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A Comparative Study of Attitudes Toward Same-Gender Parenting and Gay and Lesbian Rights in Portugal and in Mexico

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

The belief that gay men and lesbians are unable to provide a stable environment in which to raise children fuels manifestations of sexual prejudice that are still highly prevalent in Portugal and Mexico. The aim of this study was to assess attitudes toward same-gender parenting and gay and lesbian rights, as well as beliefs about the controllability of homosexuality among a sample of 531 university students. A further aim was to assess the predictors of attitudes toward same-gender parenting. Results revealed the existence of ambivalent attitudes toward same-gender parenting. The belief that homosexuality is a choice and thus controllable in particular explained over 50\% of the total variance of attitudes toward same-gender parenting. Being a man, older, and highly religious predicted higher levels of sexual prejudice regarding same-gender parenting. Comparative cross-cultural studies have the potential to highlight common features but also specificities of sexual prejudice.

\textbf{KEYWORDS}

Sexual stigma; sexual prejudice; cross-cultural studies; homoparenting; gay and lesbian parents; familism; controllability of homosexuality

According to Herek (2009), stigma “refers to the negative regard and inferior status that society collectively accords to people who possess a particular characteristic or belong to a particular group or category” (p. 66). Sexual stigma is characterized by a system of socially shared beliefs that homosexuality and homosexual behavior are deviant relative to heterosexuality. Individuals who internalize and endorse the negative evaluation of homosexuality may manifest these attitudes in the form of sexual prejudice (Herek, 2009). Further, the belief that gay men and lesbians are unable to sustain healthy relationships, and thus are unable to provide a stable environment in which to raise children, fuels manifestations of sexual prejudice and may justify preexisting negative feelings and beliefs regarding same-gender marriage and parenting.

Attitudes toward same-gender marriage and parenting have improved throughout the Western world (see, for example, Gallup Organization, 2013, 2014). Despite the immense variability among European Union member states
(Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011), attitudes toward gay men and lesbians and their families have improved, at least partially due to the legal recognition of same-gender relationships, marriage, and parenting. In Portugal, however, sexual prejudice is still highly prevalent, particularly when compared to other European countries. A study comparing 32 European countries on several attitudinal patterns reported that Portugal was listed alongside a number of former Soviet states as the least supportive of same-gender behavior (Lottes & Alkula, 2011). Takács, Szalma, and Bartus (2016) examined social attitudes toward same-gender adoption among 28 European countries and reported that Portuguese attitudes were below the scale’s mid-point, scoring between Russia and Romania.

A recent survey about attitudes toward same-gender marriage and parenting across seven European Union countries (D’Amore et al., 2017) has shown that Portuguese youth were the least accepting of same-gender relationships among the sampled European youth, despite their attitudes being generally supportive. Attitudes may further improve given Portuguese current progressive legislation regarding same-gender relationships, which were first legally recognized in 2001 in the form of civil partnership, and then in the form of marriage in 2010. Same-gender adoption and donor insemination were finally approved very recently, in 2016.

In Mexico, the federal law to prevent and eliminate different kinds of discrimination was promulgated in 2003, giving way to the approval of the Social Coexisting Act in Mexico City in 2006. In June of 2015, the Supreme Court of Justice decided that denying same-gender couples the right to marry was unconstitutional, thus mandating each state to allow same-gender marriage. However, each state has to produce legislation to that effect, and to this date only 12 out of 32 states have done so. In opposition to these advancements in the recognition of gay and lesbian rights, there has been a right-wing front opposing both same-gender marriage and gender identity recognition. These legislative acts paved the way for both the legalization of same-gender marriage and the possibility of child adoption by same-gender couples in 2009, which marked Mexico City as the second city in Latin America to do so after Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2002 (Díez, 2013). This recognition was also made possible in Uruguay and Brazil in 2013, and in Colombia in 2016 (Barragán-Pérez, Berenzon-Gorn, García-De La Torre, & Lara-Muñoz, 2016).

