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Theoretical and Empirical Contributions for a Scientific Understanding of Attitudes toward Same-Sex Families in Portugal

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Theoretical and Empirical Contributions for a Scientific Understanding of Attitudes toward Same-Sex Families in Portugal

Contribuições Teóricas e Empíricas para um Conhecimento Científico das Atitudes em Relação às Famílias Homoparentais em Portugal

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*<<It takes no compromise to give people their rights...
It takes no money to respect the individual.
It takes no political deal to give people freedom.
It takes no survey to remove repression.>>
Harvey Milk*

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Abstract

Parenting competencies of gay men and lesbians have been challenged based on a number of arguments rooted on the assumption that homosexuality implies an inability to parent adequately. A large body of knowledge on gay and lesbian families have shown that children raised by gay and lesbians parents fare at least as well as children raised by heterosexual parents, and gay and lesbian parents also show similar competences to their heterosexual counterparts. However, despite this unequivocal evidence, negative beliefs about gay and lesbian people, and gay and lesbian parents is highly prevalent and widespread throughout the Western world. The aim of this thesis is to explore Portuguese heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian families, and sociodemographic and psychological predictors of these attitudes. This thesis is organized through the compilation of articles written in the course of this research (published, in press, or submitted), and it is divided in six chapters. The first chapter consists of a literature review about gay and lesbian parenting. The second chapter reports a study of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting with a general sample of 993 heterosexuals, in which the arguments against same-sex parents were analyzed through content analysis, and the differences on the evaluations of same-sex and different-sex parents were evaluated from the answers to a case vignette. The third chapter evaluates the effects of gender, political leaning, and religious affiliation in predicting negative attitudes toward same-sex parents among 993 heterosexual individuals. The fourth chapter reports the development of three new measures: The Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parents Scale, The Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Scale, and the Beliefs about the Etiology of Homosexuality measure, with a sample of 292 university students. The fifth chapter evaluates the value of interpersonal contact with gay and lesbian people in improving heterosexuals' attitudes toward them as parents, using a general sample of 1690 people. The sixth and final chapter presents a path analysis study of predictors of negative beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting in a sample of 1933 people. The results of the studies provided evidence of the existence of differences in the evaluation of heterosexual, gay, and lesbian couple as parents, in detriment of same-sex couples. In predicting attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents, all of the variables included in the analyses were significant; Higher levels of sexual prejudice were shown by men, and person who were older, politically conservative, religious, had few gay/lesbian friends, little comfort with gay and lesbian people, and who had beliefs that homosexuality was a choice and controllable. Implications of these findings are discussed in light of the effects of sexual prejudice on the well-being of gay and lesbian families, both from an individual and societal perspectives. Limitations of the studies are acknowledged, and recommendations for future research are presented.

Keywords

Sexual Prejudice, Gay Parenting, Lesbian Parenting, Homoparenting, Same-Sex Couples, Attitudes, Gay and Lesbian Rights, Etiology of Homosexuality, Homonegativity, Interpersonal Contact.

Resumo

As competências parentais de homens gays e mulheres lésbicas têm sido contestadas com base numa série de argumentos enraizados na crença que a homossexualidade implica uma incapacidade para o desempenho de funções parentais. Um vasto corpo de conhecimento científico sobre famílias homoparentais revelou que as crianças com pais gays ou mães lésbicas têm um desenvolvimento semelhante ao de crianças com pais heterossexuais, e que pais gays e mães lésbicas demonstram também competências parentais semelhantes às de pais heterossexuais. Não obstante estas evidências, as crenças negativas acerca de pessoas gays e lésbicas, e de pais gays e mães lésbicas são altamente prevalentes e difundidas no mundo ocidental. O objetivo geral desta tese é o de explorar as atitudes das pessoas heterossexuais Portuguesas em relação às famílias homoparentais, assim como os preditores sociodemográficos e psicológicos destas atitudes. Esta tese está organizada através da compilação de artigos escritos no âmbito desta investigação (publicados, aceites ou submetidos), e divide-se em seis capítulos. O primeiro capítulo consiste numa revisão da literatura sobre famílias homoparentais. O segundo capítulo reporta um estudo sobre atitudes em relação à Homoparentalidade com uma amostra de 993 heterossexuais, no qual os argumentos contra a parentalidade por casais do mesmo sexo são analisados através de análise de conteúdo, e as diferenças nas avaliações de casais do mesmo sexo e de sexo diferente são avaliadas através das respostas dadas a uma vinheta experimental. O terceiro capítulo avalia os efeitos do género, inclinação política, e religiosidade como preditores de atitudes negativas em relação a famílias homoparentais numa amostra de 993 pessoas. O quarto capítulo reporta o desenvolvimento de três novas medidas: a Escala de Atitudes em relação à Homoparentalidade, a Escala de Atitudes em relação aos Direitos de Pessoas Gays e Lésbicas, e a medida de Crenças sobre Etiologia da Homossexualidade, com uma amostra de 292 estudantes universitários. O quinto capítulo avalia o valor do contacto interpessoal com pessoas gays e lésbicas na melhoria das atitudes em relação a estas enquanto pais/mães, numa amostra de 1690 pessoas. O sexto e último capítulo apresenta um estudo de *path analysis* dos preditores de atitudes negativas em relação à Homoparentalidade com uma amostra de 1933 pessoas. Os resultados destes estudos evidenciaram a existência de diferenças na avaliação de casais hetero, gays e de lésbicas, em detrimento dos casais do mesmo sexo. No que diz respeito aos preditores das atitudes, todas as variáveis incluídas nas análises revelaram-se significativas; Os maiores níveis de preconceito sexual foram manifestados por homens, mais velhos, politicamente conservadores (ou de direita), Católicos, com poucos amigos/as gays/lésbicas, pouco confortáveis na companhia de pessoas gay e lésbicas, e com crenças que a homossexualidade é uma escolha e controlável. As implicações destes resultados são discutidos à luz dos efeitos do preconceito sexual para o bem-estar das famílias homoparentais, tanto ao nível individual como ao nível da sociedade.

As limitações dos estudos são também reconhecidas e avaliadas, e são feitas recomendações para futuros estudos.

Palavras-chave

Preconceito Sexual, Parentalidade Gay, Parentalidade Lésbica, Homoparentalidade, Casais do Mesmo Sexo, Atitudes, Direitos de Gays e Lésbicas, Etiologia da Homossexualidade, Homonegatividade, Contacto Interpessoal.

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General Introduction

Homoparenting: What does it mean?

Homoparenting is a neologism created by the French Association of Gay and Lesbian Parents and future parents (PPGL) to characterize families headed by a gay father or a lesbian mother, or by two fathers or two mothers. Several European countries have come to integrate this new word not only into the scientific vocabulary, but also into general society's discourses: *Homoparentalidade* in Portuguese, *Omogenitorialità*, in Italian, or *Homoparentalité*, in French, to name a few. In the English language, however, it is not an expression that is frequently used. Alternatively, English-speaking scientists use expressions such as "same-sex parenting", "gay parenting", "lesbian parenting", "gay-headed families", "gay-led families" "lesbian-headed families", "lesbian-led families" to refer to this form of parenting.

Although the first studies about same-sex families were published in the decade of 1970, it took over 20 years for the scientific community to devote more attention to this topic, boosted by several north-American dispute cases over children conceived in heterosexual marriages, but where one of the parents that later came out as gay or lesbian (Patterson & Redding, 1996). It was also in the 1990's that a large number of single lesbian women and lesbian couples started planning and forming families, mostly by means of assisted reproductive technologies, a phenomenon that was later named "Lesbian Baby Boom" (Patterson, 1992). It was only a decade later that gay men caught up with this phenomenon, the "Gay Baby Boom", mostly through adoption and surrogacy. (Johnson & O'Connor, 2002).

Being a gay man or a lesbian woman, there are several paths to becoming parents but these are largely dependent on country's laws. In the United States, for example, there are several states that allow lesbian couples to become parents through assisted reproductive technologies, gay couples to become parents through surrogacy, and both gay men and lesbians to adopt a child. Contrastingly, neither of these options is available in Portugal. Moreover, across European countries there are significant differences regarding the options available for gay men and lesbians to become parents.

According to a recent European report, only eight member states allow adoption to same-sex couples: Spain, United Kingdom, Iceland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. Neither Finland nor Germany allow adoption to same-sex couples, but for same-sex couples, in which only one of the parents is a legal parent, "second-parent adoption" or "co-adoption" is extended to the other member of the couple (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011). France is now the ninth European Union member state to allow same-sex marriage and adoption (The Associated Press, 2013). In 2012, Austria has been at the center of the debate over same-sex parenting, after the European Court of Human Rights ruling that denying co-

adoption to a member of a same-sex couples was discriminatory (application 19010/07). Other forms of parenting, in particular assisted reproductive technologies, are available to lesbian couples and single lesbian women in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011).

Notwithstanding the impossibility for same-sex couples to legally become parents in Portugal, there are alternatives for gay and lesbian people to become parents. According to empirical evidence, there are several ways for gay men and lesbians to become parents: through single adoption, through artificial insemination at home with private sperm donation, or by parenting a child born in previous heterosexual relationships, which is the most common parenting arrangement for gay and lesbian parents in Portugal (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2013). There are also those who resort to adoption, surrogacy, or assisted reproductive technologies in other countries where these options are available to same-sex couples, namely Spain and the United Kingdom (Costa et al., 2013). In any of these cases, the problems arise from the non-recognition of both parents, particularly the “social parent”, who has no legal or biological tie to the children.

Same-sex couples were given the right to civil partnerships in 2001 (Bill 7/2001), and almost 10 years later, in 2010, to civil marriages (Bill 9/2010)¹. Although gay and lesbian parenting rights were discussed throughout the process of debating and approving these laws, both laws explicitly precluded same-sex couples from adopting or accessing assisted reproductive technologies. In fact, at time of this writing, a proposition of law to allow “social parents” to co-adopt the child (or children) of their partner is being considered for a vote in the Portuguese Parliament (Projecto de Lei 278/XII). It was only very recently that political initiatives such as this one looked at scientific evidence to inform the discussion and legislative decisions. In fact, during this process, the Portuguese Psychological Society has adopted an official policy statement maintaining that the results from the psychological research support the possibility of co-adoption in same-sex couples (Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses, 2013). As it will be shown in Chapter 1, empirical evidence has shown that there are no differences between children raised in same-sex and different-sex families in crucial developmental areas, nor are there differences between same-sex and different-sex parents’ competences (Allen & Burrell, 1996; Anderssen, Amlie, & Ytteroy, 2002; Crowl, Ahn, & Baker, 2008).

However, although there are no systematic differences between these two broadly defined types of families, same-sex families are faced with unique challenges and experiences brought by social oppression and discrimination, that have repercussions both in terms of family dynamics and in the interaction between the family and their social contexts (Clarke,

¹ For an anthropological analysis of the events that lead to the approval of these laws see Vale de Almeida (2009).

2002). There are several sources of additional stress imposed on parents: (1) legal: difficulties with, or impediments to, parenting paths; (2) health-related: obstacles for the unrecognized (i.e. “social”) parent; (3) psychological: lack of social support, or forcing children to conceal their family configuration, (4) school-related: not accepting the families, or allowing bullying and harassment behaviors of children; (5) societal, from the most subtle heterosexual behaviors (microaggressions), to physical and/or verbal aggression (Costa et al., 2013; Gabb, 2001; Hash & Cramer, 2003; Robitaille & Saint-Jacques, 2009; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). All of these additional sources of stress may pose serious threats to family well-being, safety, and stability (Costa et al., 2013; Lowe, 2009).

