



Through the Lens of the Attributional Theory of Stigma: Attitudes Toward Adoption by Same-Sex Couples and Children's Adjustment in Same-Sex Parent Families

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Abstract

The current study aimed to examine significant predictors of negative attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples and same-sex parenting. A cross-sectional study was conducted via an online survey. A total of 130 Greek heterosexual adults aged between 18 and 57 years old ($M=25.26$; $SD=8.84$) participated in the study. Bivariate correlations were generated to explore the associations between variables of interest. Multiple regression analysis was performed to estimate the influences of socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics, and causal attributions about sexual orientation on participants' attitudes toward same-sex couples' right to adopt and parent. Results showed that, over and above the impact of socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics, those who believed that sexual orientation is controllable were also likely to express more negative views towards sexual minorities' rights such as adopting and parenting. This study's results show that changes in attributional beliefs can produce changes in attitudes towards equality of adoption and family rights.

Keywords Sexual prejudice · Attributional theory of stigma · Same-sex couples' adoption and family rights

Introduction

In the last decades, research findings have shown a positive development in the extent to which people support sexual minority individuals in general (Altemeyer, 2001; Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020; Takács et al., 2016). However, considering that currently, same-sex marriage is allowed in 16 European countries and also that “marriage may be deemed to have a higher symbolic value”

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(Gallo et al., 2014, p.173) we can argue that it is still a privilege for different-sex couples and underlines a legal cleavage between same-sex and different-sex couples (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2021). In addition, negative attitudes toward same-sex parenthood remain very common (e.g., Baiocco et al., 2013; Gato & Fontaine, 2016), although multiple research data report no relationship between parents' sexual orientation and the well-being of their children (Fedewa et al., 2015; Tasker, 2010).

Thus, although nowadays attitudes toward sexual minority individuals may have changed, still there are negative attitudes toward same-sex parent families (Farr and Vázquez, 2020; Ioverno et al., 2018).

There is a common social impression that sexual minority individuals are inconsistent with reproduction, childbirth, and parenting (Farr and Vázquez, 2020; Spivey, 2006). This may be because same-sex couples oppose the traditional highly gendered conceptualization of parenting (Lasio et al., 2020; Spivey, 2006). However, the caregiver role is more likely to be related to one's parenting qualities regardless of her/his gender (Carone & Lingiardi, 2022). Same-sex-parent families challenge the heteronormative social beliefs about the traditional nuclear family, including the values of heterosexual marriage and biological parenthood. Specifically, heteronormativity illustrates that heterosexual reproduction and kinship seem like the apparent choice, leaving same-sex couples separate from kinship (Lasio et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, now more than ever is evident that same-sex relationships and parenting aspirations are not mutually exclusive (Amodeo et al., 2018; Carone et al., 2020). Same-sex couples are currently claiming their involvement in the reproduction decision-making and fertility practices by pursuing access to assisted reproduction technologies such as VIF (in vitro fertilization) treatment for lesbian couples (Carpinello et al., 2016), recognition and protection of surrogacy practices (Söderström-Anttila et al., 2016), co-parenting arrangements, step-child adoption, and full child adoption (Brodzinsky & Pertman, 2012; Carone et al., 2017; Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2021). Yet, many still question the legitimacy of same-sex parents and consider same-sex parents as a threat to "family values" (Haines et al., 2018; Kaufman et al., 2022).

Dotti Sani and Quaranta (2021) argue that the acceptance of sexual minority individuals and equality of family and adoption rights varies considerably within and between countries. According to Shenkman et al. (2021), different socio-cultural contexts can have a significant impact on sexual minority individuals' parenthood desires, intentions, and concerns about childlessness. Thus, the process through which sexual minorities and their rights become more acceptable in the eyes of public opinion is still running at present (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2021). In particular, despite the formal legalization of adoption by same-sex couples in most European countries, this family formation remains a particularly sensitive issue probably because opinions about children's best interests vary considerably based on individuals' beliefs leading to heated debates in many countries (Takács et al., 2016; Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020; van de Rozenberg & Scheepers, 2022). Currently, full joint adoption by same-sex couples is legal in 17 countries including the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and several South American and European countries (see Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2021). Thus, adoption constitutes a challenge, as laws may prohibit same-sex couples from adopting a child (Spivey, 2006). Past research has

also highlighted the negative attitudes of directors from adoption agencies toward potential same-sex applicants (Gates et al., 2007). In addition, the double stigma of non-biological kinship and sexual orientation burdens same-sex couples' desire to adopt (Farr and Vázquez, 2020). All in all, prospective adoptive same-sex couples may have to face considerable challenges. Nevertheless, studies on the specific issue of adoption by same-sex parents are still limited, especially from an international perspective (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020; Takács et al., 2016; van de Rozenberg & Scheepers, 2022). Thus, the debate on adoption and family rights for same-sex couples remains heated in several European countries where same-sex couples are still denied the right to marry or adopt (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020; Kováts, 2018). To sum up, even though attitudes toward sexual minorities have shifted towards being more supportive, there may be less support for same-sex-parent families and same-sex couples' adoption and parenting rights (Hollekim et al., 2012; Kaufman et al., 2022). Thus, this study seeks to address this lacuna of research data in this field by examining if specific socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics and causal attributions about sexual orientation affect participants' attitudes toward equality of adoption and family rights.