It is noteworthy that Mexico was shown to be halfway between the least negative countries in Latin America—Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay—and the most negative—El Salvador, Paraguay, and Venezuela (Latinobarómetro, 2015). Despite the dearth of studies on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, same-gender marriage and parenting in Mexico, the available data are in line with international literature. Men, including young men, highly gendered and religious participants revealed higher levels of sexual prejudice regarding same-gender relationships and parenting (Barragán-Pérez et al., 2016; De La Rubia & De La O, 2014; Verduzco & Sánchez, 2011).
Besides a common history, both Portuguese and Mexican societies share many features, including an androcentric culture and high levels of gender-role traditionalism and religiosity (Steffens, Jonas, & Denger, 2015). Further, religious place and influence in both societies are comparable, and Catholicism is the main religion. However, whereas Portugal seems to be on the lower end of support for same-gender relationships among European countries, Mexico seems to be on the upper end among other Latin American, Asian, and African countries (for a more comprehensive analysis, see Smith, 2011). Overall, Portugal is suggested as being more supportive of same-gender relationships than Mexico, although with some overlap in specific policies related to LGB people.

**Sexual prejudice and attitudes toward same-gender parenting**

Consistently across studies, heterosexual men have shown more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than have heterosexual women, and these negative attitudes are generally stronger toward gay men than toward lesbians, suggesting that this gender difference is rooted in gender role beliefs (e.g., Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Costa & Davies, 2012). This gender pattern has also been reported in studies about attitudes toward same-gender marriage and parenting; men are more likely to reject same-gender marriage and parenting, more likely to oppose parenting by two men versus parenting by two women, and more likely to justify their opposition on prejudicial beliefs that gay men and lesbians are unable to have stable and healthy relationships (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Costa et al., 2013; Costa, Carneiro, Esposito, D’Amore, & Green, 2017).

Religious beliefs have also been shown to link into attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, in that religious affiliation predicts strong negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. A meta-analysis about the effect of religiosity on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Whitley, 2008) has shown that level of religiosity—frequency of attendance, fundamentalism, orthodoxy, extrinsic and intrinsic orientation—was associated with negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, further supporting that religious belief systems doctrine individuals against homosexuality. By extension, religiosity had also been shown to impact individuals’ attitudes toward same-gender marriage and parenting (Costa et al., 2014, 2017; Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011).

A growing number of studies have also explored the value of beliefs regarding the controllability of homosexuality and how they correlate with negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. According to Weiner’s attribution theory of controllability of homosexuality, the developmental origins of homosexuality may be perceived as controllable (environmental/choice) or not controllable (biologically determined; Weiner, 1979, 1985). Perceiving controllability for homosexuality suggests a level of choice for same-gender relationships, which
is accompanied by a negative evaluation of homosexual behaviors, relationships, and identities. Specifically, heterosexuals who believe that homosexuality is biogenetically determined hold more accepting attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, whereas heterosexuals who perceive homosexuality as a lifestyle choice and/or socially influenced hold higher levels of sexual prejudice (Hans, Kersey, & Kimberly, 2012; Sheldon, Pfeffer, Jayaratne, Feldbaum, & Petty, 2007). This same trend has also been found in relation to the effect of beliefs of controllability of homosexuality on negative attitudes toward same-gender marriage and parenting among heterosexual individuals (Costa et al., 2017; Frias-Navarro, Monterde-i-Bort, Barrientos-Delgado, Badenes-Ribera, & Cardenas-Castro, 2014; Frias-Navarro, Monterde-i-Bort, Pascual-Soler, & Badenes-Ribera, 2015; Rye & Meaney, 2010).

In addition, other individual and sociodemographic variables have been shown to consistently predict negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Among heterosexuals, those who are older, less educated, with lower socioeconomic status, and living in less urban areas report more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Baiocco, Nardelli, Pezzuti, & Lingiardi, 2013; Potéat & Mereish, 2012), gay and lesbian rights, and same-gender marriage and parenting (Brumbaugh, Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2008; Costa et al., 2014; Hollekim, Slaatten, & Anderssen, 2012; Webb & Chonody, 2014; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004).

The present study

In Portugal, in the last 7 years, several important legal milestones have been accomplished, and these milestones have been accompanied by societal discussions around these issues, which have likely helped to improve social attitudes regarding sexual minorities. In contrast, societal discussions as well as legal advancements have likely improved social attitudes in Mexico City but are recently starting to take place in the whole country. Thus it seems particularly relevant to assess attitudes toward gay men and lesbians and gay and lesbian parenting in Mexico under the current evolving circumstances. Further, as previously mentioned, both countries share high levels of gender-role traditionalism, familism, and religiosity, as well as a large societal presence of Catholicism, the main religion in both Portugal and Mexico (Steffens et al., 2015). Based on the reviewed comparative research and legal landscapes, both countries ranked approximately along the middle of their respective continents’ scale measuring sexual attitudes through public opinion surveys (European Values Survey for Portugal, and LatinoBarómetro for Mexico). Moreover, most comparative studies on sexual prejudice have been conducted within the same continent, thus not allowing a better understanding of Iberomerican shared history and culture.