Since literature about homoparenting has mostly been focused on comparing same-sex and different-sex families, little is known about the sources of social oppression that may cause disturbances to the families, and about the resilient mechanisms that these families use to remain healthy and stable regardless of these oppressions. As Laird (2003) put it, “in spite of the still pervasive and profound stigmatization of gay life, lesbian and gay men are building stable and satisfying couple relationships and forming families that seem to be doing at least as well as other kinds of families” (p. 180). For that reason, there are two main research areas that need further attention: (1) the effects of oppression on gay and lesbian-parented families, and (2) societal attitudes towards gay and lesbian families that form the basis for this oppression. The general aim of this thesis is inscribed in the latter research area.

Sexual Prejudice and the Study of Attitudes in the Context of Homoparenting

In face of the overwhelming evidence showing that having two same-sex parents do not hinder or compromise a child’s development, the question of why heterosexual people hold the belief that having same-sex parents or a gay/lesbian parent is so detrimental for them arises.

This thesis will frame the study of attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, and gay and lesbian parenting according to the theory of Sexual Stigma, conceptualized as:

Stigma is used here to refer to the negative regard and inferior status that society collectively accords to the people who possess a particular characteristic or belong to a particular group or category. Inherent in this definition is the fact that stigma constitutes shared knowledge about which attributes and categories are valued by society, which ones are denigrated, and how these valuations vary across situations. Sexual stigma is a particular instance of this phenomenon. It is the stigma attached to

any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community. In other words, it is socially shared knowledge about homosexuality's devalued status relative to heterosexuality. (Herek, 2009, p. 66)

In this conceptualization, Sexual Prejudice is understood as part of the internalized sexual stigma, (i.e., the adoption of a social system of beliefs and values about a group of people), in this case, Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual, (LGB) people. "Sexual prejudice is internalized sexual stigma that results in the negative evaluation of sexual minorities" (Herek, 2009, p. 74). Across the Western societies, sexual prejudice is not only highly common among individuals, but also reinforced by institutional stigma, or heterosexism, in a two-way relationship. Whereas individuals hold a set of beliefs and stereotypes about LGBT people, society's institutions - such as religion, or political parties - convey negative messages about homosexuality that both structure individuals beliefs, and are influenced by them. This exchange of beliefs about sexual minorities is conducted in the public policy arena.

While individuals in the United States have been asked directly to participate in the public policy process by voting on legislation regarding gay and lesbian civil rights, in European countries, such as Spain, the Netherlands, France, and even Portugal, individuals have not been asked to vote. In what same-sex marriage and adoption are concerned, these pieces of legislation were approved by a majority of left-wing, secular political parties, without direct public participation (Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013). Empirical evidence has shown that public policy about gay and lesbian rights and sexual prejudice are correlated and mutually influenced, but they are also independent to some extent. For example, individuals may accept policies designed to grant basic rights to gay and lesbian people, but still hold negative affective reactions toward them (Herek, 2009).

Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian People

Seminal work from Weinberg (1972) introduced the term *homophobia* to refer to the negative evaluations of homosexual people. Despite its major contribution to the field of LGBT mental health by focusing on the impact of hostility toward LGBT people as a cause for poor mental health rather than homosexual sexual orientation itself, research has shifted from the concept of homophobia, to a conceptualization of attitudes toward homosexual people as homonegativity, or sexual prejudice (for a comprehensive review, see Herek, 2004). The concept of homonegativity is complex and multifaceted. Literature has begun to parse apart different components of homonegativity, although it is not always consistently defined across studies. In broad terms, these negative attitudes are composed of cognitive stereotypes, beliefs, and affects.

Earlier research has proposed that attitudes toward homosexuality consist of three components: (1) attitudes toward homosexual persons, (2) attitudes toward homosexual behavior, and (3) attitudes toward homosexual civil rights (Kite & Whitley, 1996). Yet, updated research has shown that there may not be a clear distinction between the first two components, as both measure belief- and affective-based type of attitudes (Davies, 2004).

Several sociodemographic and psychological variables have been identified for their predictive value of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, which can be theoretically clustered into four groups: (1) social conservatism, (2), gender-related, (3) interpersonal contact, and (4) etiological beliefs about homosexuality.

Social conservatism has been measured by different, albeit correlated, indicators. More negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people are held by religious and right-wing political people (Barringer, Gay, & Lynxwiler, 2013; Schulte & Battle, 2004; VanderStoep & Green, 1988). In fact, according to a recent meta-analysis, “most forms of religiosity - fundamentalism, religious service attendance, orthodoxy, self-rated religiosity, and intrinsic orientation - are related in various degrees to negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men” (Whitley, 2009, p. 29), and their effects are not completely canceled when evaluating potential mediators. In contrast, people with spiritual beliefs but who are not affiliated with a particular religion are more accepting of homosexuality (Barringer et al., 2013). Political conservatism and right-wing authoritarianism are also strong predictors of sexual prejudice (Goodman & Moradi, 2008; Haslam & Levy, 2006; Nagoshi et al., 2008).

Gender-related constructs are the most studied predictors of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people. It has been shown that men tend to be more negative toward homosexuality than women, and that these negative attitudes are stronger toward gay men than toward lesbians (LaMar & Kite, 1998; Herek, 2000; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Costa & Davies, 2012). Moreover, sexism and traditional gender beliefs are also strongly associated with homonegativity, particularly for men (Davies, 2004; Sakall1, 2002; Whitley, 2001).

The third cluster regards interpersonal contact with gay and lesbian people. Earlier work from Herek and his colleagues has provided evidence that having regular contact with gay and lesbian people can improve heterosexuals' attitudes towards them (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993). In addition, regular contact and closeness of the relationship are also important predictors of favorable attitudes (Anderssen, 2002; Lemm, 2006). Interestingly, the effect of interpersonal contact seems to depend on whether the attitudes are directed to lesbian or gay men (Hewitt & Moore, 2002).

Finally, the effect of the beliefs about the etiology of homosexuality on attitudes toward gay and lesbian people has recently received more attention. Research has demonstrated that people who believe in “controllability of homosexuality” (i.e. that homosexuality is acquired,

learned, or chosen; Weiner, 1979, 1985), hold more prejudicial attitudes toward homosexual people, whereas people who believe that homosexuality is innate and biologically determined hold more affirmative attitudes (Altemeyer, 2001; Hans, Kersey, & Kimberly, 2012; Hewitt & Moore, 2002; Smith, Zanotti, Axelton, & Saucier, 2011).

Other sociodemographic predictors have also been identified, although their effect is comparatively smaller than those just mentioned. Older people, living in rural areas, with less formal education tend to be more negative toward gay men and lesbians, compared to younger, urban, and more educated (Grapes, 2006; Herek, 1994).

Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Rights

According to the sexual prejudice conceptualization, marriage inequality is a form of structural stigma, institutional heterosexism (Herek, 2007). Although attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights are mostly based on cognitive stereotyping of same-sex relationships, policy positions regarding gay and lesbian rights have been found to be correlated with affective attitudes toward gay and lesbian people (Ellis, Kitzinger, & Wilkinson, 2003; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004).

Whereas literature has found evidence for the effect of several sociodemographic and psychological predictors on affective attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, there is a growing body of research addressing the predictors of the endorsement of gay and lesbian civil rights. Level of education, age, gender, religious beliefs, political affiliation, and etiological beliefs were all shown to predict heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights (Ellis et al., 2003; Grapes, 2006; Whitehead, 2010; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004), and in particular toward same-sex marriage (Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; Moskowitz, Rieger, & Roloff, 2010; Pearl & Galupo, 2007). Nevertheless, some differences have been reported; interpersonal contact, for example, seems to have a weaker effect on attitudes toward same-sex marriage and parenting than toward gay and lesbian people in general (Barth & Parry, 2009; Herek, 2011). Noteworthy, etiological beliefs seem to be the strongest predictor of gay and lesbian rights (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008).

On the one hand, those differences may be explained by people's changing attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights (Gallup Organization, 2013), considering that overtly discriminatory or homophobic attitudes are generally considered unacceptable in today's western societies. On the other hand, sexual prejudice is also partially responsible for negative attitudes toward same-sex unions and same-sex parenting (Herek, 2001; Poteat & Moreish, 2012), evidencing an affective component of attitudes towards marriage and parenting by same-sex couples beyond policy attitudes. Even in more accepting societies, such as Norway, same-sex

parenting is still disputed among supporters of marriage equality (Hollekim, Slaatten, & Anderssen, 2012).

Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting

To date, far less research has looked into heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, than toward gay and lesbian people. These attitudes seem to be largely based on attitudes toward homosexuality insofar as people who are devalued or judged to be morally inferior to heterosexuals are not capable of parenting well-adjusted children (Clarke, 2001). In that sense, attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as parents seems to go beyond policy as an extension of rights to same-sex parents, to a more beliefs-based attitudes.

Nevertheless, an increasing number of gay men and lesbians have been raising children while being out as gay or lesbian, or as a same-sex couple, and thus the question of how society views these families has gained special relevance. Research about attitudes toward gay- and lesbian-parented families among psychosocial professionals and future professionals has reported low levels of knowledge about homosexuality and gay and lesbian families, and little contact with gay and lesbian families (Bliss & Harris, 1999; Money & Cain, 1997). Moreover, even when attitudes were somewhat more accepting of same-sex families, individuals remained concerned about the level of support and acceptance of these families, and had fears that children would be victimized or harassed at school for having two same-sex parents (Bliss & Harris, 1999; Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999; King & Black, 1999).

Another group of studies has used a quasi-experimental design, by means of case vignettes presenting participants with a gay, a lesbian, or a heterosexual couple. This body of work has revealed that participants would be more reluctant to give custody of a child to a same-sex couple, particularly to a male same-sex couple, than to a different-sex couple (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Fraser, Fish, & Mackenzie, 1995;). More recently, however, there has been evidence of a significant change in heterosexuals' perceptions of gay and lesbian families, at least in the United States and Australia. Social work students and school psychologists showed high levels of knowledge about gay and lesbian people, gay and lesbian parenting, and positive attitudes toward these families (Averett & Hedge, 2012; Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Choi, Thul, Berenhaut, Suerken, & Norris, 2005). More favorable attitudes were held by women, younger, and less religious people, those with more contact with gay and lesbian people, and those who believed that homosexuality is innate (Choi et al., 2005; Crawford et al., 1999; Frias-Navarro, Moterde-i-Bort, Pascual-Soler, & Badenes-Ribera, 2013; Money & Cain, 1997; Rye & Meaney, 2010).

The few existing Portuguese studies found a similar pattern of attitudes, although it seems that Portuguese university students may have more negative beliefs about same-sex families than Australian or North-American students (Gato, Fontaine, & Carneiro, 2010; Xavier, Mendes, Martins, & Fernandes, 2011). The situation in Portugal is not very different from that of the rest of Europe, and with the exception of a recent Norwegian study reporting a majority of people supportive of same-sex marriage, but not of same-sex parented-families (Hollekim et al., 2012), little is known about the views and beliefs of European heterosexuals toward same-sex parenting. The studies available that compared European Union member-states' attitudes toward several homosexuality issues reported that Portugal is the highest on levels of sexual prejudice alongside former communist countries, in particular toward gay and lesbian families, (Lottes & Alkula, 2011; Takács & Szalma, 2011, 2013).

The work of Victoria Clarke studying the beliefs of heterosexual people about gay and lesbian parenting is widely cited. She has authored two of the few studies that employed qualitative analysis to explore the arguments against gay and lesbian parenting (Clarke, 1999, 2001). Clarke has found six main arguments, either focused on the illegitimacy of gay and lesbian parents: (1) religious arguments (it is sinful), (2) biological arguments (it is unnatural), and (3) children's best interests (parents are selfish); or focused on problems posed to child's development: (1) lack of (gender) role models; (2) gender and sexual orientation compromised; and (3) homophobic victimization (based on parents' sexual orientation) (Clarke, 2001). Considering that most studies about gay and lesbian parenting have used case vignettes and experimental manipulation, as opposed to scales, there is a need to further explore these arguments and to develop reliable measures to evaluate sexual prejudice towards gay and lesbian parenting.