Attitudes Toward Equality of Adoption and Family Rights

Herek (2009, p.67) defines sexual stigma as “stigma attached to any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community.” Heteronormativity that is the assumption that heterosexuality is natural devalues individuals who are not heterosexual and this extends also to relationships such as same-sex marriage (Bartholomay, 2018). Heterosexism (a form of structural sexual stigma) reinforces power differentials through the existence of sexual stigma in social institutions (Herek, 2009). This is evident in laws against same-sex marriage and same-sex couples' adoption rights as well as the lack of non-discrimination laws (Kaufman et al., 2022). Hegemonic heteronormative norms perpetuate homonegativity, stigmatization, and discrimination against sexual minorities and same-sex-parent families (Lingiardi et al., 2016). Past research findings show that same-sex parents are considered emotionally unstable, less responsible, less competent, and less nurturing (Morse et al., 2007). Recent research data show that same-sex couples and their children still face discrimination in their everyday lives (Levitt et al., 2020; Messina & D'Amore, 2018). Furthermore, this discrimination varies considerably across European countries (Takács et al., 2016).

Biased beliefs surround parenting by same-sex couples, including that gay and lesbian parents will negatively affect their children's gender roles and sexual orientation. Nevertheless, recent research findings show that children of same-sex parents are similar to their peers raised by different-sex parents as regards gender nonconformity (Bruun and Farr, 2020; Carone et al., 2020). Also, Farr and Vázquez (2020) study on how adoptive lesbian and gay parents' stigma experiences influence their parenting competence and parent-child relationships showed that despite any negative experiences same-sex parents reported high levels of parenting competence whereas their children reported high-quality parent-child relationships.

Furthermore, research findings show that the potentially negative impact of children born to gay fathers through surrogacy on child attachment security is unsupported (Carone et al., 2020). Thus, same-sex parenting has to be considered against a background of prejudice and discrimination that stems from a macro and micro-environmental setting lessening possible social support and creating additional difficulties. As sexual prejudice persists, sexual minorities are denied equality of family and adoption rights due to deviating from the rigid heteronormative societal norms. Opposition to equal adoption rights for same-sex couples appears to be part of a broader gender belief system characterized by heteronormative ideas about family formation and appropriate social roles for men and women (Takács et al., 2016).

Societal beliefs about same-sex parenting competencies may lead to stereotypical attitudes that may be manifested with both old-fashioned (traditional) and new-fashioned (modern) types of unfavorable attitudes and beliefs (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). Traditional forms refer to open rejection, whereas modern forms refer to subtle manifestations of disapproval of sexual minorities (Salvati et al., 2018). In this context, children of sexual minority parents may encounter subtle and brief verbal or behavioral indignities from peers and not overt bullying related to their family formation. Such microaggressions in the school context may result in children experiencing their environment as less trustworthy and more threatening (Carone et al., 2022). Previous research findings using the scale on Beliefs about Children's Adjustment in Same-Sex Families (SBCASS) (Frias-Navarro et al., 2012, 2014) showed that relatively new-fashioned (modern) types of unfavorable attitudes toward children's adjustment in same-sex families, illustrated by the normative opposition subscale (NO), correlated more strongly with opposition to same-sex parenting than the old-fashioned (traditional) types of unfavorable attitudes toward children's adjustment in same-sex families, demonstrated by the individual opposition subscale (IO; Frias-Navarro et al., 2014, 2018). In addition, same-sex couples are also highly discriminated against (Clarke, 2002) and experience more challenges than their heterosexual counterparts during the adoption process (Gates et al., 2007). Societal beliefs about children adopted by same-sex parents entail the fear of the children being discriminated against by peers, developing a minority sexual orientation, and lacking opposite-sex role models (Clarke, 2001).

According to the theory of socializing agents individuals' attitudes are affected by socializing agents to which individuals are exposed. This means that various forms of socialization influence the attitudes of people (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Examples of socializing agents related to opposition to sexual and gender minority individuals are religiosity and the educational system. Specifically, whereas involvement in religious activity may increase negative attitudes toward sexual minorities participation in the latter may reduce negative attitudes toward sexual minorities (Van den Akker et al., 2013). In addition, higher levels of education are positively associated with support for adoption by same-sex couples in the USA (Whitehead & Perry, 2016).