The aim of this study was to assess the levels of sexual prejudice—specifically, attitudes toward same-gender parenting, attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, and beliefs about the controllability of homosexuality—among a
sample of university students in Portugal and in Mexico. A further aim was to compare the levels of sexual prejudice and to assess the predictors of attitudes toward same-gender parenting in both countries.

**Method**

**Participants**

The final sample consisted of 531 university students, 292 from Portugal and 239 from Mexico (Table 1). Participants’ age ranged from 18 to 30, and Mexican participants were significantly older than Portuguese participants, $t(529) = 8.154, p < .001$. The vast majority of participants identified as heterosexual (91%); 48% identified as Catholic and 37% as atheist. Of the 531 participants, 55% were from Lisbon, Portugal, and 45% were from Mexico City, Mexico; only 3% from the Portuguese sample and 2% from the Mexican sample were from other countries of origin.

**Measures**

Participants responded to a questionnaire booklet designed for this study. The questionnaire booklet consisted of basic demographic questions, the Attitudes Toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting Scale, the Attitudes Toward...
Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Scale, and a set of questions measuring beliefs about the etiology of homosexuality.

**Attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting**
The Attitudes Toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting Scale (Costa et al., 2014) is a multidimensional 11-item scale consisting of two dimensions: (1) Negative beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting (six items; e.g., “Children of gay and lesbian parents will become homosexuals or will be confused about their sexuality”) and (2) Perception of benefits of gay and lesbian parenting (five items; e.g., “The difficulties that lesbian and gay parents face help to prepare them to be good parents”). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the present study, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the total sample revealed a good model fit, $\chi^2 = 246.397$, $df = 36$, $p < .001$, CFI = .919, GFI = .923, RMSEA = .105 90% CI (.093, .118), and a high internal consistency was observed for the dimension Negative Beliefs ($\alpha = .829$) and for the dimension Perception of Benefits ($\alpha = .841$). Internal consistency for Negative Beliefs was high in both Portugal ($\alpha = .783$) and Mexico ($\alpha = .895$), and for Perception of Benefits it was acceptable in Portugal ($\alpha = .666$) but high in Mexico ($\alpha = .912$).

**Attitudes toward gay and lesbian civil rights**
The Attitudes Toward Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights (Costa et al., 2014) is an 8-item scale of measuring attitudes regarding the rights of LGB people and recognition of same-gender relationships (e.g., “same-sex marriage should not be allowed,” or “I think that gay pride does not make sense because there is not heterosexual pride”). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). CFA with the total sample revealed a good model fit, $\chi^2 = 86.432$, $df = 14$, $p < .001$, CFI = .950, GFI = .952, RMSEA = .099 90%CI (.079, .119), after deleting the item “Nowadays, homosexual people have the same rights as heterosexual people” due to low factor loading ($\beta = .024$, $p = .607$). Internal consistency for the whole sample was high ($\alpha = .839$), as it was in Portugal ($\alpha = .825$) and in Mexico ($\alpha = .862$).

**Etiology beliefs of homosexuality**
The measures used to assess participants’ etiology beliefs about homosexuality were different in both countries but with similar items. In Portugal, a 6-item measure of etiology beliefs was used (Costa et al., 2014), whereas in Mexico an 8-item measure was used (Frias-Navarro & Monterde-i-Bort, 2012). Considering that the purpose of this study was to assess social etiological beliefs about homosexuality, two items from the two measures were comparable: (1) “Parents have a role on their children’s sexual orientation” and (2) “Homosexuality can be learned.” The correlation between
these two items was moderate for the total sample ($r = .327, p < .001$), moderate for the Portuguese sample ($r = .313, p < .001$), and high for the Mexican sample ($r = .554, p < .001$). A new variable was computed by combining the sum of means of both items in which higher scores reflect the belief that homosexuality is socially constructed.