Thesis structure and Objectives

The purpose of this general introduction was to present the state of the art regarding attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, gay and lesbian rights, and gay and lesbian parenting, the intersections between these attitudes, and how these may affect the adjustment and well-being of gay- and lesbian-parented families. Most of the research presented here originates from the US, making it more difficult to make comparisons with the Portuguese reality, which is, for the most part, unknown.

This thesis is among the first research studies undertaken in Portugal, with the general aim of exploring Portuguese heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, and possible predictors of these attitudes. This thesis was written in an article format, using a combination of different designs to address several research questions. Three different and complementary approaches were used to answer different research questions. It is divided

into six chapters, each one representing an article that was published, accepted, or submitted to a Psychology Journal, and focusing on different aspects of the overall study.

The first chapter, “Homoparenting: The State of the Art and the Search for Normalization”, provides an overview of the research regarding gay and lesbian parenting. Beyond simply presenting a theoretical review of the studies, a critical analysis of the different paradigms that guided research into gay and lesbian families, and of how these paradigms may influence the results drawn from the studies was adopted. The aim of this review was, therefore, to understand gay and lesbian families in their paths to parenthood and their unique experiences, which can help to illuminate research about negative beliefs about them.

In the second chapter, “Portuguese Attitudes toward Homosexual Parenting”, a mixed-methods design was used, combining a quasi-experimental methodology comparing participants responses to three different case vignettes depicting a couple wishing to adopt (heterosexual couple, gay couple, lesbian couple), with a qualitative methodology exploring the arguments that participants used against gay and lesbian parenting. The purpose of this study was to assess if there were differences in the evaluation of parental competences of same-sex and different-sex couples, and the arguments behind these evaluations. To accomplish this, a cross-sectional, online survey with a sample of 993 self-identified heterosexuals was conducted.

The third chapter, “Heterosexuals’ Attitudes toward Same-Sex Parenting: The Case of Portugal”, expands the previous chapter’s results by focusing on the correlates of the negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. The purpose of this study was to assess whether people with different genders, political and religious affiliations would differently evaluate same-sex and different-sex couples in their potential to be good parents. This study used the same sample of 993 participants collected on the online survey.

The fourth chapter, “University Students’ Attitudes toward Same-Sex Parenting and Gay and Lesbian Rights in Portugal”, reports a correlational study conducted with a convenient sample of 292 university students. The main purpose of this study was to test three new culturally-sensitive measures of sexual prejudice developed for this research: The Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting scale, the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights scale, as well as a measure of Beliefs about the Etiology of Homosexuality. In accordance to the research general aim, the correlates of negative attitudes that provided evidence of the scales’ validity were further assessed.

The fifth chapter, “‘The Contact Hypothesis’ Revisited: The Case of Attitudes toward Same-Sex Parenting in Portugal”, reports a correlational study aimed at evaluating the predictive value of interpersonal contact with gay and lesbian people in reducing negative beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting. For this purpose, a sample of 1690 heterosexuals was recruited,

and completed an online survey including a set of questions regarding frequency of contact, type of contact, comfort, and type of relationship with gay and lesbian people, the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting scale, and the Affective Reactions toward Gay Men and Lesbians scales.

Finally, because there are several psychological and sociodemographic variables that may influence the attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting which were never tested together, the sixth chapter, “Heterosexuals’ Beliefs about Gay and Lesbian Parenting: A Path Analysis Model”, consists of a correlational study designed to evaluate the possible predictors of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. Through a path analysis model with multiple mediators, relations among the different predictors of the perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting, and their combined effects were explored. For this study, an online sample of 1933 heterosexuals was recruited, and answered to a set of questions regarding interpersonal contact with gay and lesbian people, a sociodemographic questionnaire, the Affective Reactions toward Gay Men and Lesbians scales, the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting scale, and the Etiology Beliefs about Homosexuality scale. Due to space restrictions in developing the article for publication, the validation studies conducted prior to including the latent variables in the model were only briefly acknowledged. However, four confirmatory factor analyses were run, using AMOS, in order to evaluate if the variables measured by scales were indicated to include in the structural equation model.

The general discussion, written for this thesis, discusses the main findings from the different studies, highlighting the individual and collective effects of the different sociodemographic and psychological variables evaluated in the different studies on heterosexuals’ attitudes toward gay and lesbian-parented families. The limitations of the studies are acknowledged, and future important venues for both research and intervention on sexual prejudice and stigma are suggested.

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Chapter 1

“Homoparenting”: The State of the Art and the Search for Normalization

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Extended abstract

Parenting competences of lesbian women and gay men have been challenged based on a number of arguments that are rooted on the assumption that homosexuality implies lesser parental capacity. Nevertheless, this legal and political argument, with particular relevance on a societal level, does not seem to be supported by scientific evidence. The body of research about gay and lesbian parenting has grown exponentially, and consistently revealed that parents' homosexual orientation does not negatively influence child development. Through a theoretical review of studies, we intended to evaluate the state of the art on parenting by homosexual people by adopting a critical view of the main research paradigms, and how these may influence the conclusions drawn from the studies. The literature has identified four main research paradigms: (1) no difference between same-sex and different-sex parents; (2) same-sex parented families are different and deviants; (3) lesbian parenting is different and transformative; and (4) same-sex parented families are different as a consequence of social oppression (Clarke, 2002). The overwhelming majority of studies, despite some methodological and sampling shortcomings acknowledged in this review, concluded that there are no differences between children raised in same-sex and different-sex families in crucial developmental areas, nor between same-sex and opposite parents in their parental capacity and couple relationship. However, a small but significant body of research has revealed some differences. In fact, children and adolescents with gay or lesbian parents seem more flexible in their gender roles and behaviors, but they also seem more likely to be victimized at school. We argue that because these families face unique obstacles and experiences throughout the family cycle, some processes are inevitably different from those of heterosexual families, as presented in the fourth paradigm. For that reason, the conclusion that there are no differences between same-sex and different-sex parented families is misleading, and efforts to minimize their differences undermine the scientific knowledge about gay and lesbian families.

Keywords: parenting, gay fathers, lesbian mothers, child development.

Resumo

As competências parentais de mulheres lésbicas e de homens *gays* têm sido contestadas com base em diversos argumentos assentes no pressuposto de que a sua orientação sexual implica uma menor capacidade parental. Esta contestação legal, política e social, parece no entanto não conhecer eco na comunidade científica. A quantidade de estudos dedicados à parentalidade homossexual tem crescido exponencialmente e revelado que a orientação sexual de pais e mães não influencia negativamente o desenvolvimento das crianças. Através de uma revisão teórica de estudos pretende-se situar o estado da investigação na área da homoparentalidade, adotando uma visão crítica dos principais paradigmas de investigação e da forma como estes influenciam as conclusões dos estudos. Conclui-se que a inexistência de diferenças entre famílias homoparentais e famílias heteroparentais é equívoca, e que os esforços de normalização e minimização de eventuais diferenças comprometem o conhecimento científico sobre estas famílias.

Palavras-chave: parentalidade, pais gays, mães lésbicas, desenvolvimento infantil.

A diversidade de arranjos familiares

Os arranjos familiares de mães lésbicas e de pais *gays* são muitos e diversos. Esta diversidade acontece face à dificuldade no acesso a formas de parentalidade que, na maioria dos países ocidentais, são ainda quase exclusivas de famílias heteroparentais². Antes do fenómeno americano conhecido como *lesbian baby boom*³, a grande maioria das famílias homoparentais tratava-se de famílias reconstituídas após o *coming-out* (autoidentificação pública) do pai ou da mãe como homossexuais (Patterson, 1994, 2006). São as mudanças legais e sociais que têm vindo a ocorrer em diversos países ocidentais que têm tornado possível o acesso a diversas formas de parentalidade que estavam anteriormente restritas a casais de sexo diferente, ou a pessoas heterossexuais, como a adoção ou a inseminação artificial.

De facto, através do processo de Inseminação Artificial tornou-se possível mulheres lésbicas conceberem uma criança e educarem-na sozinhas ou numa relação conjugal, como é o caso de países como a Holanda ou a Bélgica (Bos & Hakvoort, 2007; Brewaeys, 2001; Vanfraussen,

² Heteroparentais diz respeito a famílias constituídas por um pai e uma mãe.

³ *Lesbian Baby Boom* refere-se a um aumento significativo de mães lésbicas, especialmente com recurso a inseminação artificial.

Ponjaert-Kristffersen, & Brewaeys, 2002). Em países onde o acesso a esta técnica de reprodução medicamente assistida não é permitida fora de um casamento entre pessoas de sexo diferente, como é aliás o caso de Portugal, é no entanto possível fazê-lo de uma forma privada com recurso a doação de esperma. Não sendo esta via reprodutiva possível a homens, em situações onde a parentalidade biológica é fundamental, o recurso a gestação de substituição (vulgo ‘barriga de aluguer’) revela-se então uma via privilegiada (Bergman, Rubio, Green & Padron, 2010). Através do recurso a inseminação artificial ou a gestação de substituição, os arranjos parentais têm por sua vez múltiplas conjugações possíveis com base na negociação de envolvimento entre o dador de esperma, ou dadora de óvulos, e a família. De facto, estudos australianos têm revelado que em particular doadores homossexuais têm como principal motivação o desejo de parentalidade, em muitos casos requerendo algum tipo de envolvimento com a criança (Riggs, 2008; Ripper, 2008).

Por outro lado, a adoção de crianças é uma realidade somente em países em que esta situação é legalmente possível para casais do mesmo sexo, ou a adoção singular, de uma forma mais ou menos explícita, por mulheres lésbicas e homens gays. Nos Estados Unidos, por exemplo, tem-se assistido a um aumento considerável do número de pessoas que recorrem a agências de adoção para concretizar o desejo de parentalidade, nomeadamente entre homens (Brodzinsky & Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2003; Downing, Richardson, Kinkler, & Goldberg, 2009; Erich, Hall, Kanenberg & Case, 2009). Na Europa, o acesso à adoção por parte de casais do mesmo sexo ou por pessoas gays e lésbicas singulares é possível apenas na Bélgica, Dinamarca, Islândia, Holanda, Noruega, Espanha, Suécia e Reino Unido (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011).

Entre os países Europeus há diferenças consideráveis no que diz respeito às formas de parentalidade. Em países como a Holanda, Bélgica ou Alemanha, onde a legislação permite que as famílias recorram a diferentes vias como a adoção ou a inseminação artificial, são diversos os estudos com mães lésbicas que recorreram a inseminação artificial (Bos, van Balen & van den Boom, 2005; Brewaeys, 2001; Herrmann-Green & Gehring, 2007). Em contraste, em países em que não há acesso a estas formas de parentalidade (como em Itália ou Portugal) ou em que este acesso é ainda recente (como é o caso de Espanha), a larga maioria das famílias homoparentais são ainda constituídas por filhos/as provenientes de relações heterossexuais anteriores (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2013; González & López, 2009; Lelleri, Prati & Pietrantoni, 2008).

Considerando esta situação, são ainda poucas as estimativas nacionais do número de famílias homoparentais. Estudos comunitários revelaram que em Itália o número de pessoas homossexuais com filhos/as varia entre 5% e 8% (Lelleri et al., 2008) e em Portugal entre 3% a 10% (Costa et al., 2013), sendo a grande maioria destas crianças concebidas em relações heterossexuais anteriores. Devido ao facto de tanto a adoção como a reprodução medicamente assistida e a ‘barriga de aluguer’ estarem vetados a casais do mesmo sexo,

torna-se ainda mais difícil chegar a números aproximados destas famílias, relevando-as para uma perigosa invisibilidade e desproteção.