Furthermore, previous research data show that political conservatism is associated with negative attitudes toward same-gender marriage and parenting (Baiocco et al., 2018; Costa et al., 2014). Petrucelli et al. (2015 as cited in De Simone et al., 2020) showed that left-wing political leaning correlated with positive beliefs

about same-gender parenthood. Research data also reported intergroup contact as an important variable that significantly affects attitudes toward sexual minorities (Baiocco et al., 2020; Grigoropoulos, 2022a, b). In many cases, social interactions between members of different groups may reduce prejudice and stereotypical attitudes (Allport, 1954). Another important variable concerning attitudes toward sexual minorities is age. It has been reported that younger people may have more positive attitudes toward lesbian and gay individuals (Avery et al., 2007). In particular, recent research data show that cohort (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020) and gender of participants (Bettinsoli et al., 2020) affect attitudes toward equal adoption rights for same-sex couples but only in countries that recognize legal rights towards sexual and gender minority individuals (van de Rozenberg & Scheepers, 2022).

Previous research findings regarding attitudes towards same-sex marriage in Greece show personal and contextual characteristics, namely religiosity, contact experiences, older age, and male gender as significant predictors of homonegative and intolerant attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Grigoropoulos, 2018; Iraklis & Kordoutis, 2015; Iraklis, 2010, 2020). Greek society is traditionally conservative (Iraklis, 2021a). In addition, the Orthodox religion in Greece strongly affects societal attitudes and beliefs while Greek cultural values overemphasize the importance of heterosexual marriage (Voultsov et al., 2018). Overall, research data exploring the socio-demographic correlates of negative attitudes toward same-sex parents show that the male gender (Costa et al., 2018; Frias-Navarro and Monterde-i-Bort, 2012), lower education levels (Costa et al., 2018), higher levels of political conservatism (Webb et al., 2017), and poor interpersonal contact with sexual minority individuals (Costa et al., 2015) emerged as the main predictors of negative attitudes toward same-sex parent families.

Attributional Theory of Stigma

Social psychological approaches to understanding sexual prejudice used the attribution theory framework emphasizing the link between fixed beliefs (i.e. that sexual orientation is biologically based and immutable) and decreased blame and prejudice (see Weiner et al., 1988). Much previous research steeped in attribution theory indicates that beliefs about the control and choice that people have over their behaviors influence the extent to which they are blamed (Weiner, 1985). As Crandall (2000, p.129) noted “An attribution of internal controllability points the finger of blame directly at stigmatized individuals: Since they are responsible for their fate, they have earned its consequence.” Thus, believing that sexual orientation is biologically based and unchangeable (essentialist belief) predicts positive attitudes towards sexual minorities (Haslam & Levy, 2006). Hence, opposition to sexual minorities loses force when acknowledged as non-volitional (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2011). Overall, there is a growing body of research showing that perceiving individuals as responsible for their sexual orientation predicts higher levels of sexual prejudice against sexual minorities relative to perceiving lower levels of responsibility (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008). All in all, attribution theory considers causal beliefs as significant factors of emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral reactions to stigmatized individuals

and groups (Weiner et al., 1988). Taking into account the attributional theory of stigma (Weiner et al., 1988), when individuals are considered as having personal accountability for their condition/stigma more negative attitudes are likely to occur toward them (Frias-Navarro et al., 2013).

In this study, according to Weiner's attribution theory, the origins of same-sex behavior may be considered controllable/volitional (environmental/choice) or not controllable/ non-volitional (biologically determined; Weiner et al., 1988). However, the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation denotes a level of choice and responsibility for same-sex relationships, which is usually related to a negative evaluation of sexual minority individuals (Frias-Navarro et al., 2014). Thus, the belief in unchanging qualities may decrease stereotypes and negative attitudes towards sexual minorities (Haslam et al., 2006; Weiner et al., 1988).

To conclude, notions about the etiology of differences among different groups can significantly influence people's attitudes (Boysen & Vogel, 2007). Thus, the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation (i.e. people who consider sexual orientation as a choice) may predict more negative attitudes toward equality of family and adoption rights than uncontrollable causes (i.e. people who think of sexual orientation as non-volitional; Frias-Navarro et al., 2014).

The Current Study

Attitudes toward same-sex adoption and children's development in same-sex parent families constitute an important, although understudied field of research (Baiocco et al., 2020). This scarcity however underscores the need for more studies from different cultural contexts to reflect the impact of socio-cultural influences on attitudes toward equality of family and adoption rights. Even though nowadays, same-sex-parent families have been granted institutional legitimization, prejudice regarding sexual minority individuals' competencies continues, mostly motivated by conservative political preferences and religious beliefs (Lasio et al., 2020, Lasio et al., 2018). In Greece, same-sex couples are not treated equally to different-sex couples. Specifically, in Greece, same-sex couples are not allowed access to in vitro fertilization (IVF) technology and surrogacy (Voultsos et al., 2018, 2021). Furthermore, according to the new child adoption law (law 4538/2018), sexual minority individuals may foster children; however, same-sex couples are banned from adopting jointly.