**Procedure**

This study employed a convenient sampling method to recruit participants from Lisbon, Portugal and Mexico City, Mexico. Students were individually approached inside several university campuses by a member of the research team and were invited to participate in a study about gay and lesbian parenting. Paper questionnaires were distributed to students, and they were asked to fill in a questionnaire booklet and to return it to the researcher. Participants were also informed of the study’s aims and how to fill in and return the questionnaire, and they were asked for their written participation consent. All participants who agreed to take part in this study returned their questionnaires. All procedures were in accordance with the ethical standards stated by 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Analysis plan**

The data were analyzed using the Predictive Analysis Software (PASW) Statistics version 21. Univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were used to comparatively assess the prevalence of sexual prejudice—namely, attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, and etiology beliefs about homosexuality—in Portugal and in Mexico. Further, hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to investigate the predictors of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, using country of origin, gender, age, religiosity, attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, and etiology beliefs of homosexuality as predictor variables.

**Results**

**Sexual attitudes in Portugal and in Mexico**

**Attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting**

Univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test for differences between Portuguese and Mexican university students’ attitudes. Portuguese students were significantly more negative about gay and lesbian parenting than were Mexican students $F(1,531) = 16.580, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .030$. However, Portuguese students were significantly more positive in perceiving benefits associated with gay and lesbian parenting than were Mexican
Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the whole sample and separately for Portugal and Mexico.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total sample (n = 531)</th>
<th>Portugal (n = 292)</th>
<th>Mexico (n = 239)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative beliefs about gay/lesbian parenting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It1. Gay men and lesbians should not have children because it is a sin</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It3. Gay and lesbian parents do not care about children's best interests</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It6. Children of gay and lesbian parents are more victimized in school</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It7. Children of gay and lesbian parents will be homosexual or will be confused about their sexuality</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It9. Children of gay and lesbian parents do not have the needed masculine and feminine references for their normal development</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It11. It is not natural for gay men and lesbians to have children</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of benefits of gay/lesbian parenting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It2. The main difficulties of gay and lesbian parents are due to society prejudice</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It4. The difficulties that gay and lesbian parents face prepare them to be good parents</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It5. Children of gay and lesbian parents are more tolerant</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It8. Children of gay and lesbian parents are more acceptant of other people's differences</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It10. There are gay and lesbian people with a high desire to have children and to be available for them</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward gay/lesbian rights</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It1. Homosexuality is not morally acceptable</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>2.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It2. I would not mind having gay or lesbian friends</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It4. Same-sex marriage should not be allowed</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It5. I agree that gay men and lesbians fight for their rights in society</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It6. Homosexual people should not have children because it is not natural</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It7. I do not mind that same-sex couples have the same rights as opposite-sex couples, but marriage should only be possible for opposite-sex couples</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It8. I think that gay pride does not make sense because there is no heterosexual pride</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etiology beliefs about homosexuality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It1. Homosexuality can be learned</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It2. Parents have a role on their children's sexual orientation</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students $F(1,531) = 50.166, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .087$. As shown in Table 2, scores on the negative beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting were below the scale's mid-point in both Portuguese and Mexican samples, indicating that overall attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting were not negative. Regarding the perception of benefits associated with gay and lesbian parenting, the scores in the Portuguese and Mexican samples were close to the scale’s midpoint,
suggesting that these university students did not endorse the benefits of gay and lesbian parenting.

Analyzing the items separately, results revealed that Portuguese students were significantly more likely than Mexican students to believe that children of gay and lesbian parents are more victimized at school, $F(1,531) = 157.463$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .202$, that they do not have the needed masculine and feminine references, $F(1,531) = 29.292$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .052$, and that is not natural for gay and lesbian parents to have children, $F(1,531) = 25.077$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .045$. In contrast, Mexican students were significantly more likely to hold the belief that gay and lesbian parents do not care about children’s best interests than were Portuguese students, $F(1,531) = 25.673$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .046$.

Regarding the perceptions of benefits associated with gay and lesbian parenting, Portuguese students were significantly more likely than Mexican students to believe that the main difficulties that gay and lesbian parents face are due to prejudice, $F(1,531) = 48.413$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .084$, that the difficulties these parents face prepare them to be good parents, $F(1,531) = 6.689$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2_p = .012$, that there are gay and lesbian parents with a high desire to have children, $F(1,531) = 62.244$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .105$, that these parents raise more tolerant children, $F(1,531) = 7.818$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2_p = .015$, and that these parents raise children who are more acceptant of other people’s differences, $F(1,531) = 45.278$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .079$ (Table 2).

**Attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights**

Univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test for differences between Portuguese and Mexican university students’ attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights. No significant differences were found between Mexican and Portuguese students, $F(1,531) = .003$, $p = .955$, $\eta^2_p = .000$. Overall, the mean score obtained by the Mexican and Portuguese samples was 2, which indicated low levels of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights. However, looking at the items separately, small but significant differences were found in two of them: Mexican students were significantly less likely than Portuguese students to endorse the statement “I would not mind having gay or lesbian friends” $F(1,531) = 4.047$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2_p = .008$, as well as “I agree that gay men and lesbians fight for their rights in society” $F(1,531) = 6.094$, $p = .014$, $\eta^2_p = .011$ (Table 2).

**Etiology beliefs about homosexuality**

Univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to test for differences between Portuguese and Mexican university students’ beliefs about the social etiology of homosexuality. No significant differences were found between Mexican and Portuguese students, $F(1,531) = 2.333$, $p = .127$, $\eta^2_p = .004$. Overall, the mean score obtained by the Mexican and Portuguese samples was around 2, which indicated that these students did
not endorse social explanations for a homosexual sexual orientation. However, small but significant differences were found when comparing the two groups on each item. Mexican students were significantly more likely than Portuguese students to believe that “Parents have a role on their children’s sexual orientation” $F(1,531) = 17.225, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .032$, and that “Homosexuality can be learned” $F(1,531) = 55.871, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .096$ (Table 2).

**Predicting attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting**

Two hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to investigate the relative effects of country of origin, individual differences, attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, and social etiological beliefs on attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. The correlations between variables are shown in Table 3. Negative beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting and perception of benefits associated with gay and lesbian parenting were introduced as outcome variables in each regression model. Country of origin (Portugal or Mexico) was introduced in the first step, and individual-level variables were introduced in the second step; age and religiosity (frequency of attendance of religious services) were measured as continuous variables, and gender was dummy coded so that women = 0 and men = 1.\(^1\) Attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights and social etiological beliefs of homosexuality in step Table 3. Correlations between measures separately for Portugal and Mexico.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Negative beliefs</th>
<th>Perception benefits</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Religiosity</th>
<th>Etiology beliefs</th>
<th>Attitudes LG rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative beliefs</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.55*</td>
<td>.75*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception benefits</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
<td>-.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etiology beliefs</td>
<td>.66*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>-.49*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes LG rights</td>
<td>.70*</td>
<td>-.19*</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.58*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^*p < .001.\)

Note: Mexico below the diagonal and Portugal above the diagonal.
three also significantly contributed to the model, $F(1,471) = 120.945$, $p < .001$, $R^2_{Adj} = .604$, in which negatives attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights and social etiological beliefs predicted higher scores on negative beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting. Individual coefficients are presented in Table 4.

**Perception of benefits associated with gay and lesbian parenting**

In step one, country of origin emerged as a significant predictor, $F(1,471) = 13.349$, $p < .001$, $R^2_{Adj} = .026$, in which Portuguese students scored higher on the perception of benefits. After controlling for the effect of country of origin, individual-level variables in step two, specifically age, also significantly contributed to the model, $F(1,471) = 4.980$, $p = .001$, $R^2_{Adj} = .033$, indicating that younger age significantly predicted higher levels of perception of benefits. Lastly, both attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights and social etiological beliefs of homosexuality in step three also significantly contributed to the model, $F(1,471) = 15.616$, $p < .001$, $R^2_{Adj} = .157$, in which negatives attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights and social etiological beliefs predicted lower scores on the perception of benefits associated with gay and lesbian parenting. Individual coefficients are presented in Table 4.