Em contraste, de acordo com o Censos Americano de 2000, estimava-se que mais de 60 mil casais de homens e mais de 90 mil casais de mulheres tinham filhos/as menores de 18 anos. Foi também possível estimar o número de crianças em famílias homoparentais, sendo que 270 mil crianças cresciam em famílias com dois pais ou duas mães, e 540 mil com um pai *gay* ou uma mãe lésbica (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Outras estimativas nacionais realizadas por meio de estudos comunitários revelaram que aproximadamente uma em cada cinco mulheres lésbicas eram mães e um em cada nove homens *gays* eram pais (Bryant & Demian, 1994).

A comparação com as famílias heteroparentais

O primeiro impulso para o estudo das famílias homoparentais surge da preocupação com o desenvolvimento e o bem-estar das crianças. Tanto nos Estados Unidos como na Europa têm sido diversos os casos de disputas de custódias de crianças cuja mãe ou pai se revelam homossexuais, colocando-se a questão de serem ou não capazes de assumir as funções parentais das crianças, e se a sua orientação sexual se reflectirá negativamente no desenvolvimento das mesmas. É aqui que a investigação científica ganha um papel fundamental do ponto de vista do impacto social.

De uma forma geral, os estudos dedicados às famílias homoparentais têm reportado a não existência de diferenças significativas entre crianças em famílias homoparentais e crianças em famílias heteroparentais no que diz respeito a diversos índices de desenvolvimento. Numa revisão de estudos publicados até ao ano de 2000, Anderssen, Amlie e Ytteroy (2002) reuniram 23 estudos empíricos de onde retiraram 7 categorias principais de desenvolvimento infantil: (1) desenvolvimento emocional; (2) preferências sexuais; (3) estigmatização; (4) comportamentos de género; (5) ajustamento comportamental; (6) identidade de género; e (7) funcionamento cognitivo. Após a análise dos resultados publicados nestes estudos, os autores concluíram não existirem diferenças significativas entre os dois grupos, ou problemáticas de desenvolvimento em crianças de famílias homoparentais. Resultados semelhantes foram reportados em outros estudos de meta-análise (Allen & Burrell, 1996; Crowl, Ahn, & Baker, 2008).

Por outro lado, também os estudos dedicados às competências parentais e ajustamento relacional de pais *gays* e de mães lésbicas apontam, na sua generalidade, para a não existência de diferenças significativas quando comparados com pais e mães heterossexuais. No que diz respeito às características de pais *gays* e mães lésbicas não há qualquer indício de problemáticas ligadas à saúde mental ou à capacidade de estabelecer laços afetivos seguros

com os/as seus/suas filhos/as (Bos et al., 2005; Patterson, 2006; Ryan, 2007), demonstrando-se também que casais do mesmo sexo e casais de sexo diferente com filhos/as apresentam níveis de comunicação e suporte conjugal semelhantes (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2004, 2007).

Se os estudos comparativos e transversais apontam para a inexistência de diferenças assinaláveis entre famílias homoparentais e famílias heteroparentais, os estudos longitudinais com as primeiras não só reforçam as conclusões anteriores, como contribuem para a expansão do conhecimento sobre o desenvolvimento destas famílias, em especial no que diz respeito às consequências a médio e a longo prazo de crescer em famílias homoparentais. Nanette Gartrell e os seus colaboradores (Gartrell et al., 1996, 1999, 2000; Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser, & Banks, 2005) são os responsáveis pelo primeiro e mais significativo estudo longitudinal, de origem norte-americana, com um desenho experimental de 25 anos que inicia aquando da inseminação artificial de cerca de 100 mulheres. Desde as primeiras entrevistas às futuras mães foi possível assinalar o forte desejo de parentalidade e planeamento de uma criança na família. Nos diferentes tempos de investigação, as mães reportaram elevados níveis de saúde, tanto própria como das crianças, redes de suporte social de qualidade e um ajustamento comportamental dos/as filhos/as semelhante à população normativa. No entanto, não obstante a maioria das crianças terem uma atitude positiva em relação a terem duas mães, 18% das crianças experimentaram discriminação e *bullying* homofóbico na escola aos 5 anos, e 43% confessaram terem sido vítimas de algum tipo de discriminação com base na orientação sexual da(s) sua(s) mãe(s) aos 10 anos de idade (Gartrell et al., 1996, 1999, 2000, 2005).

Também em estudos com adolescentes e jovens adultos/as foram encontradas poucas ou nenhuma diferença entre estes/as e adolescentes de famílias heteroparentais ao nível da autoestima e bem-estar (Golombok, Tasker, & Murray 1997; Huggins, 1989; O'Connell, 1993; Tasker & Golombok, 1995), ajustamento psicológico (Rivers, Poteat, & Noret, 2008; Wainright, Russel & Patterson, 2004), qualidade das relações de pares (Tasker & Golombok, 1995; Rivers et al., 2008; Wainright & Patterson, 2008) e orientação sexual (Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mikach, 1995; Tasker & Golombok, 1995).

Diferenças e semelhanças entre famílias homoparentais e famílias heteroparentais

Num artigo teórico sobre famílias homoparentais, Victoria Clarke (2002) identifica quatro principais paradigmas de investigação. Segundo esta autora, o primeiro paradigma sustenta a hipótese da ausência de diferenças entre famílias homoparentais e famílias heteroparentais.

A grande maioria da investigação tem revelado que pais e mães homossexuais não divergem significativamente das restantes famílias em domínios psicológicos e comportamentais cruciais (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Este paradigma surge da necessidade de confrontar a patologização de que estas famílias são vítimas e de reduzir a importância da orientação sexual no desenvolvimento individual humano (Kitzinger, 1989), mas incorre no problema de um reforço do padrão heterossexista de família, e na normalização e invisibilidade das famílias homoparentais, o que impede um conhecimento mais aprofundado das dinâmicas e percursos únicos destas famílias.

Um segundo paradigma, mais conservador, sustenta que as famílias homoparentais são diferentes e desviantes. Argumentam contra a parentalidade por pessoas *gays* e *lésbicas* com base na patologização destes/as, especialmente argumentando que as crianças nestas famílias encontrarão problemáticas ao nível da construção da identidade de género, identidade sexual, e terão uma maior probabilidade de desenvolver uma orientação sexual homossexual (Clarke, 2002). Mais, tendem igualmente a estigmatizar todas as pessoas homossexuais, e não só aquelas que têm ou desejam ter filhos (ver, por exemplo, Cameron & Cameron, 1996). No entanto, estes estudos têm várias falhas metodológicas assim como uma interpretação abusiva dos resultados, tendo mesmo conduzido à suspensão do primeiro autor da Associação de Psicólogos Americanos (APA) em 1983 e a uma repreensão por parte da Associação de Sociólogos Americanos (ASA) por manipulação de dados de investigação.

O terceiro paradigma surge como reação ao primeiro, impulsionado pelos argumentos de feministas *lésbicas* que sustentam que a maternidade *lésbica* é essencialmente diferente e transformativa e não segue o padrão patriarcal. O discurso é muito politizado com o intuito de afirmar uma identidade *lésbica* (de onde advém a maternidade *lésbica*) diferente, e possuindo qualidades que a maternidade heterossexual não possui. Segundo Clarke (2002), o problema que se coloca é que este paradigma demonstra uma maior preocupação com a agenda política do que com a ciência experimental, adotando com frequência um discurso construído ‘de *lésbicas* para *lésbicas*’.

Finalmente, o paradigma que sustenta que as famílias homoparentais são diferentes em consequência da opressão social e homofobia de que são vítimas. De acordo com Stacey (1996):

As crianças de pais *gays* [*e mães lésbicas*] são vicariantemente vítimas de homofobia e heterossexismo institucional violentos. Todas elas sofrem de consideráveis desvantagens económicas, legais e sociais impostas pelos seus pais [*e mães*], por vezes de forma ainda mais severa. Elas arriscam-se a perder um pai [*ou mãe*] ao simples capricho de um juiz” (p. 135).

Deste paradigma advém uma diversidade de estudos que apresentam algumas diferenças entre famílias homoparentais e heteroparentais. A literatura tem revelado que apesar de não terem sido encontradas diferenças significativas na incidência de homossexualidade nem em problemáticas ligadas à construção de género em filhos/as de pais *gays* ou de mães lésbicas, estas crianças e adolescentes demonstram uma maior lateralidade nos comportamentos de género, menor tipificação dos papéis de género, maior conforto com a sua identidade de género, maior questionamento sobre a sua orientação sexual e uma maior frequência de experiências amorosas com pessoas do mesmo sexo (Bos & Sandfort, 2010; Gartrell, Bos, & Goldberg, 2011; Golombok, 2000; Green, Mandel, Hotvedt, Gray, & Smith, 1986; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). Mais, não obstante a literatura revelar não existirem diferenças no que diz respeito à qualidade da relação de pares, alguns estudos revelam que as crianças, e em particular adolescentes em famílias homoparentais, são com frequência vitimizados/as e/ ou estigmatizados/as na escola em função do género parental (Gartrell et al., 2005; Robitaille & Saint-Jacques, 2009). Digno de referência é que estas experiências parecem não influenciar a autoestima ou as competências sociais destas, supondo-se que o seu impacto seja mitigado por fatores protetores como a qualidade da relação parental, comunicação aberta sobre a orientação sexual do pai ou da mãe na família, e contacto com famílias semelhantes (Bos & van Balen, 2008; Fairtlough, 2008).

Por outro lado, também têm sido reportadas algumas diferenças no que diz respeito ao ajustamento relacional e práticas parentais em famílias homoparentais. ‘Mães sociais’ (mães não biológicas que asseguram as funções parentais) envolvem-se mais nas tarefas domésticas e de cuidados infantis (Bos et al., 2007; Patterson, 2002), demonstram um maior desejo de parentalidade (Bos et al., 2007), e utilizam menos comportamentos parentais de imposição de limites e demonstrações de poder (Bos et al., 2004, 2007) do que pais heterossexuais. Mães biológicas lésbicas revelam uma maior satisfação com a sua companheira e possuem um maior desejo de parentalidade (Bos et al., 2007) do que as mães heterossexuais. No geral, as famílias constituídas por duas mães apresentam maiores níveis de satisfação conjugal e melhor qualidade de interação mãe-criança do que famílias de um pai e uma mãe (Bos et al., 2004; Brewaeys, Ponjaert, van Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Flaks, Fisher, Masterpasqua, & Joseph, 1995; Golombok et al., 1997).

Os estudos qualitativos com famílias homoparentais, ainda em pequena quantidade, permitem aceder a estas diferenças de uma forma mais compreensiva. Ao questionar os pais e as mães sobre as suas experiências de parentalidade, dificuldades e obstáculos, torna-se visível que a gestão da opressão social e a antecipação de dificuldades ligadas à discriminação é uma constante nos seus discursos, o que implica uma gestão quotidiana do *stress*, tanto por parte dos pais e mães como por parte das crianças (Hash & Cramer, 2003; Lubbe, 2008; Robitaille & Saint-Jacques, 2009). De facto, “pais [e mães] heterossexuais não sentem as mesmas pressões ou necessidade de assumir com ‘orgulho’ a sua heterossexualidade” (Gabb,

2001, p. 347). A invisibilidade normativa da heterossexualidade implica a gestão de uma série de tarefas de conciliação entre as diferentes identidades, assim como uma desvantagem de poder e de estatuto com que necessariamente as famílias constituídas por pessoas *gays* ou lésbicas se confrontam e que inevitavelmente traz consigo diferenças.

O cruzamento em que a literatura se encontra é precisamente na explicação para estas diferenças. Como foi demonstrado, alguns/as autores/as pretendem minimizar as diferenças em forma de normalização destas famílias, enquanto outros/as utilizam estas diferenças sob a forma de agenda política de contestação da norma heterossexual ou de patologização da parentalidade homossexual. O que parece claro é que há algumas diferenças inegáveis, mas que não significa que estas diferenças tenham uma tradução direta quer na qualidade quer nas problemáticas destas famílias.