Also, within Greece's socio-cultural context, traditional family life is praised and distinct roles for men and women are reinforced (Grigoropoulos & Kordoutis, 2015; Grigoropoulos et al., 2010; Grigoropoulos, 2022b; Iraklis, 2020, 2021b), placing additional significance on gender roles (Chalkidou, 2020). The Orthodox Church is also a significant factor that profoundly influences sexual-ity and marriage issues (Grigoropoulos, 2018; Iraklis, 2010; Iraklis & Kordoutis, 2015). The above-stated societal beliefs and governmental policies echo the socio-cultural stigmatization and discrimination of sexual minorities. Therefore, due to the evolving concern about sexual minorities' rights, it is important to examine public bias toward same-sex couples' adoption and parenting rights in the Greek

culture. To the researcher's knowledge, this exploratory cross-sectional study is the first in Greece concerning attitudes toward same-sex couples' adoption rights.

Takács et al. (2016) argue that adoption is a highly sensitive topic because people are likely to consider it a public rather than a private issue (for example sexual orientation). Thus, even those individuals who on average display less opposition to same-sex relationships may be more reluctant to support adoption rights for same-sex couples. Hence, the idea that same-sex couples should have the same right to adopt as straight couples may encounter greater resistance, especially in socio-cultural contexts that are more behind in the process of normalization of same-sex relationships (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Overall, examining attitudes towards the "difficult" issue of adoption by same-sex couples allows us to uncover possible mixed opinions in the way participants think about the rights of same-sex couples. Support for adoption by same-sex couples permits a first assessment of where the people stand toward the equality in formal rights between heterosexual individuals and sexual minority individuals (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). In line with the literature, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Participants' background characteristics and opposition to same-sex parenting, along with the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation will be associated with more negative attitudes toward same-sex couples' adoptive rights.

H2: Participants' background demographics along with the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation will be associated with more modern types (normative opposition subscale) of unfavorable attitudes toward children's adjustment in same-sex families,

H3: Participants' background demographics along with the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation will be associated with more traditional types (individual opposition subscale) of unfavorable attitudes toward children's adjustment in same-sex families.

Method

Procedure and Participants

A cross-sectional study was conducted between January 5 and February 5, 2021, via an online survey. The platform google forms was used. Convenience sampling was utilized as the questionnaire was shared through social media (e.g. LinkedIn) and posts on different social networks and forums (e.g., parenting groups). The online study was completely anonymous and participants indicated their agreement to participate by choosing the consent checkbox. The inclusion criteria were: a) agreeing to take part; b) being at least 18 years old. The process lasted approximately 10–15 min. This study follows all the ethical instructions and directions of the institution to which the researcher belongs.

A total of 130 respondents aged between 18 and 57 years old ($M=25.26$; $SD=8.84$) participated in the study: 86.2% (112) were female and 13.8% (18) male. All of the respondents considered themselves to be heterosexual. Regarding

respondents' level of education, 77.7% (101) had a degree, 13.1% (17) had a postgraduate degree, and 9.2% (12) had a high school diploma (Table 1).

Measures

Socio-demographic and Attitudinal Variables

In the demographic section of the questionnaire, participants gave background information about their age (reported by participants in a numerical entry box), gender (male, female, transgender, other—any descriptor of gender participants' felt comfortable with), sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, other), level of education (below high school, high school diploma, university degree, postgraduate degree), political positioning (left, center-left, center, center-right, right), religiosity (frequency of religious services attendance; extending from 1 = *never* to 5 = *frequently*) and self-reported contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals (number of close acquaintances with LGBTQ+ individuals reported in a numerical entry box) (Table 1).

Scale on Beliefs About Children's Adjustment in Same-Sex Families (SBCASSF)

A 14-item instrument, consisting of two subscales, was used to examine old-fashioned/traditional (named as individual opposition, IO; e.g. A boy raised by lesbian mothers will be an effeminate child) and new-fashioned/modern opposition (named as normative opposition, NO; e.g. The child raised by gay/lesbian parents will probably not be chosen as a leader by his/her classmates or friends) to same-sex parenting (Frias-Navarro & Monterde-i-Bort, 2012). Each subscale consists

Table 1 Sample characteristics (N = 130)

Characteristic	N	%
Education		
High school diploma	12	9.2
University degree	101	77.7
Postgraduate studies	17	13.1
Political positioning		
Left	5	3.8
Centre-left	30	23.1
Centre	84	64.6
Centre-right	10	7.7
Right	1	.8
Religiosity		
Never	35	26.9
Sometimes	47	36.2
Frequently	37	28.5
Usually	8	6.2
At least once a week	3	2.3

of 7 items. Respondents specified their level of agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Higher scores denote more individual and normative opposition to children's adjustment in same-sex parent families. The Greek version of the BCASSF scale was used. In this study, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.84 and 0.87 for individual and normative opposition, respectively.