**Discussion**

This study’s aim was to comparatively assess university students’ attitudes toward same-gender parenting and gay and lesbian rights in Portugal and in Mexico. A further aim was to examine the correlates of both negative beliefs

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**Table 4. Multiple regression results for attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>β</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>R²</td>
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<td>.023</td>
<td>.009</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>15.97</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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**Perception of benefits of gay and lesbian parenting**

<table>
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<th>p</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
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<td>p</td>
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<td>β</td>
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<td>p</td>
<td>R²</td>
<td>β</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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$F_{change}(1, 470) = 5.22, F_{change}(3, 467) = 15.80, F_{change}(2, 465) = 302.04, p = .023, F_{change}(1, 470) = 13.349, F_{change}(3, 467) = 2.157, F_{change}(2, 465) = 35.422, p < .001, p < .001, p < .001$
about same-gender parenting and perception of benefits associated with same-gender parented families. In this study, we assessed the prevailing beliefs against same-gender parented families and gay and lesbian rights as a measure of sexual prejudice. The results yield new findings, namely the existence of ambivalent attitudes toward same-gender parenting.

Multiple regression analyses showed that attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights and beliefs about the controllability of homosexuality were strong predictors of attitudes toward same-gender parenting, over and beyond other sociodemographic and individual variables. The belief that homosexuality is a lifestyle choice and thus controllable in particular explained over 50% of the total variance of attitudes toward same-gender parenting, which highlights how important these beliefs are in justifying sexual prejudice. These findings have been documented in previous studies, which showed that etiology beliefs significantly predicted attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights and same-gender parenting (e.g., Frias-Navarro et al., 2015). Furthermore, controllability of homosexuality and attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights were significant predictors of perception of benefits associated with gay and lesbian parenting, albeit in a negative direction and with a weaker predictive power. This finding not only corroborates the importance of the perception of controllability of homosexuality in justifying sexual prejudice, but it also shows how a biological explanation for sexual orientation is linked to affirming attitudes regarding LGB people in general and same-gender parented families in particular.

Gender and religiosity were also significant predictors of negative beliefs about same-gender parenting, in that men and religious participants showed higher levels of negative beliefs about same-gender parenting, corroborating previous studies (Barragán-Pérez et al., 2016; Costa et al., 2014, 2017; Webb & Chonody, 2014; Webb, Chonody, & Kavanagh, 2017). However, neither gender nor religiosity helped to explain the perception of benefits associated with same-gender parenting. We argue that other variables may be more likely to link with these affirmative attitudes, namely interpersonal contact with sexual minorities and low levels of overall sexual stigma (Costa et al., 2017; Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2015). Despite the small age range, age was also a significant predictor of perception of benefits associated with same-gender parenting, indicating that younger participants were more likely to perceive potential benefits for children growing up with two same-gender parents. The limited participants’ age in this study (18–30 years of age) further suggests increasing supportive attitudes of same-gender parented families among adolescents and young adults both in Mexico and in Portugal.

The objections of Portuguese students to same-gender parenting were based on concerns that children growing up with two same-gender parents would likely face discrimination at school, which has been previously documented as a prevalent belief in Portugal as in other European countries (Clarke, 2001; Costa et al., 2013). In contrast, Mexican students were found to be more likely to endorse the belief that same-gender parents are selfish and are not
considerate of the children’s best interests, which may have been fueled by recent events; After months of social upheaval caused by the 2016 presidential proposal to introduce equal access to marriage and child adoption into the Mexican Constitution, the effort failed but uncovered the arguments justifying structural stigma from a right-wing front (Frente Nacional por la Familia, National Front for the Family) to the legalization of both same-sex marriage and same-gender parenting. Ambivalent attitudes remain in Portugal and Mexico despite the meta-analytic evidence that have demonstrated that the psychosocial development of children raised by same-gender parents is not negatively affected by their parents’ sexual orientation, and that lesbian and gay and are as capable at parenting and child-rearing as heterosexual couples (Carneiro, Tasker, Salinas-Quiroz, Leal, & Costa, 2017; Crowl, Ahn, & Baker, 2008; Fedewa, Black, & Ahn, 2015).

As a corollary, Portuguese students showed less negative attitudes regarding gay and lesbian rights, specifically about having gay and lesbian friends or being supportive of gay men and lesbians reclaiming their rights, as well as less prejudiced beliefs about the controllability of homosexuality. In fact, Mexican students were more likely than Portuguese students to endorse social explanations for the development of a homosexual sexual orientation, thus advocating the controllability of homosexuality. Although overt sexual stigma may have diminished in both countries, it has not disappeared altogether. It seems that people will express their sexual prejudice (Herek, 2009) in situations in which an alternative explanation for negative judgment can be found, as the case of same-gender parenting. Sexual prejudice is becoming more subtle, manifesting in situations where it can be attributed to a non-prejudiced cause (Massey, Merriwether, & Garcia, 2013)—in this case, environment/choice (controllable).