Principais críticas metodológicas

De uma forma geral as principais críticas apontadas aos estudos sobre famílias homoparentais dizem respeito aos processos de amostragem e aos métodos utilizados. Uma das principais críticas consistentemente apontada tem sido a utilização de amostras autosseleccionadas, recrutadas através de amostragens de tipo *snowball* e/ou em organizações LGBT⁴ (Tasker, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2006). As famílias que se voluntariam para estes estudos poderão não ser famílias típicas ou representativas das famílias homoparentais, nomeadamente as que são recrutadas através associações ou redes LGBT. Estas famílias possuem à partida características menos comuns como o facto de estarem ativamente envolvidas em organizações de defesa dos direitos das minorias sexuais, ou mesmo um elevado nível de conforto e de divulgação da sua configuração familiar. Este envolvimento pode também implicar uma maior aceitação por parte da família de origem e a presença de uma rede social de que a maioria das famílias poderá não gozar. O número de participantes é também, com frequência, muito pequeno o que implica uma maior cautela na interpretação e na generalização dos resultados.

Uma outra crítica importante é que os/as investigadores/as desta área não controlam de uma forma sistemática a sua reatividade interpessoal às famílias, isto é, a sua assunção de ‘normalidade’ (ou de ‘desvio’ em alguns casos) destas famílias não é controlada aquando da análise dos resultados obtidos (Tasker, 2005; Tasker & Patterson, 2006). Na grande maioria dos estudos, o objetivo da investigação é claro tanto para os/as participantes como para os/as investigadores/as o que poderá originar enviesamentos por desejabilidade social dos/as participantes, ou com base nas crenças dos/as investigadores/as.

⁴ A sigla LGBT refere-se a pessoas Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais e Transgénero.

Em resposta a estas críticas, estudos recentes provenientes tanto dos Estados Unidos como da Europa vêm colmatar algumas das falhas apontadas aos processos de amostragem através de duas formas: (1) recrutamento de famílias em clínicas de reprodução medicamente assistida, e (2) análise de dados obtidos por meio de estudos nacionais representativos. Nos Estados Unidos e Reino Unido começam a ser publicados resultados sobre famílias homoparentais retirados de estudos nacionais representativos, o que permite ultrapassar o problema da autosselecção de participantes (ver, por exemplo, Golombok et al., 2003; Wainright et al., 2004). Por outro lado, em alguns países Europeus como é o caso da Alemanha, Bélgica ou Holanda, e também nos Estados Unidos, é já possível recolher amostras aleatórias e em número suficiente através de clínicas de reprodução medicamente assistida (Bos et al., 2004, 2007; Brewaeys et al., 1997; Chan, Raboy & Patterson, 1998; Herrmann-Green & Gehring, 2007). Contudo, estes estudos são limitados a casais de lésbicas que recorrem a esta forma de conceção, não sendo por isso representativos da totalidade da população de famílias homoparentais.

Por outro lado, a diversidade de métodos utilizados no estudo de famílias homoparentais é advogado por vários investigadores/as como uma das principais mais-valias destes estudos. Não obstante a validade das críticas aqui referidas, o facto de os resultados serem semelhantes mesmo quando obtidos através de diferentes métodos e metodologias de investigação vem reforçar a consistência das suas conclusões. Os diferentes desenhos de investigação aqui referidos (transversais, comparativos, longitudinais e qualitativos) têm em todos os casos concluído a inexistência de problemáticas associadas à parentalidade por pais gays ou mães lésbicas em domínios fundamentais da saúde psicológica.

De acordo com Anderssen e seus colegas “devido aos resultados não ambíguos nos estudos revistos, acreditamos que estudos epidemiológicos maiores e com instrumentos e testes mais robustos são menos necessários do que métodos mais aprofundados e orientados para os processos” (Anderssen et al., 2002, p. 349). Por outras palavras, mais do que prosseguir uma linha de investigação que procura normalizar as famílias homoparentais minimizando as suas diferenças, seria aconselhável que os/as investigadores/as procurassem avaliar e compreender as necessidades e processos específicos destas famílias.

Conclusão e direções futuras

Segundo a Academia Americana de Pediatras (AAP), não há diferenças sistemáticas entre pais gays e mães lésbicas e pais e mães heterossexuais na saúde emocional, competências parentais e atitudes acerca da parentalidade. Nenhum estudo revelou qualquer risco para as crianças como resultado de crescerem numa família com um ou mais pais gays ou mães lésbicas (Perrin & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002).

Semelhantes pareceres foram publicados pelas principais sociedades científicas norte-americanas, como é também o caso da Associação de Psicólogos Americanos (Paige, 2005).

Os estudos comparativos entre famílias homoparentais e famílias heteroparentais foram necessários no sentido de proteger as primeiras e de salvaguardar os interesses das crianças que se encontravam à guarda de mães lésbicas ou de pais *gays*. Estes estudos foram impulsionados pelo número crescente de disputas parentais após o *coming-out* do pai ou mãe nos Estados Unidos, embora atualmente seja já seguro afirmar que as crianças e adolescentes com pais ou mães lésbicas terão um desenvolvimento psicológico, emocional e social dentro de parâmetros normativos. Contudo, como foi aqui demonstrado, a prossecução desta linha de investigação pode ser contraproducente para o conhecimento científico ao minimizar as diferenças existentes. As famílias homoparentais confrontam-se com desafios únicos que é necessário compreender e avaliar, especialmente quando se observa que as crianças e adolescentes poderão estar em maior risco de serem vitimizados/as ao longo da sua vida com base na configuração familiar. Desta forma, importa conhecer as situações e características destes episódios de forma a poder introduzir mudança nos contextos em que estas acontecem. Mais, pouco se sabe dos processos que permitem às crianças com uma maior incidência de vitimização demonstrarem elevados níveis de saúde mental, ajustamento comportamental e autoestima, colocando-se a hipótese de que a vitimização anterior dos pais ou mães lhes permite estarem preparados/as para antecipar as dificuldades e estimular comportamentos resilientes nas crianças (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

Mais recentemente é também sugerido que a orientação sexual dos pais e mães *per se* não tem consequências nem ao nível do desenvolvimento infantil nem no ajustamento e qualidade relacional de casais do mesmo sexo, embora o género dos pais e mães possa estar associado à aprendizagem dos papéis e comportamentos de género das crianças, especialmente no caso de casais de lésbicas. O género dos pais, ou mesmo a interação entre género e orientação sexual, está envolvido na criação de novos tipos de estruturas e processos familiares que importa conhecer (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Associado a estas questões ainda sem resposta está também o vazio na literatura dedicada a pais *gays*. Se por um lado são conhecidos vários estudos com mães lésbicas que recorrem às novas tecnologias de reprodução, poucos estudos conseguiram recrutar amostras de pais *gays* em situações semelhantes, ainda que se verifique já o fenómeno *gay baby boom* cujos pais recorrem a adoção ou a ‘barrigas de aluguer’ como via para a parentalidade (Johnson & O’Connor, 2002). Partindo do pressuposto que é o género dos pais e mães que pode estar na génese das diferenças, é especialmente importante aprofundar o conhecimento sobre a parentalidade de homens *gays*.

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Chapter 2

Portuguese Attitudes toward Homosexual Parenting

[Contents of this chapter were published in the following article:
Costa, P. A., Caldeira, S., Fernandes, I., Rita, C., Pereira, H., & Leal, I. (in press). Atitudes da população Portuguesa em relação à Homoparentalidade. *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica/Psychology*, 26. In Portuguese.]

Extended abstract

Despite recent social and legal changes regarding gay and lesbian rights, literature shows that negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, and in particular toward gay and lesbian parents, are common and widespread in Western societies. The aim of this study was to explore Portuguese attitudes toward parenting by gay men and lesbians. 993 participants, aged between 18 and 69 ($M = 34$), filled in a questionnaire that included a vignette depicting a heterosexual couple, a lesbian couple, or a gay couple wishing to adopt a child. Participants were asked to evaluate the couple as prospective parents, and if they anticipated emotional or social problems for the children. Although most participants held a positive attitude toward gay and lesbian parents, the results revealed a more favorable attitude toward the heterosexual couple. Participants anticipated more emotional and social problems in children adopted by a lesbian couple, and even more so by a gay couple. Moreover, men and catholic participants revealed the highest levels of prejudice toward same-sex parents. When asked about their arguments against same-sex parenting, most participants sustained their arguments on a lesser capacity of gay men and lesbians to be parents, namely, by not providing children with the necessary gender figures, stigmatizing homosexuality, or by affirming the moral superiority of heterosexual couples. Most participants also argued that children with same-sex couples would be victimized in school because of their family configuration, and/or would have their socioemotional development compromised. In conclusion, although the majority of the participants were not against same-sex couples adopting a child, the results confirmed that there different-sex couples were judged more favorably than same-sex couples as prospective parents, and that children of same-sex parented families would face more social and emotional difficulties. In particular, the fear regarding the possibility of children adopted by a same-sex couple to be victimized in school was evident regardless of how participants evaluated the couple, highlighting the need for a

Careful reflection about the social mechanisms that would allow a potential victimization of these children.

Keywords: same-sex parenting, same-sex couples, adoption, attitudes, arguments.

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo foi avaliar as atitudes da população portuguesa em relação à homoparentalidade. Participaram 993 pessoas com idades entre os 18 e os 69 anos ($M=34$), respondendo a um questionário que incluiu uma vinheta descrevendo um casal heterossexual, um casal de lésbicas ou um casal *gay* que pretendia adotar. Foi pedido aos participantes que avaliassem os casais enquanto futuros pais, e se antecipavam dificuldades emocionais e sociais no desenvolvimento da criança. Apesar da maioria dos participantes apresentar uma atitude favorável à homoparentalidade, os resultados revelaram uma atitude mais favorável em relação ao casal heterossexual. Os participantes anteciparam mais problemas emocionais e sociais nas crianças adotadas por um casal de duas mulheres, e mais ainda por um casal de dois homens.

Palavras-chave: homoparentalidade, casais do mesmo sexo, adoção, atitudes, argumentos.

Introdução

De acordo com o censo Norte-Americano, no ano de 2000 estimava-se que mais de 150 mil casais do mesmo sexo tinham filhos menores de 18 anos, sendo que cerca de 270 mil crianças cresciam em famílias com dois pais ou duas mães e cerca de 540 mil com um pai *gay* ou uma mãe lésbica (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Outras estimativas comunitárias revelaram que aproximadamente uma em cada cinco lésbicas e um em cada nove homens *gays* assumiam funções parentais (Bryant & Demian, 1994), estimando-se que o número de crianças a crescer numa família homoparental se situava entre os seis e os 14 milhões (Patterson, 2002; Patterson & Friel, 2000; Ryan & Martin, 2000).

Na verdade, pessoas *gays*, lésbicas e bissexuais sempre assumiram funções parentais, começando a assistir-se nas últimas três décadas ao fenómeno a que os investigadores apelidaram de *lesbian and gay baby boom* e que consiste na constituição de famílias lésbicas e *gays* de forma planeada. Este fenómeno, que inicia nos Estados Unidos, assiste-se hoje em dia em diversos países Europeus como é o caso da Holanda ou Bélgica (Bos, van Balen & van den Boom, 2005; Brewaeys, 2001).

Em Portugal estima-se que a maioria das famílias homoparentais sejam famílias reconstituídas após a divulgação da orientação sexual do pai ou da mãe, à semelhança do que acontece em outros países onde o enquadramento legal não permite o acesso por pessoas *gays* e lésbicas a formas alternativas de parentalidade, nomeadamente em Itália (Lelleri, Prati & Pietrantonio, 2008), ou em países onde esta realidade é ainda recente como é o caso de Espanha (González & López, 2009).