Beliefs About the Etiology of Sexual Orientation

An 8-item instrument, namely Beliefs About the Etiology of Sexual Orientation (BESO), consisting of two four-item subscales, was used to examine participants' beliefs about the causes of sexual orientation (Frias-Navarro, 2009). Genetic etiology (GE; uncontrollable causes) was evaluated with responses to four items (e.g. homosexual orientation is an inevitable behavior that depends on genetics). Learned etiology (LE; belief in the controllability of sexual orientation) was also evaluated with four items (e.g. children need a father and a mother to provide them with masculine and feminine role models). A five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used to evaluate responses. Higher scores indicated stronger beliefs in genetic or learned causes of sexual orientation. In this study, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.81 and 0.84 for genetic and learned causes respectively.

The Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Couples as Adoptive Parents Scale

A 25-item instrument was used to examine attitudes toward adoption by same-gender couples (Spivey, 2006). A six-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree) was used to evaluate responses. On this scale, scores can range from 25 to 150. Higher scores denote more favorable attitudes. The ATSCAP reported a reliability coefficient of 0.96 (Spivey, 2006). The ATSCAP consists of two subscales, the gay couple subscale (GCS; e.g. I would feel uncomfortable placing a child in a home where he/she would have two male parents), and the lesbian couple subscale (LCS; I would feel uncomfortable placing a child in a home where he/she would have two female parents) (Spivey, 2006). In this study, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.72.

Statistical Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics version 19 was used to analyze the data. Bivariate correlations were generated to explore the associations between variables of interest. Next, multiple regressions were performed to estimate the influences of all independent variables on attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents and children's adjustment in same-sex parent families.

Preliminary Analysis

Data screening techniques were used before the main statistical analysis. The normal range for skewness and kurtosis are considered to be between +2 and -2 for normal distribution according to the criteria by George and Mallory (2010), and that assumption is satisfied as the values for skewness were found to be between -0.43 and 1.09 and for kurtosis between -1.13 and 1.27. No outliers were detected. For this sample power analysis was conducted using G* Power (post hoc) (Faul et al., 2009). For multiple regression (seven predictors), the analysis (two-tailed) showed a power of 0.90.

Results

Descriptive Results

The correlations of ATSCAP with all variables (see Table 2) show that younger age, lower levels of religiosity, having many contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals, and lower scores on normative opposition, individual opposition, and learned etiology of sexual orientation are all associated with greater acceptance of same-sex couples as adoptive parents.

The correlations of normative opposition with all variables (see Table 2) show that fewer contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals, more conservative political positioning, higher levels of religiosity, and learned etiology of sexual orientation are all correlated with higher levels of normative opposition, denoting greater opposition to children's adjustment in same-sex parent families.

The correlations of individual opposition with all variables (see Table 2) show that fewer contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals, more conservative political positioning, higher levels of religiosity, older age, strongly believe in the learned etiology of sexual orientation, and less in the genetic etiology of sexual orientation are all associated with higher levels of individual opposition, denoting more opposition to children's adjustment in same-sex families (same-sex parenting).

Regression Analyses

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the first hypothesis (H1) and analyze which of the correlated variables affected attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents. The assumption of independent errors was met (Durbin-Watson value = 1.91). The independent variables were entered into the regression equation in three steps. In Model 1, the background variables (age, religiosity, and contact with LGBTQ+ individuals) were inserted. In Model 2, the variables of individual and normative opposition to children's adjustment in same-sex families were added. In Model 3, the genetic and learned beliefs about sexual orientation were applied as independent variables. Model 3 was significant ($F = 34.870, p < 0.001$). The total

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables ($N=130$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender											
2. Age	.09										
3. Religiosity	-.04	.12									
4. Political positioning	-.13	.08	.33**								
5. Contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals	-.01	-.10	-.07	-.07							
6. Educational level	.15	.15	-.05	-.07	-.08						
7. ATSCAP	.01	-.25**	-.27**	-.16	.28**	-.11					
8. NO	-.02	.08	.18*	.34**	-.30**	-.04	-.52**				
9. IO	.08	.26**	.38**	.32**	-.33*	.01	-.56**	.64**			
10. GE	-.10	-.08	-.25**	-.12	-.11	-.09	.11	-.08	-.22*		
11. LE	.03	.25**	.44**	.39**	-.21**	-.01	-.55**	.58**	.88**	-.33**	

ATSCAP, attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents scale; NO, normative opposition; IO, individual opposition; GE, genetic etiology; LE, learned etiology

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

proportion of variance explained by the predicting variables was 40% (adjusted $R^2=0.402$). According to the standardized regression coefficient, normative opposition ($\beta = -0.316$; $p < 0.001$), and learned etiology ($\beta = -0.278$; $p < 0.001$), were significantly associated with attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents (Table 3). Thus, less normative opposition to same-sex parenting and believing less in the learned etiology of sexual orientation predicted more favorable attitudes toward same-sex couples as adoptive parents.

