes of younger respondents, but also its direct effect is statistically significant, meaning that it retains a small, but significant effect for the oldest respondents. Furthermore, the substantive effect size of GDP is roughly half that compared with previous models. This suggests that a large portion of the previously reported effect of GDP is because nations with a higher GDP tend to have freer media. Figure 3 reveals that the substantive effect of press freedom in terms of its correlation with an inter-cohort gap is slightly larger than the effect of GDP. Controlling for press freedom, differences between low and high GDP result in a change of about one scale point. At constant levels of GDP, the same effect for press freedom is about two points.

In the last model of Table 1, we include both the log of TVs per capita and press freedom to establish that neither of the media-related effects found above is due solely to the omission of the other as a control. The results show that both effects survive in a more expansive model. Using the BMS instead of TVs gives similar results. As illustrated in Figure 3, press freedom appears to be a slightly stronger predictor, whereas TVs rank second and GDP last (although these differences lack statistical significance). The difference in the inter-cohort gap between a nation low in all three and one high in all three is about three and half points. We also tested several additional control variables. Regional dummy variables, time trends, and interactions between a time trend and year of birth were generally either insignificant statistically or in the wrong direction and did not affect the findings of our key hypothesis. Furthermore, our findings are unaffected when an interaction between the globalization index and year of birth is included in our model testing media-based origins of these generational effects.

If we are correct, and the start of a global media dialogue on gay people is a primary cause of more liberal attitudes, then it would make little sense that media would be having an effect before this dialogue began. Because we have cases both before and after the start of this dialogue (Online Appendix A), we can further verify that the rise of a transnational media dialogue on homosexuality was responsible. In Table 2, we re-estimate Model 2 from Table 1, dividing the data into years pre- and post-1992. As expected,

television media density becomes a significant predictor of attitudes in 1992 and after; coinciding with increased television portrayals of gay people. At the same time, the Globalization index and GDP (for younger respondents) retained substantively large and statistically significant effects in both time periods, indicating that the insignificant effects on television density prior to 1992 were not due to a smaller sample. Because our variable on press freedom is unavailable before 1995, around the time when LGBT-related content in media increased, we cannot test to see whether an effect of press freedom only emerged after this shift in content in a similar fashion.

Finally, the Internet is also thought to foster greater exposure to minority opinions and out-groups, and we thus test a second variable relating to Internet exposure in Online Appendix E that captures the percentage of the population that has access to the Internet.<sup>11</sup> We find that, although the Internet initially had no effect on attitudes if only surveys taken after 2000 are examined—coinciding with the proliferation of household computers, higher connection speeds, and the rise of social media—its penetration does result in more tolerant attitudes among all respondents, with even larger effects among those born in later cohorts, as predicted. These effects survive the inclusion of press freedom as a contextual control variable, though in only a statistically marginal fashion ( $t = 1.88, p < .06$ ). Importantly, Internet access may be a sufficient criterion for increased tolerance, absent press freedom.

## Discussion

The research findings we have described above have important implications. In cross-national comparison, our results have shown that measures of media consumption and freedom of the press—both of which allow for an increase in news stories on, and portrayals of, gay people in popular culture—predict more positive attitudes toward homosexuality among younger cohorts. To contextualize these quantitative findings and reflect further on the mechanisms behind them, we draw on our survey of LGBT organizations in 47 countries.<sup>12</sup> The prominent theme in these responses mimicked the theoretical expectations we formulated above: that media is a conduit for information concerning LGBT people that cross borders, and that it exposes younger cohorts to more multifaceted information with which to develop positions on homosexuality during their formative years.

In the survey, organizational representatives were asked to reflect (in an open text field) on the various factors that contribute to more positive (or negative) attitudes toward gay people in their respective countries.<sup>13</sup> A reoccurring theme in the responses of national experts was that changes in societal attitudes to the introduction of gay visibility had much to do with portrayals in the mass media. This was recognizable, despite the fact that

**Table 2.** Differential Effects of Television Media Density, Pre and Post the Rise of Dialogue on Homosexuality (From Table 1, Model 2).