A escassez de estudos empíricos com estas famílias dificulta mais ainda uma estimativa do número de famílias, assim como a sua caracterização. Estudos comunitários recentes estimam que 3% das pessoas *gays*, lésbicas e bissexuais e 8% dos casais do mesmo sexo tinham filhos, não existindo, contudo, uma estimativa real da dimensão da população Lésbicas, Gay, Bissexual e Transgénero (LGBT) portuguesa (Costa, Pereira & Leal, 2013). Não obstante, inferindo a partir de dados norte-americanos que indicam que cerca de 5% da população maior de idade se identifica como *gay*, lésbica, bissexual ou transgénero (Gagnon, Laumann, Michael, & Michaels, 1994), será possível inferir a dimensão da população LGBT portuguesa. De acordo com o censo de 2001, habitavam em Portugal cerca de 8 milhões de pessoas maiores de 20 anos (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2002). Assim, 5% seriam 400 mil pessoas lésbicas, *gays* e bissexuais. Se desta população retirarmos 3% a 8%, poderemos esperar uma dimensão aproximada de pessoas *gays*, lésbicas e bissexuais com filhos, em Portugal, entre 12 e 32 mil. Este número incluiria, então, famílias reconstituídas após a divulgação da homossexualidade do pai ou da mãe, e famílias planeadas, ainda que maioritariamente monoparentais, de mães lésbicas e pais *gays*.

Atitudes em relação a pessoas homossexuais

As atitudes em relação às famílias homoparentais assentam, em grande parte, em atitudes em relação às próprias pessoas lésbicas, *gays* e bissexuais. A literatura tem revelado que as atitudes negativas contra pessoas homossexuais (homonegativas) são comuns e frequentes nas sociedades ocidentais (Herek, 2000a; Kite & Whitley, 2003). Contudo, a atitude em relação a pessoas homossexuais não é um conceito simples, dividindo-se em três principais categorias: (1) o medo ou repulsa por pessoas homossexuais, que se considera homonegatividade; (2) a avaliação dos atos homossexuais como desviantes ou patológicos; e (3) as atitudes em relação aos direitos das pessoas homossexuais, categoria assente numa perspetiva tradicional dos papéis de género (Herek, 2004).

As pessoas que revelam atitudes homonegativas são com frequência pessoas que mantêm atitudes mais sexistas, com uma visão tradicional de família nuclear, acreditam que a homossexualidade é uma escolha do indivíduo, mantêm uma maior religiosidade e uma identificação política mais conservadora (Davies, 2004; Herek, 2000a; Nagoshi et al., 2008).

Tem-se também observado que os homens são mais homonegativos do que as mulheres, e com maior intensidade em relação a homens *gays* do que a mulheres lésbicas (Costa & Davies, 2012; Herek, 2000b; Kite & Whitley, 2003) Estas atitudes fundamentam, assim, as atitudes negativas em relação às famílias homoparentais (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; McLeod, Crawford, & Zechmeister, 1999).

Atitudes em relação à homoparentalidade

Victoria Clarke (2001) avaliou os argumentos mais frequentemente utilizados na comunicação social e em *focus groups* com estudantes universitários contra a homoparentalidade, tendo identificado seis principais categorias: (1) com base em crenças religiosas; (2) com base na impossibilidade biológica de reprodução; (3) com base no egoísmo dos pais/mães; (4) com base na falta de referências de género; (5) com base no desenvolvimento da orientação sexual; e (6) com base na vitimização e discriminação das crianças. Estas seis categorias dividem-se ainda em dois tipos de argumentos: argumentos que reforçam a imoralidade de pais *gays* e mães lésbicas, e argumentos que sublinham os efeitos negativos de crescer numa família homoparental.

A par da crescente visibilidade social e aumento do interesse científico sobre as famílias homoparentais, as atitudes têm vindo a sofrer alterações. Os estudos da década de 90 com estudantes universitários revelaram médios ou baixos níveis de homonegatividade, mas perceções negativas de famílias homoparentais. O estudo de Crawford e Solliday (1996) revelou que os estudantes universitários não só detinham atitudes negativas em relação aos casais homossexuais que pretendiam adotar e tendiam a atribuir com menor frequência a custódia de uma criança a estes casais, como justificavam estas atitudes na avaliação de instabilidade dos casais homossexuais. Resultados semelhantes foram encontrados com estudantes universitários de Psicologia (Fraser, Fish, & Mckenzie, 1995; King & Black, 1999; Money & Cain, 1997). Contudo, em estudos em que não foram encontradas estas diferenças, os participantes revelaram preocupação com a possibilidade de estas crianças serem vitimizadas na escola e de serem confrontadas com maiores dificuldades no seu dia a dia (Bliss & Harris, 1999; McLeod et al., 1999). Um outro estudo mais recente, de origem australiana, revelou que os estudantes de Serviço Social tinham uma atitude favorável em relação à homoparentalidade, elevado conhecimento sobre famílias homoparentais e baixo nível de homonegatividade (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006).

Resultados semelhantes foram observados com estudantes de áreas psicossociais Portugueses, não se tendo encontrado diferenças significativas na avaliação de casais homossexuais e heterossexuais. Contudo, foi observado que os participantes antecipavam maiores dificuldades sociais em crianças adotadas por pessoas homossexuais, assim como uma maior

probabilidade de virem a ser, também elas, adultos homossexuais (Gato, Fontaine, & Carneiro, 2010). Um outro estudo Português com uma amostra universitária revelou a existência de atitudes negativas em relação a famílias homoparentais (Xavier, Mendes, Martins & Fernandes, 2011). A nível Europeu, na média dos países-membros, apenas 32% são favoráveis à adoção de crianças por parte de casais do mesmo sexo, ainda que 44% se revelem favoráveis à extensão do casamento a estes casais. Em Portugal, 29% das pessoas revelaram-se favoráveis ao acesso ao casamento por casais do mesmo sexo, e apenas 19% à adoção por estes casais (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011). Estes dados foram recolhidos em 2006, 4 anos antes do casamento civil em Portugal ter sido estendido a casais do mesmo sexo. A adoção de crianças e o acesso a reprodução medicamente assistida continua, contudo, vetada a estes casais.

O presente estudo

O objetivo do presente estudo foi desenvolver investigação empírica em Portugal sobre as atitudes em relação às famílias homoparentais por parte de pessoas heterossexuais, e explorar os seus argumentos contra estas famílias. Com este objetivo foram colocados os seguintes problemas de investigação: (1) Serão as atitudes em relação a casais de sexo oposto e casais do mesmo sexo diferentes?; (2) Quais são os argumentos contra a adoção por casais do mesmo sexo?; (3) Serão estas atitudes diferentes em homens e em mulheres?; (4) Serão estas atitudes diferentes com base em crenças religiosas?

Método

Participantes

A amostra consistiu em 993 participantes (27% do sexo masculino e 73% do sexo feminino), heterossexuais, de nacionalidade portuguesa, com idades compreendidas entre os 18 e os 69 anos ($M = 34$, $dp = 11$). 333 participantes responderam ao questionário 1 (caracterizando um casal heterossexual), 359 participantes responderam ao questionário 2 (caracterizando um casal de duas mulheres), e 301 participantes responderam ao questionário 3 (caracterizando um casal de dois homens). A maioria da amostra foi constituída por pessoas solteiras (55%), com elevada qualificação académica (licenciatura: 43%, pós-graduação: 44%), sem filhos (67%), e provenientes das cidades mais populosas (36% de Lisboa, 10% do Porto, 6% de

Setúbal). 55% dos participantes identificaram-se como Católicos, 11% espirituais mas não religiosos, e 31% ateus.

Instrumentos

Juntamente com um questionário demográfico foi apresentado a cada participante uma de três vinhetas nas quais é descrita uma família candidata à adoção de uma criança. Foi então pedido aos participantes que avaliassem as qualidades desta família como futuros pais/mães de uma criança respondendo a quatro questões. Através de um desenho quase-experimental foi apresentado a cada participante apenas uma família constituída por um casal heterossexual, um casal de dois homens (*gay*) ou um casal de duas mulheres (lésbicas). Os casais foram descritos como tendo uma relação longa e estável e com forte desejo de parentalidade. Foram também descritos como gozando de estabilidade financeira e profissional, de um bom suporte social, e estabilidade emocional. A vinheta-base foi construída a partir do trabalho de Camilleri e Ryan (2006) de acordo com os objetivos deste estudo. A adaptação da vinheta foi submetida a análise da sua validade facial através de um *focus group* com técnicos de Psicologia familiarizados com investigação na área da Parentalidade por forma a garantir que a história era clara, objetiva, e descrevia os aspetos mais importantes da caracterização familiar. A versão final da vinheta é apresentada no Figura 1.

Figura 1

Vinheta descrevendo um casal adotante

Ana e Catarina são um casal há 10 anos, comprometidas uma com a outra e felizes. No entanto, têm uma vontade muito grande de serem mães, e como não podem ter filhos decidiram adotar. Ana e Catarina são ambas licenciadas, bem sucedidas profissionalmente e também muito queridas pelos amigos e familiares. Os pais de ambas estão entusiasmados com a ideia de serem avós, e disponibilizaram-se para ajudar no que for preciso para receber a criança na família. Ana e Catarina moram num apartamento com dois quartos espaçosos na mesma cidade onde ambos trabalham. Os amigos e colegas descrevem-nas como pessoas tranquilas, disponíveis, e atentas às necessidades dos outros, acreditando que reúnem a vontade e as características necessárias para serem boas mães. Têm alguma experiência de cuidar de crianças, especialmente dos sobrinhos de Ana. Depois de pensarem muito sobre o assunto, iniciaram o processo de adoção e frequentam as reuniões com a técnica responsável pelo recrutamento e seleção de famílias adotantes e estão muito entusiasmadas por virem a cumprir o desejo de serem mães. Estão a aguardar serem aceites como candidatas a adotarem uma criança.

Nota: Apenas os nomes das pessoas foram alterados de forma a descrever um casal heterossexual, um casal de lésbicas ou um casal *gay*.

Foi pedido aos participantes que após lerem a história respondessem a quatro questões; 1) “Considera que a ‘Pessoa A’ e a ‘Pessoa B’ serão bons pais [mães]?”; 2) “Pensa que se a ‘Pessoa A’ e a ‘Pessoa B’ adotarem, a criança poderá estar em risco de problemas emocionais?”; 3) “Pensa que se a ‘Pessoa A’ e a ‘Pessoa B’ adotarem, a criança poderá ser gozada ou rejeitada pelos colegas na escola?”; e 4) “Considera a ‘Pessoa A’ e a ‘Pessoa B’ bons candidatos [candidatas] a adotar uma criança? Porquê?”. As primeiras três questões foram medidas numa escala de *Likert* de 4 pontos (seguramente não, provavelmente não, provavelmente sim, seguramente sim), e os nomes foram atribuídos conforme o casal fosse heterossexual, *gay* ou lésbico. A última questão foi de resposta aberta, permitindo que os participantes descrevessem a sua perceção da família e os seus argumentos em relação à parentalidade.

Procedimentos

Os participantes foram recrutados através da colocação de anúncios na internet, nomeadamente em fóruns de diversos tipos, grupos e listas *online*, e através da criação de uma página no *Facebook* para este efeito. Os participantes foram então encaminhados para um *website* com o título Atitudes da População Portuguesa sobre a Homoparentalidade, onde constava o nome e filiação dos investigadores e o objetivo do estudo. Neste *website* foram disponibilizados três *links* diferentes para o questionário, e os participantes foram informados que deveriam escolher apenas um destes e preencher apenas esse questionário. Por forma a controlar o número de respostas por questionário, a ordem dos *links* apresentados foi alterada semanalmente. No que diz respeito à prevenção de mais de um preenchimento de questionário por pessoa, não foi utilizado nenhum bloqueio ao IP, uma vez que no mesmo IP poderiam responder mais do que uma pessoa. Mais, acreditamos que a extensão e o tempo de resposta do questionário demoveriam as pessoas de duplo preenchimento. Contudo, após a introdução das respostas no SPSS, versão 19, os dados foram cuidadosamente analisados para detetar questionários duplicados. O método amostral utilizado garante a confidencialidade e anonimato de todos os participantes, desta forma permitindo que os participantes expressassem as suas opiniões sem constrangimentos.