Next, multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the second hypothesis (H2) and analyze which of the independent variables affected normative opposition to same-sex parenting. The assumption of independent errors was met (Durbin-Watson value = 1.71). The independent (predictor) variables were inserted into the regression equation in two blocks. In the first block (Model 1), the background demographic variables (religiosity, political positioning, and contact with LGBTQ+ individuals) were inserted. In the second block (Model 2), the learned and genetic beliefs about sexual orientation were added.

Model 2 was significant ($F = 38.123$, $p < 0.001$). The total proportion of variance explained by all the predictor variables was 38% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.384$). According to the standardized regression coefficient, learned etiology ($\beta = 0.526$; $p < 0.001$), political positioning ($\beta = 0.162$; $p < 0.05$), and contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals ($\beta = -0.147$; $p < 0.05$) were significantly associated to normative opposition to children's adjustment in same-sex families (Table 4). Thus, strong beliefs in the learned etiology of sexual orientation, more conservative political positioning, and less contact with LGBTQ+ individuals predicted more normative opposition to children's adjustment in same-sex families.

Finally, linear multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the third hypothesis and analyze which of the independent variables affected individual

Table 3 Results of hierarchical regression analysis predicting attitudes towards same-sex couples as adoptive parents ($n = 130$)

	Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	R^2
Step 1	Age	-.285	.114	-.203*	.166
	Religiosity	-2.944	1.019	-.235**	
	Contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals	1.055	.354	.242**	
Step 2	Age	-.260	.101	-.185*	.363
	Religiosity	-2.079	.916	-.166*	
	Contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals	.494	.328	.113	
	NO	-1.019	.173	-.449***	
Step 3	Age	-.197	.101	-.141	.402
	Religiosity	-.939	.976	-.075	
	Contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals	.366	.322	.084	
	NO	-.718	.198	-.316***	
	LE	-.858	.301	-.278**	

NO, normative opposition; LE, learned etiology

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

Table 4 Results of hierarchical regression analysis predicting normative opposition ($n = 130$)

	Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	R^2
Step1	Religiosity	.318	.470	.057	.196
	Political positioning	2.447	.691	.301**	
	Contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals	-.532	.154	.277**	
Step2	Religiosity	-.647	.441	-.117	.364
	Political positioning	1.317	.634	.162*	
	Contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals	-.282	.141	-.147*	
	LE	.715	.116	.526***	

LE, learned etiology

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

opposition to same-sex parenting. The assumption of independent errors was met (Durbin-Watson value = 1.98). The independent variables were inserted into the regression equation in two blocks. In the first block (Model 1), the background demographic variables (age, religiosity, political positioning, and contact with LGBTQ+ individuals) were inserted. In the second block (Model 2), the genetic or learned beliefs about sexual orientation were added. Model 2 was significant ($F = 126.051$, $p < 0.001$). The total proportion of variance explained by all the predicting (independent) variables was 65% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.659$). According to the standardized regression coefficient, learned etiology ($\beta = 0.730$; $p < 0.001$) and contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals ($\beta = -0.113$; $p < 0.05$) were significantly correlated with individual opposition to children's adjustment in same-sex families (Table 5). Thus, strong beliefs in the learned etiology of sexual orientation and less contact with LGBTQ+ individuals predicted more individual opposition toward children's adjustment in same-sex families.

Table 5 Results of hierarchical regression analysis predicting individual opposition ($n = 130$)

	Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	R^2
Step1	Religiosity	1.902	.523	.292**	.313
	Political positioning	2.004	.769	.210*	
	Contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals	-.671	.172	-.297***	
	Age	.131	.054	.181*	
Step2	Religiosity	.297	.388	0.46	.659
	Political positioning	.123	.557	.013	
	Contacts with LGBTQ+ individuals	-.255	.124	-.113*	
	Age	.042	.039	.057	
	LE	1.168	.104	.730***	

LE, learned etiology

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

Discussion

While many studies examine the general acceptance of sexual minorities (see Takács & Szalma, 2011; Van den Akker et al.), fewer studies examine attitudes toward the legalization of equal treatment of same-sex couples (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020, 2021; van de Rozenberg & Scheepers, 2022). Greece took considerably longer to adopt laws regulating same-sex partnerships (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Considering marriage and adoption legislation in Greece, same-sex couples are currently not allowed to marry or fully adopt indicating that marriage and adoption are still privileges for different-sex couples. Therefore, this study examined the predictors of negative attitudes toward same-sex couples' adoption and parenting rights. In particular, this study examined the effect of specific demographic and attitudinal variables along with the belief in the controllability/uncontrollability of sexual orientation on attitudes toward same-sex adopting couples and beliefs about children's adjustment in same-sex families in a sample of Greek heterosexual adults. This study's results highlight the significant and predictive role of causal attributions about sexual orientation (Weiner et al., 1988). Above and beyond socio-demographic and attitudinal variables, the notion that sexual orientation is controllable is significantly associated with negative attitudes toward sexual minorities' adopting rights and their parenting abilities.