	Model 1 (years prior to 1992)		Model 2 (1992 and after)	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Intercept	1.925	0.374***	1.714	0.361***
Male	-0.550	0.028***	-0.497	0.018***
Education	0.052	0.003***	0.030	0.002***
Never married	0.048	0.047*	0.165	0.026***
Divorced or widowed	-0.115	0.056	-0.043	0.040
Residence: medium town	0.020	0.048	0.171	0.031***
Residence: medium city	0.377	0.052***	0.395	0.033***
Residence: big city	0.357	0.059***	0.562	0.036***
Protestant	-0.513	0.055***	-0.333	0.041***
Catholic	-0.559	0.044***	-0.360	0.032***
Other religion	-0.757	0.066***	-0.620	0.036***
Practicing protestant	-1.094	0.086***	-1.038	0.051***
Practicing Catholic	-0.752	0.042***	-0.498	0.031***
Children	-0.757	0.066***	-0.063	0.007***
Non-manual	0.043	0.074	0.091	0.039*
Manager	0.184	0.086*	0.119	0.038**
Professional	0.184	0.106@	0.180	0.037***
Year of birth	0.528	0.481	1.535	0.287***
GDP per capita (in US\$1,000s)	0.024	0.024	0.061	0.013***
Globalization index	3.244	0.622***	2.543	0.679***
Log (televisions per capita)	-0.066	0.343	-0.010	0.185
Freedom of the press				
GDP × Non-manual	0.033	0.004***	0.019	0.002***
GDP × Manager	0.009	0.005@	0.013	0.002***
GDP × Professional	0.046	0.006***	0.035	0.002***
GDP × Year of birth	0.147	0.039***	0.066	0.018***
Log (TVs) × Year of birth	0.149	0.587	1.226	0.266***
N (surveys)	40		77	
N (respondents)	40,629		86,966	
σ (respondents)	2.659		2.480	
σ (Intercept Survey)	0.945		1.050	
σ (Year of birth Survey)	1.467		1.635	
AIC	195,134		405,518	
Log likelihood	-97,477		-202,657	

AIC = Akaike information criterion.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . @ $p = .1$ .

respondents were not prompted to address the role of the media, and came from contexts that vary substantially in terms of political rights for LGBT people. According to an Austrian organization, having a “presence in the media had the strongest effect towards a general acceptance of LGBT individuals” (Survey 126). In large part, the mechanism is attributed to the type of contact that the media can facilitate, in that it familiarizes and personalizes the issue for large segments of the population. In Germany, for example, a representative focused on the personal element of media contact:

... societal attitudes improved because LGBTIs were more visible than before and the media in Germany reported about their normal lives, their families and experiences (also about the experiences of homophobic discrimination). All that together made LGBTIs more personal ... that changed a lot for the better. (Survey 63)

It was also noted that media images of openly gay people function as role models, not only encouraging a domestic debate but also helping more gay people to be open about their sexuality within their social networks and, in turn, with other members of the public. Thus, the effects of gay people represented in the media may be magnified through associated increases in interpersonal contact.

While there was an optimism associated with the socializing potential of media contact on changing attitudes, responses also reflect our findings that this effect is more prominent among younger cohorts: “TV series, movies and artists [in Portugal] sending a strong message of tolerance [played] an important role, especially *in young people*” (Survey 127). The same was true for Ireland, another Catholic country that has recently improved on the front of gay recognition:

Ireland has come late to progressive socio-political change, but the country has also leap-frogged our neighbours in some ways. We have very progressive Equality Legislation ... and our media is by and large LGBT friendly. In 2010 a TV documentary series called “Growing Up Gay,” which told the stories of eight LGBT young people growing up in Ireland, was one of the most viewed TV programmes of the year ... which I think is very telling of how far Ireland has come in recent years. (Survey 110)

Even in the domain of highly stigmatized transgender rights, a Dutch organization attributed changes in young people’s attitudes to the media, because it “started to report on the lives of (adult) trans [people] ... Over the years the coverage became wider and there has been a lot of sympathy, especially [among] young people” (Survey 87). Those that oppose liberalizing attitudes toward gay people also recognize the strong, if not

inevitable, socializing potential of the media on younger cohorts. While critiquing the European Union on social issues when justifying accession, Polish Archbishop Józef Życiński argued, “even if Poland remained outside EU structures the *younger generations* will seek patterns of living foreign to Christianity, following a life-style taken from *the media* or learned abroad.”<sup>14</sup>

The finding that younger audiences are more influenced by the media may have its explanation in the types of media that the young consume—which increasingly consist of international sources—but also in the fact that they have been socialized in periods when more positive information on homosexuality was present. The situation was different for previous generations, whose ideas formed during a time when few positive arguments on homosexuality were available to compete with negative ones. Many of the survey responses suggest this dynamic, arguing that the media plays a role in alleviating the conservative backlashes that often coincide with the visibility of gay rights, but primarily among younger populations. Backlashes had more disparaging effects in the earlier period when older generations were socialized, and during which positive media portrayals of gay people were absent:

Attitudes got better from the 1950s to 1970s, but then got worse again . . . thanks partly to a national conservative backlash, including a backlash to the greater visibility of lesbian and gay issues and people in the 1970s, and partly to HIV/AIDS. Then from 1988 attitudes got steadily better, coinciding with the greater visibility of lesbian and gay people in the media, soap operas, etc. The law “section 28,” introduced in 1988, banning local public bodies and education authorities from “promoting homosexuality,” caused a resurgence in lesbian and gay activism, and since 1994 onwards there have been many improvements . . . in societal attitudes. (Survey 107, Scotland)