Portuguese students were found to hold more negative beliefs regarding same-gender parented families than Mexican students, while simultaneously holding a higher perception of benefits associated with same-gender parenting. These ambivalent attitudes remain prevalent in countries where strong negative attitudes are socially discouraged and where affirmative legislation regarding gay and lesbian rights is in place. It is noteworthy that a study with a similar research design to that used in this study compared the beliefs about children’s adjustment in same-gender parented families among Spanish and Chilean university students (Friass-Navarro et al., 2014). In Chile, which has yet to recognize same-gender relationships and families, opposition to same-gender parented families was significantly stronger than in Spain, where the legalization of same-gender marriage and parenting was accomplished in 2005. It has also been documented that “the rejection of gay men and lesbians is moving toward more modern and subtle forms” (Friass-Navarro et al., 2014, p. 7). This ambivalence seems to follow a similar trend to that reported in sexism studies,
in which hostile and benevolent forms of sexism coexist and serve to justify structural stigma against women (Glick et al., 2000, 2004).

Spain and Chile share a common history, language, religion, gender expectations, and androcentric culture, so comparing both countries is well founded. It should be highlighted that the legalization of same-gender marriage and parenting brings not only acceptance, but also, to a certain point, “normalization.” The social and legal developments that have occurred in Spain in the last decade have fostered positive and affirmative attitudes toward same-gender families. In Portugal, a similar trend has been observed in the last few years. In contrast, although Catholicism still remains a benchmark for millions of Chileans and Spaniards, the secular state and its evolving laws are also expected to start to positively impact same-gender families.

Limitations

There were some limitations in this study that must be acknowledged. This study reported the attitudes of university students, which limits generalizability to the general population. Considering the age effect found in this and other studies, it seems likely that the levels of sexual prejudice in Portugal and in Mexico are higher than those found in this sample. Further, although a randomized sampling was used, the participants came from only two cities (Lisbon and Mexico City), and thus are not representative of either Portugal or Mexico. In fact, both Lisbon and Mexico City are capital cities, where sexual prejudice is assumed to be less prevalent than in other parts of each country. Lastly, the instruments used to measure controllability of homosexuality were different in the two samples, and only two items were similar and could be used to make the comparisons. Further studies would be needed to corroborate this study findings.

Conclusion

Marriage is the official societal mechanism for conferring rights, benefits, and protections that support couples and families both financially and legally (Perrin & Siegel, 2013). Legally recognizing same-gender families contributes to greater personal wellbeing and social inclusion, whereas the lack of legal and social protection constitutes one of the biggest threats to the wellbeing of these families (Lowe, 2009). The prohibition of such rights marginalizes LGB people and their children and sends a message to the wider community that same-gender families are not morally or legally acceptable. It perpetuates stigma, tacitly encouraging discrimination against an already marginalized group (Baiocco, Argalia, & Laghi, 2014). Legal recognition does not eliminate the stigmatization of LGB individuals, but it constitutes an important macro-environmental factor that may affect their motivation to have children.
(Baiocco et al., 2014; Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010). Further, the awareness of the impact of stigma and minority stress as etiologic factors that contribute to the burden of adverse physical and mental health outcomes is essential (Hatzenbuehler & Pachankis, 2016).

Another important aspect of stigma related to same-gender families is structural hegemonic masculinity, which refers to an ideal model of being male and to the characteristics that every man “should” possess; it is translated into efforts and performances in the daily lives of men who try to comply with masculine norms (Lozano, 2013). Iberoamerican cultures follow this model where heterosexism guides men to hold anti-gay men prejudices assert their own masculinity. It may be here where resistance to giving the same rights to LGB people becomes more evident (Barrientos, Cárdenas, Gómez, & Frias-Navarro, 2013).

In sum, most of the research about attitudes toward same-gender families and about the wellbeing of same-gender families have been conducted in the United States and Europe. These studies have highlighted how societal attitudes may foster a negative adjustment of both parents and children in same-gender families as much as they have supported social and legal advances for the recognition of these families. It is thus particularly relevant to pursue research in other countries where these changes are needed, and cross-cultural studies can help cast light on how to best promote these efforts.

**Note**

1. Considering the low number of participants with a nonbinary gender, and that their responses may have shown different trends, these were not used in the analyses.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**References**