As Schwartz (2010) suggested, sexual minorities' rights are controversial subjects that give rise to public debate. Societal endorsement of sexual minorities' rights is not consistent. On the contrary, endorsement of same-sex parenthood and adoption rights can vary widely (Schwartz, 2010). Adoptive parents may face stigma due to the lack of biological ties (Farr and Vázquez, 2020), whereas same-sex adoptive parents may encounter additional stigma due to their sexual identity and concerns about their parenting ability (Goldberg & Smith, 2014). In Greece, dominant societal and cultural norms about the family echo heteronormativity and the significance of biological ties between families (Iraklis, 2021a; Kantsa & Chalkidou, 2014). These broad societal scripts can lead to stigmatization of families not defined by biological ties and to more negative attitudes toward same-sex couples who want to adopt. Furthermore, same-sex couples report incidents of discrimination and additional legal complexities in their efforts to adopt due to their sexual identity (Farr & Goldberg, 2018; Goldberg & Smith, 2011). Thus, sexual minority individuals face adoption stigma as well as sexual stigma. The present study aimed to examine significant predictors of negative attitudes toward two of the most debated sexual minority issues: adoption by same-sex couples and children's adjustment in same-sex parents' families. In particular, this study examined to what extent can opposition to equality of family and adoption rights be explained by specific socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics and causal attributions about sexual orientation.

In support of H1, the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation (higher learned etiology scores) and normative (modern) opposition to children's adjustment in same-sex families predicted less favorable attitudes toward adoption by

same-sex couples. Thus, this study's results show that the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation (i.e. learned etiology of sexual orientation) was the strongest predictor of opposition towards adoption by same-sex couples, followed by more subtle manifestations of opposition to sexual minorities, that is normative opposition to children's adjustment in same-sex families. These findings coincide with previous research data reporting that people who perceive sexual orientation as controllable more strongly reject children's adjustment in same-sex families than those who place it on uncontrollable causes (genetic etiology; Costa et al., 2018; Vecho et al., 2019). Therefore, participants considering sexual orientation as controllable are more likely to hold higher levels of sexual prejudice (Hans et al., 2012). Conversely, those who acknowledge that sexual orientation is inherent and non-volitional are more likely to hold more favorable attitudes toward sexual minorities (Costa et al., 2018). This result also confirms that attributing a stigma to causes that the stigmatized individual can control relates to greater prejudice toward the target (Weiner et al., 1988). Participants' normative (modern) opposition to children being raised in same-sex families was the second predictor of negative attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples. This finding is consistent with recent research data showing that daily microaggressions in the form of subtle verbal and behavioral indignities against new family forms are common (Carone et al., 2022; Grigoropoulos, 2022b).

This study's results confirmed H2 because the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation (higher learned etiology scores) and conservative political positioning together with less contact with LGBTQ+ individuals emerged as the strongest predictors of higher normative opposition to children being raised in same-sex families. Belief in the controllability of sexual orientation (learned etiology) was the most significant predictor, followed by political leaning and less contact with LGBTQ+ individuals. Among participants, those who identified themselves as more conservative and having less contact with LGBTQ+ individuals reported more negative attitudes toward same-sex parent families. This finding is in line with past research in this field (e.g. Baiocco et al., 2013; Costa et al., 2014; Schwartz, 2010). Conservatism stresses that existing social arrangements are fair and legitimate. Therefore, conservatives are more likely to adopt beliefs that help legitimize inequalities (Hoyt et al., 2018; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). In addition, the idea that under certain circumstances exposure to a minority or an outgroup can correct negative stereotypes and prejudice and lead to favorable attitudes can be traced back to Allport's contact theory (Skipworth et al., 2010).

Finally, the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation (higher learned etiology scores) and less contact with LGBTQ+ individuals emerged as the strongest predictors of individual (traditional) opposition to children being raised in same-sex families (H3).

The belief in the controllability of sexual orientation (learned etiology of sexual orientation) was the strongest predictor of negative attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples. Yet this effect seems to hold especially for individuals with conservative political ideology and with limited contact with LGBTQ+ individuals as regards opposition to same-sex parenting confining same-sex couples' possibilities to live their lives as they wish. This study's results coincide with the well-documented

association between support for biologically essentialist views about sexual orientation and more positive views towards sexual minorities confirming attribution theory which posits that causal attributions for stigmas (i.e. attributing a stigma to a cause that the stigmatized person can control) lead to prejudice (Armesto & Weisman, 2001; Weiner et al., 1988). Thus, this study shows that through the lens of the attribution theory, biologically essentialist beliefs are more likely to remove blame for stigma from the individual and instead place it on fixed, non-volitional causes leading to more positive attitudes toward equality of adoption and family rights.