Different generations, thus, experienced starkly different portrayals of homosexuality, depending on the political debates of the time. The media has only recently offered a dominant counter-frame to compete with the negative portrayal of homosexuality prevalent in the popular culture of previous decades, which may explain the null finding of media effects among older populations who were socialized prior to the 1990s and who may have more deeply engrained views on social roles. This is not to say that the attitudes of older cohorts are fixed, but simply that they are less malleable and much less likely to shift positions than those of younger cohorts, who formed their initial political opinions in times with more diverse portrayals of homosexuality. Because domestic socio-political responses during times of backlash are more in line with what older cohorts learned in earlier years, they may naturally be less receptive to mediated contact with the new contested portrayals of homosexuality that the media offers. If this

is true, our findings support the “primacy and structural principles” put forth by Searing, Schwartz, and Lind (1973), who argued that early life socialization shapes processes of learning and interpreting new information acquired later in life, in a process that substantiates their earlier attitudes.

Despite the backlashes that the visibility of homosexuality provokes (Ayoub, 2016)—especially in societies that previously had little exposure to gay people—the media becomes a vehicle for making the contest surrounding this debate far more active than ever before.<sup>15</sup> This debate can play out favorably for younger cohorts who are forming their initial positions on the issue. The media may even be effective in repressive cases such as Russia, which in 2013 passed draconian legislation that attempted to remove “propaganda” on homosexuality from the public sphere. Because of subsequent international condemnation, the discourse on, and salience of, the gay rights issue has paradoxically been heightened to unprecedented levels. With prominent politicians, athletes, and pop stars—from Wentworth Miller to Madonna—taking a stand for LGBT people alongside groups within the Russian domestic context, the domestic and international media is obliged to confront the issue. Despite political repression, young Russians have access to competing frames on homosexuality that did not exist before and can evaluate these claims in the light of new information and an active debate.

It is in repressive contexts, in which gay people find it difficult to show themselves openly, that the media provides one of the few—even if imperfect—avenues for contact with gay people. According to an organization in Ukraine, few people are personally acquainted with openly gay persons, meaning people have to rely on images of LGBT people that appear in the media (Survey 144). However distorted those images may be in comparison with the actual lived experiences of gay people in that country, they provide an avenue for cultural contact. In sum, we posit that the media dissemination of images related to gay people is effectual via a mechanism of mediated contact, yet how it is received varies according to the period that individuals were socialized in. These complex processes described by experts in multiple domestic contexts support the general trends we chart in our quantitative analyses.

## **Conclusion**

In a recent article, Reynolds (2013) shows that liberalizing attitudes increase the likelihood of the election of LGBT representatives in national governments across the globe—and consequently lead to more LGBT-friendly legislation in many countries—but we knew little about why attitudes in all these countries have changed in the first place. Furthermore, if it is indeed the young who are responsible for this liberalizing trend, then it is imperative that we come to understand how their opinions on this issue are shaped. In this



article, we have tried to contribute to our understating of how political attitudes are shaped by highlighting that one important mechanism of that change is media contact, a mechanism that may operate both domestically and trans-nationally. In a cross-national multilevel analysis of individual attitudes, we demonstrated that both media pervasiveness and press freedom influence more liberal attitudes among the young. We believe that this coincides with the cultural contact that younger people come to have with gay and lesbian issues via channels of socialization. However imperfect media portrayals of gay people may be (and they may be a poor substitute for interpersonal contact), the media does introduce a debate and new frames of reference on homosexuality in multiple domestic contexts.

These findings have implications for our understanding of socialization through contact by suggesting that we should think of contact in more multifaceted ways that take into account the effect of mediated cultural contact across borders. The findings also reflect on the mechanism of the theorized shift from materialist to post-materialist values in Inglehart's framework. The media may transmit certain values in the transition to a post-materialist culture. Television, film, radio, and the Internet can reinforce values concerned with individual self-attainment, tolerance of individual differences, happiness, and personal development while downplaying redistributive (or materialist) concerns. The media remains a powerful socializing mechanism through which younger generations come into contact with previously invisible minorities. In making our case, we do not refute the important findings related to previous research, but instead maintain that our perspective is a compelling lens with which to understand the simultaneous changes that occur among a certain demographic in a multitude of contexts. We also do not wish to minimize the importance of direct, interpersonal contact to the process of attitude change. Indeed, it may be prominently interrelated to other factors we have presented here.