Resultados

Avaliação dos casais adotantes

A totalidade dos participantes avaliou positivamente o casal heterossexual, enquanto que 27% afirmou seguramente que o casal duas mulheres seriam boas mães e 68% que provavelmente seriam. No caso do casal de dois homens, 27% afirmaram que seriam bons pais e 67% que provavelmente seriam.

Para averiguar a existência de diferenças entre os grupos que avaliaram o casal heterossexual, o casal de duas mulheres, e o casal de dois homens, foram realizados testes ANOVA a um fator, com o tipo de família (hetero x lésbica x gay) como variável independente e as três questões como variáveis dependentes (tabela 1).

Tabela 1

Média, desvio padrão e resultados do teste ANOVA

	Casal heterossexual	Casal de lésbicas	Casal gay	ANOVA
	N=333	N=359	N=301	
Qualidade parental	1.89 (.33)	1.80 (.59)	1.81 (.60)	$F(2,992) = 2.916, p = .055$
Risco emocional da criança	1.92 (.44)	2.14 (.79)	2.17 (.82)	$F(2,992) = 12.464, p < .001^*$
Risco social da criança	1.79 (.53)	2.81 (.60)	2.93 (.63)	$F(2,992) = 377.550, p < .001^*$

* $p < .001$

Os resultados dos testes ANOVA revelaram um efeito do tipo de casal na antecipação de dificuldades emocionais e sociais de crianças. De acordo com os testes de comparação múltipla de médias de Tukey, os participantes anteciparam uma maior incidência de problemáticas em crianças adotadas por casais de dois homens ou de duas mulheres ($p < .001$) do que em casais heterossexuais, e uma maior antecipação de vitimização das crianças quando estas eram adotadas por um casal de duas mulheres ($p < .001$), e mais ainda quando eram adotadas por um casal de dois homens ($p = .025$).

Argumentos contra a homoparentalidade

Apesar de os resultados obtidos revelarem que a maioria das pessoas apresentou uma atitude favorável à homoparentalidade, as diferenças encontradas na avaliação dos três casais são reveladoras da existência de negatividade em relação a estas famílias. Por forma a compreender os motivos que justificam estas atitudes, apenas as respostas negativas à qualidade dos casais do mesmo sexo (questionários 2 e 3) foram avaliadas através de análise de conteúdo (Bardin, 1977). As respostas dadas pelos participantes foram analisadas e categorizadas, tendo emergido três categorias de resposta: ‘críticas aos pais’, ‘preocupação com as crianças’ e ‘críticas à situação’ (Tabela 2).

Tabela 2

Categorias e subcategorias da análise de conteúdo

Categorias	Subcategorias (Argumentos)	Nº observações
Críticas aos pais	Complementaridade dos papéis de género	14
	Natureza / Biologia	9
	Estigmatização da homossexualidade	8
	Superioridade da heterossexualidade	6
	Valores familiares da sociedade	4
	Incapacidade parental	3
	Religião	1
	Aceitação da orientação sexual da criança	1
Preocupação com as crianças	Vitimização / Discriminação	15
	Diferenciação / Identificação de género	11
	Desenvolvimento socioemocional	11
Críticas ao material	Preconceito da sociedade	4
	Realidade factual	1
	Crítica da investigação	1

Do total de 89 observações, 51% dizem respeito à menor qualidade parental percebida de casais do mesmo sexo, e o motivo mais evocado (14 observações) foi o da falta de papéis tradicionais de género: “A verdade é que milhares de estudos suportados cientificamente já

comprovaram que, na grande maioria dos casos, a mãe proporciona mais carinho, afeto, apoio sentimental, paciência, compreensão e disponibilidade total às crianças. São, portanto, emocionalmente mais disponíveis”.

Neste caso, os papéis tradicionais de género dizem respeito ao papel do pai e da mãe, assumidos como complementares e, por esse motivo, fundamentais. Outros argumentos frequentemente evocados dizem respeito a uma inferioridade destes casais face a casais heterossexuais, como por exemplo: “Entre ficar numa instituição com carências afetivas, é preferível ficar com pais homossexuais. Contudo a preferência terá de ser sempre dada aos casais heterossexuais”.

Esta postura, apresentando uma crença de superioridade moral de pessoas heterossexuais, demonstra contudo alguma abertura face à parentalidade por parte de pessoas homossexuais. Em contraste, outros participantes revelam uma postura mais próxima de aversão aos próprios homossexuais (homonegatividade) sob a forma de patologização destes ou das suas relações: “Também é do conhecimento geral que a maioria das relações homossexuais são de curta/média duração e que trocam frequentemente de parceiro o que também não é benéfico para a criança ver um dos pais com diferentes parceiros”.

No que diz respeito aos argumentos relativos à preocupação com o bem-estar e desenvolvimento das crianças (42% das observações), os motivos mais frequentemente evocados agruparam-se em apenas três categorias: ‘experiências de vitimização/discriminação’, ‘problemas de desenvolvimento social e emocional’ e ‘não acesso à diferenciação e identificação de género’. A maioria dos participantes (15 observações) manifestou preocupação com as crianças poderem vir a ser vitimizadas pelos pares: “(...) Possam ser uns excelentes candidatos a adotar qualquer criança deste mundo, mas é certo que apesar da mente aberta que evolui ao passar dos tempos nas sociedades também existem muitas pessoas maldosas e as crianças possivelmente podem sofrer de *bullying*”.

Estes argumentos colocam a responsabilidade pelo heterossexismo da sociedade nos homens *gays* e mulheres lésbicas, desresponsabilizando a sociedade na promoção da igualdade e do respeito por todos os que a integram. Mesmo os participantes que evocam riscos desenvolvimentais ou emocionais para a criança, raramente concretizam quais estes seriam, em muitos casos associando-os a consequências emocionais das experiências de vitimização: “Não creio que seja emocionalmente bom para uma criança ter dois pais ou duas mães. Será gozada na escola e isso colocará ao nível psicológico na criança uma sensação de exclusão”.

Finalmente, a terceira categoria de argumentos que emergiu dos dados foi a preocupação com problemáticas ligadas à diferenciação de género, problemáticas suscitadas pela falta de uma figura materna e de uma figura paterna: “Uma criança precisa de um pai e de uma mãe.

Ambos desempenham funções diferentes na socialização e crescimento da criança, e ter dois pais é suprimir um dos papéis. Acredito que trará problemas à criança no futuro”.

Neste caso, a falta destas figuras de género é associado não só a problemáticas emocionais, como também à identificação de género da criança. Este receio faz parte de uma atitude que assenta nos papéis tradicionais de género associados ao ser homem e ao ser mulher.

Comparação de grupos

Diferenças de género. Para averiguar se homens e mulheres avaliaram de forma diferente a qualidade da família e a possibilidade de problemáticas da criança foram conduzidos testes *t* de *student* para amostras independentes, para cada uma destas questões (Tabela 3).

Tabela 3

Média, desvio padrão e teste *t* de *Student* por género

	Casal heterossexual		<i>t</i> (331)	Casal de lésbicas		<i>t</i> (357)	Casal <i>gay</i>		<i>t</i> (299)
	Homens (N=89)	Mulheres (N=244)		Homens (N=89)	Mulheres (N=270)		Homens (N=88)	Mulheres (N=213)	
Qualidade parental	1.83 (.38)	1.91 (.31)	=1.837 <i>p</i> = .097	1.99 (.82)	1.73 (.48)	=3.578 <i>p</i> < .001*	1.99 (.74)	1.73 (.52)	=3.417 <i>p</i> = .001*
Risco emocional da criança	1.97 (.49)	1.90 (.42)	=1.182 <i>p</i> = .238	2.43 (.96)	2.05 (.70)	=3.954 <i>p</i> = .001*	2.44 (.87)	2.05 (.77)	=3.854 <i>p</i> < .001*
Risco social da criança	1.79 (.53)	1.79 (.53)	=.006 <i>p</i> = .995	2.91 (.67)	2.78 (.57)	=1.809 <i>p</i> = .071	3.01 (.72)	2.90 (.59)	=1.436 <i>p</i> = .115

**p* < .001

Na avaliação do casal heterossexual não foram encontradas diferenças significativas entre homens e mulheres. Contudo, no cenário do casal de duas mulheres, os homens avaliaram mais negativamente o casal adotante (*p* < .001) e anteciparam maiores dificuldades emocionais da criança (*p* < .001) do que as mulheres. Resultados semelhantes foram encontrados no cenário do casal de dois homens, em que os homens avaliaram mais negativamente o casal adotante (*p* < .001) e anteciparam maiores dificuldades da criança (*p* < .001) do que as mulheres. Apesar de não terem sido encontradas diferenças de género no que diz respeito à antecipação de problemas sociais, é de salientar que tanto homens como mulheres obtiveram um resultado médio próximo de 3, que corresponde à afirmação de que

as crianças adotadas por um casal do mesmo sexo ‘provavelmente’ serão vítimas de rejeição pelos pares.

Diferenças religiosas. Para averiguar se as pessoas com diferentes crenças religiosas avaliaram de forma diferente os três casais recorreu-se novamente aos testes *t* de *student* para amostras independentes. Devido ao número reduzido de pessoas com diferentes crenças religiosas, foram apenas comparados os grupos de católicos e ateus (Tabela 4).

Tabela 4

Média, desvio padrão e teste *t* de *Student* por afiliação religiosa

	Casal heterossexual			Casal de lésbicas			Casal gay		
	Católicos (N=185)	Ateus (N=98)		Católicos (N=202)	Ateus (N=103)		Católicos (N=156)	Ateus (N=107)	
Qualidade parental	1.90 (.32)	1.88 (.33)	$t(281)=.629$ $p = .530$	1.86 (.62)	1.67 (.62)	$t(303)=2.494$ $p = .013^{**}$	1.90 (.62)	1.77 (.58)	$t(261)=1.726$ $p = .081$
Risco emocional da criança	1.94 (.47)	1.90 (.39)	$t(281)=.665$ $p = .506$	2.29 (.82)	1.99 (.77)	$t(303)=3.109$ $p < .002^{**}$	2.38 (.83)	1.98 (.74)	$t(261)=3.981$ $p < .001^*$
Risco social da criança	1.75 (.55)	1.79 (.50)	$F(281)=.519$ $p = .605$	2.91 (.64)	2.66 (.55)	$t(303)=3.383$ $p = .001^*$	3.00 (.63)	2.92 (.57)	$t(261)=1.103$ $p = .271$

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

Na avaliação do casal heterossexual não foram detetadas diferenças significativas em nenhuma das questões. No cenário do casal de duas mulheres, foi observado que as pessoas católicas avaliaram mais negativamente as competências parentais do casal ($p = .013$), e anteciparam maiores dificuldades emocionais ($p = .002$) e sociais ($p = .001$) da criança adotada por este casal do que as pessoas ateias. Finalmente, no cenário do casal de homens, as pessoas católicas anteciparam maiores dificuldades emocionais da criança ($p < .001$) do que as pessoas ateias.