The use of Weiner's attribution theory (Weiner et al., 1988) to predict negative attitudes toward two of the most debated sexual minorities' rights is a significant strength of this study and a contribution to an under-researched field (Farr and Vázquez, 2020). According to Weiner's theory, perceived responsibility and controllability of a situation are linked to a negative evaluation. In this study, negative evaluation of sexual minorities (Weiner, 1985; Whitley, 1990). The belief in the controllability of sexual orientation is most important, as it offers a rationale for individual and institutional prejudice (Costa et al., 2018). As Clarke (2001) noted, opposition to same-sex-parent families stems from the assumption that the children will become non-heterosexual because they will learn it from their parents. Therefore, this study adds to research data trying to uncover the roots of sexual prejudice, a critical issue in resisting its consequences for sexual minorities.

All in all, believing the determinants of sexual orientation to be fixed can serve to decrease prejudice by reducing the blame and responsibility placed on sexual minorities (Crandall & Reser, 2005). This research has important implications for approaches to lessen prejudice against sexual minorities as it contributes to the mounting evidence showing that conceptualizing stigmatized characteristics as unchangeable comes with benefits in terms of prejudice. However, research data report that biologically essentialist conceptions of sexual orientation can come with costs in terms of prejudice as well. Reliance on non-volitional attributions about sexual orientation can suppress prejudice (see Haslam & Levy, 2006). Thus, policymakers and activists wanting to undermine prejudice can emphasize also social justice along with fixed attributions about sexual orientation.

Even though legal recognition of rights for same-sex couples is on its way in several European countries, a controversial issue such as adoption by same-sex couples echoes public attitudes toward greater formal inclusiveness and equality of sexual minorities' rights and opportunities (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Research data in this understudied field concerning a country in which the process of normalization of same-sex relationships has not reached yet an advanced stage constitute a significant first step toward equalizing the family rights of all people by extending to same-sex couples the right to adopt and parent (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2021). Also, greater institutional effort in terms of sexual minorities' rights campaigns and initiatives may be useful to increase support for sexual minorities (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Furthermore, acknowledging the legitimacy of same-sex relationships can operate as a buffer for opposition to equality of adoption and family rights in countries where laws and policies establishing sexual minorities' rights do not exist. Introducing these legal frameworks can result in more inclusive socio-cultural contexts

since laws can act as socializing agents stating what is legally right and what is wrong (Van den Akker et al., 2013). Overall, attitudes toward sexual minority rights are most significant as they illustrate how different socio-cultural contexts consider sexual minorities and their rights. Also, research data from this field could help sexual minority rights supporters to counteract the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation. This study also attempts to raise awareness about sexual prejudice and discrimination faced by sexual minority individuals and provides Greek data in this field of research.

Limitations

In line with other online surveys, this study's participants were fairly young and highly educated (see Costa et al., 2018). Another important restriction is the gender asymmetry in this study's sample since the vast majority of participants were female. Taking into account that women are less prejudiced against sexual minorities and their families (Costa et al., 2018), this gender imbalance may have influenced some of the relationships between the variables. For the aforementioned reasons, the results may not be generalizable. Future studies may benefit from larger and less similar samples and the inclusion of sexual and gender minority individuals as studies inclusive of sexual minorities are still scarce (Carneiro et al., 2017). Furthermore, because this study was a cross-sectional research, causal relationships can not be estimated. Finally, this study examined the equality of family and adoption rights emphasizing uncontrollable and controllable attributions about sexual orientation as potential predictors of attitudes. Future studies could use other significant predictors such as sexism.

Conclusions

Full family rights are most significant for the sexual minority community as they reflect the institutional endorsement of principles of equality and non-discrimination among all people and their children regardless of their sexual orientation (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2021). This study provides useful data about the factors that significantly predict negative attitudes toward equality of adoption and family rights. In this study, the belief in the controllability of sexual orientation has proven to be fruitful in predicting the rejection of equal adoption and parenting rights for same-sex couples extending a growing body of literature showing that biologically essentialist views about sexual orientation are related to decreased prejudice. More studies are needed to perceive how sexual minorities' rights are considered, especially in the Greek society where the research data are very limited. Such data may assist the development of new strategies for same-sex couples to enjoy equal social and legal rights as opposite-sex couples. Overall, this study's findings produce information to reduce sexual prejudice and protect the rights of sexual minorities by decreasing the strength of causal beliefs that determine reactions to stigmatized individuals and groups.

Data Availability The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declarations

Ethical Approval All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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