It is also important to note that we do not argue that the visibility generated by the media always improves the lived experiences of individual gay people in any given context. The media can highlight either more sensational or more palatable depictions of gay life, but often neglects the broad array of issues inherent to a diverse community. Activists have warned that the success gay people have found in the media since the 1990s does not mean the battle has been won, "there is this idea that 'we can see LGBT people in movies, in TV shows, so there is no more discrimination,'" yet discrimination remains (Survey 164, France). Furthermore, as we have pointed out, backlashes against LGBT rights, when they become visible, are common and can lead certain segments of society to mobilize in resistance (Ayoub, 2014; Langlois & Wilkinson, 2014). Future research needs to explore the resistance to gay rights that the media visibility of LGBT people can provoke, as well as

how the quality of domestic media portrayals shapes attitudes. A Cypriot activist organization emphasized that, “The attitudes are still improving . . . gradually, depend[ing] on *how the issue* is covered in the media” (Survey 11).

In concluding this study, we wish to emphasize that the liberalization of attitudes toward gay and lesbian people has occurred in a highly diverse set of states across the globe since the 1980s. This research suggests that part of what has encouraged this widespread attitudinal transformation is a national climate allowing for the free transmission of minority viewpoints. Encouraging the telling of more accurate stories on lesbian and gay people may be the key to closing the gap in tolerance that has opened between freer countries and those which restrict the ability of minority viewpoints to get their message out.

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### Notes

1. This article explores attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. When we write “gay people” or “gay rights,” we always refer to both men and women.
2. The same holds true for changes in the legal status of homosexuality (Frank, Camp, & Boutcher, 2010) and same-sex relationships (Paternotte & Kollman, 2013).
3. We make the smallest category slightly smaller because few nations, especially in the earlier years of the surveys, have high means values on the justifiability questions. Only Iceland and Sweden fit into our highest category on the most recent rounds. Furthermore, a score of 3 was the closest to the average mean rating in the most recent round of the World Values Survey (WVS) that allowed for a comparison of countries falling above and below this threshold.
4. The European homophile movement—a precursor of gay liberation—that emerged after the Second World War was well established in both of these

- states, particularly in the Netherlands. Founded in 1946, the Federation of Dutch Associations for Integration of Homosexuality (COC) is also the longest running lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) organization in the world.
5. Consistent with the findings of past research, our focus here is on age cohort specifically, rather than life cycle effect. Previous studies that have looked into the possibility of life cycle effects on gay rights have reached the conclusion that if life cycle effects exist on gay rights, or minority rights in general (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Kryson, 1997), they are quite rare (Wilcox & Norrander, 2002).
  6. The inequality finding was not supported by Hadler (2012), using a different model and slightly different data.
  7. Younger people report slightly more contact with gay people, but the differences are not large enough to explain the wide gulf between young and old on gay rights in surveys when controlling for contact (Lewis, 2011).
  8. This process is far from unproblematic, as it introduces categories of sexuality that often lack rootedness in many domestic contexts, requiring local interpretation. For the purposes of our analysis, however, we simply wish to make the point that those countries that actively portray gay people in their own media generally also often happen to have the cultural hegemony necessary to dispense these portrayals transnationally (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2008).
  9. Increases in positive affect toward gay people subsequently translated into greater support for specific policies supporting gay rights among younger respondents. Furthermore, Garretson (2015) has shown that people who view larger amounts of television develop more positive views toward out-groups when those particular out-groups are portrayed in substantive roles.
  10. The data in Online Appendix A demonstrate that the issue has diffused across linguistic barriers.
  11. We found the Banks Media Scale (BMS) Internet component inadequate for a complete analysis of the effects of Internet media due to its limited availability through the year 2005 (cf. Online Appendix E). Widespread access to computers and the Internet occurred later than other forms of media, and social media were not available until after 2004, necessitating the use of separate Internet measure.
  12. We draw on an original online survey, which serves as a descriptive supplement to the systematic quantitative test presented above. One survey was sent to each of the 291 transnational LGBT organizations identified in the 47 Council of Europe countries. One hundred eighty responded, bringing the response rate to 62%, a high average yield for organizational surveys (Baruch & Holtom, 2008).
  13. Survey question was as follows: "Please briefly comment on your perception of the process of change in societal attitudes toward LGBT individuals. For example, did attitudes improve/worsen immediately after LGBT issues became visible? Or did improved attitudes follow an initial backlash in attitudes when the issue was first introduced?"
  14. Emphasis added, and translated from the Polish. "'Nie Lękajcie Się Europy!'"—Przesłanie Przed Kongresem Kultury Chrześcijańskiej." 2000. *Katolicka Agencja Informacyjna*, August 8.
  15. See Bishin, Hayes, Incantalupo, and Smith (2016) on the effects of backlash on public opinion more generally.

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