Discussão

Os resultados do presente estudo confirmaram a existência de diferenças na avaliação de famílias heteroparentais e homoparentais por pessoas heterossexuais. Apesar de não terem

sido encontradas diferenças significativas na avaliação da qualidade parental, foram antecipadas maiores problemáticas emocionais e sociais em crianças adotadas por um casal do mesmo sexo do que por um casal de sexo oposto, resultado em linha com anteriores investigações internacionais (Bliss & Harris, 1999; McLeod et al., 1999). Como esperado, os homens avaliaram mais negativamente as competências parentais dos casais do mesmo sexo e anteciparam maiores problemáticas emocionais nas crianças adotadas por estes do que as mulheres. A afiliação religiosa foi também uma variável importante na justificação das diferenças encontradas, tendo o grupo de pessoas católicas avaliado mais negativamente o casal de duas mulheres do que o grupo de pessoas ateias. Este grupo antecipou também maiores dificuldades emocionais em crianças adotadas por um casal do mesmo sexo, resultados de acordo com a literatura (Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999).

Em particular, na antevisão de problemas sociais das crianças, nomeadamente vitimização por parte dos colegas, os participantes revelaram maior preocupação com crianças com dois pais do que com duas mães. Esta diferença poderá estar relacionada com uma maior perceção de risco de discriminação de homens *gays*, o que está de acordo com a literatura sobre atitudes em relação a minorias sexuais que revelaram de forma consistente maiores níveis de preconceito e homonegatividade em relação a homens *gays* do que a mulheres lésbicas (Herek, 2000b). Por outro lado, as mulheres, ainda que lésbicas, poderão ser percebidas como tendo as competências tradicionalmente associadas à maternidade o que poderia mitigar os efeitos da vitimização da criança.

Apesar dos participantes deste estudo terem revelado baixos níveis de negatividade em relação às famílias homoparentais, a possibilidade de as crianças poderem vir a ser vítimas de rejeição ou *bullying* pelos colegas foi uma preocupação evidente e independente da avaliação das qualidades do casal, do género dos participantes, ou da sua afiliação religiosa. Este resultado tem implicações importantes ao nível da integração das famílias homoparentais nos diferentes contextos sociais, e em particular no contexto escolar. É fundamental criar redes de suporte para as crianças que são filhas de pais *gays* ou de mães lésbicas que frequentam a escola. De fato, uma forma privilegiada de garantir que a antecipação de problemas de *bullying* com estas crianças não será uma realidade é promovendo uma discussão aberta sobre a existência de diferentes orientações sexuais e sobre as diferentes configurações familiares, permitindo assim que as crianças de famílias homoparentais tenham um desenvolvimento e ajustamento psicológico e social adequado. Por outro lado, o contacto com pessoas com diferentes orientações sexuais tem-se mostrado ser uma variável importante na alteração das atitudes em relação a pessoas homossexuais (Herek & Glunt, 1993), esperando-se que falar sobre diferentes configurações familiares, nomeadamente famílias homoparentais, surta o mesmo efeito.

Quando avaliadas as respostas à questão aberta sobre a qualidade parental percebida dos casais, os resultados evidenciaram uma maior percentagem de críticas aos casais do mesmo

sexo do que argumentos baseados na preocupação com as crianças. Os argumentos com base na falta de figuras tradicionais de género, impossibilidade de gerar uma família de forma biológica, ou estigmatização da homossexualidade, mais frequentemente evocados, são reveladores de uma homonegatividade já sublinhados por Clarke (2001) na avaliação das representações nos meios de comunicação britânicos. Estes argumentos são comuns na cultura ocidental e têm-se mantido ao longo dos anos e após inúmeros debates sobre a temática da homoparentalidade.

Segundo a mesma autora, estes argumentos servem a função de impedir que as pessoas homossexuais planeiem e constituam uma família, desta forma garantindo a superioridade moral das pessoas (e das famílias) heterossexuais (Clarke, 2001). No presente estudo, os argumentos apresentados desenvolvem-se em torno da incapacidade das pessoas homossexuais em assumir as funções parentais, tendo alguns participantes revelado atitudes explicitamente heterossexistas ao afirmarem que deve ser sempre dada preferência a casais heterossexuais aquando do processo de adoção. Em contraste, a investigação dedicada às competências parentais e desenvolvimento infantil em famílias homoparentais não confirmam a existência de motivos que impeçam a constituição de família por parte de pessoas *gays*, lésbicas ou bissexuais (Anderssen, Amlie & Ytteroy, 2002; Patterson, 2006; Tasker, 2005). Pareceres da Associação Americana de Psicólogos e da Academia Americana de Pediatras afirmam, com base na evidência científica disponível, que o desenvolvimento das crianças e adolescentes é semelhante em famílias heteroparentais e homoparentais, considerando que mais importante que orientação sexual dos pais ou mães, são as interações e relações que se estabelecem na família para o desenvolvimento ótimo destas crianças (Paige, 2005; Perrin & Committe on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002). Mais, um relatório elaborado para o Conselho Europeu sobre os direitos de crianças em diferentes tipos de famílias concluiu que o bem-estar destas crianças depende não só da dinâmica familiar em si, mas especialmente na proteção legal de que gozam, apontando que a maior ameaça ao bem-estar e estabilidade das crianças é a discriminação de que são vítimas em estados europeus que não legitimam as suas famílias (Lowe, 2009). Não obstante, são ainda poucos os países europeus que oferecem os mesmos direitos e proteção a famílias hetero e homoparentais, e as atitudes dos europeus em relação à qualidade parental de pessoas *gays*, lésbicas e bissexuais são ainda predominantemente negativas. Como referido, em 2006, 81% das pessoas em Portugal não aceitavam que casais do mesmo sexo pudessem adotar crianças (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011).

Limitações do estudo

Uma limitação importante deste estudo é a metodologia amostral utilizada. Tendo em conta as estatísticas apresentadas pelo Conselho Europeu, a maioria dos Portugueses são ainda

contra a adoção por parte de casais do mesmo sexo. Contudo, no presente estudo a grande maioria dos participantes mostrou-se favorável. Estes resultados sugerem cautela na sua interpretação, não se podendo por isso generalizar às atitudes da população Portuguesa. É possível que a amostra seja autosseleccionada, tendo as pessoas que manifestam uma atitude mais favorável à adoção querido manifestar-se com maior frequência. Mais, o perfil das pessoas utilizadoras da internet tende a revelar pessoas mais jovens, com maior nível de instrução e mais acesso à informação pelo que poderá constituir um enviesamento destes resultados em relação às atitudes da população em geral. Outro fator importante é metade da amostra ser proveniente das três cidades Portuguesas mais urbanas, o que poderá também ter sido responsável pelas atitudes mais favoráveis à homoparentalidade encontradas. É este um dos primeiros estudos empíricos realizados em Portugal, e o primeiro com uma amostra geral da população, sendo fundamental a continuidade da investigação nesta temática, tentando colmatar as limitações assinaladas.

Conclusão

O presente estudo marcou o início da investigação empírica em Portugal sobre as atitudes das pessoas heterossexuais em relação a famílias homoparentais. Foi demonstrado existirem diferenças na avaliação da qualidade parental de casais heterossexuais, gays e de lésbicas, e que os homens e as pessoas católicas apresentam as atitudes menos favoráveis em relação a estas famílias. Através da análise dos argumentos apresentados contra a qualidade parental de casais do mesmo sexo observou-se a persistência de preconceito não só contra estas famílias mas também na estigmatização de pessoas gays, lésbicas e bissexuais. A maioria das pessoas manifestaram o receio que as crianças adotadas por casais do mesmo sexo sejam vítimas de rejeição e discriminação pelos pares, o que reflete a necessidade de uma reflexão aprofundada sobre os mecanismos sociais que permitem uma potencial vitimização destas crianças e sobre as formas de intervenção nestas situações.

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Chapter 3

Heterosexuals' Attitudes toward Same-Sex Parenting: The Case of Portugal

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Abstract

During the last decade in Portugal, there have been significant political changes regarding the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals, such as the right to marry. However, there are still legal impediments for same-sex parents to adopt a child. The purpose of this study was to assess Portuguese heterosexuals' attitudes toward same-sex parenting and its correlates. 993 participants (266 men and 727 women), aged between 18 and 69 years ($M = 34$), responded to one of three online questionnaires using a quasi-experimental methodology: each questionnaire included a case vignette depicting a different-sex, a female same-sex, or a male same-sex couple wishing to adopt a child. Participants were then asked to evaluate if the couple would be suitable to adopt and if they anticipated any social and emotional problems with the child. Although there were no significant differences in the evaluation of different-sex and same-sex couples, participants consistently anticipated more children's social and emotional problems if they were adopted by a same-sex couple. Men evaluated less favorably the same-sex couples than women did, and even less the male same-sex couple. It was also found that both religious affiliation and political ideology were significant correlates of attitudes toward same-sex parenting, in particular that religious participants and with conservative political views held more negative perceptions of same-sex couples. Implications of these findings will be discussed.

Keywords: same-sex parenting, same-sex couples, adoption, attitudes, religion, political conservatism.

Introduction

According to the American Census, in 2000 it was estimated that over 150 thousand same-sex couples had children under the age of 18, that about 270 thousand children were being raised in families with two fathers or two mothers and that about 540 thousand with a gay father or a lesbian mother (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Other community estimates revealed that approximately one in five lesbians and one in nine gay men were parents (Bryant & Demian, 1994), estimating that the number of children growing up in a same-sex family was between six and 14 million (Patterson, 2002; Patterson & Friel, 2000; Ryan & Martin, 2000).

In fact, gay, lesbian and bisexual people have always been parents, although in the last three decades there has been a phenomenon, labeled as *lesbian and gay baby boom*, consisting of an increase of gay and lesbian planned families. This phenomenon, that started in the United States, can also be seen today in several European countries such as The Netherlands and Belgium (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2005; Brewaeys, 2001).

In Portugal, it is estimated that the majority of same-sex families are reconstituted families after the disclosure of one of the parent's homosexuality, similarly to what happens in other countries where it is not legally possible for same-sex couples to become parents, namely Italy (Lelleri, Prati, & Pietrantonio, 2008), or in countries where this possibility is still recent as in Spain (González & López, 2009). The scarcity of empirical studies with these families makes it more difficult to have an estimate of the number of families, or of their characterization. Recent community studies in Portugal estimated that about 3% of single gay, lesbian and bisexual people and between 8% and 10% of gay and lesbian couples have children (Costa, Pereira & Leal, 2013).

In terms of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, these are rooted on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Literature has revealed that negative attitudes toward homosexual people are common and widespread in Western societies (Kite & Whitley, 1996), and that people who hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians are more likely to hold sexist attitudes, to adhere to traditional gender roles, to be religious, and to be politically conservative (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Davies, 2004; Herek, 2000a; Nagoshi et al., 2008). Moreover, it has also been shown that men tend to hold more negative perceptions of gay men and lesbians than women, and that these are more pronounced toward gay men than toward lesbians (Costa & Davies, 2012; Herek, 2000b; Kite & Whitley, 1996). These attitudes thus foster negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as parents (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; McLeod, Crawford, & Zechmeister, 1999).

Research about heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents are still scarce, and have not been following the increase in scientific enquiring into family and child development in gay and lesbian-headed families. Earlier studies have found that university students held

low or medium levels of negative reactions toward gay men and lesbians, but high negative perceptions of gay and lesbian-headed families (Crawford & Solliday, 1996). In this study it was also reported that not only students tended to grant custody significantly less to same-sex couples, but they justified this with judgments of instability in same-sex couples (Crawford & Solliday, 1996).

Similar results were found in Psychology students (Fraser, Fish, & McKenzie, 1995; King & Black, 1999; Money & Cain, 1997). However, even when no differences in judgments between same-sex and different-sex couples were found, participants still revealed concern about the possibility that children with gay or lesbian parents would be harassed in school, and exposed to more difficulties in their daily life (Bliss & Harris, 1999; McLeod et al., 1999).

In contrast, a more recent study with Australian Social Work students revealed that the participants held positive attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as parents and showed low levels of negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006). Nonetheless, none of these studies have tried to evaluate the relation between these attitudes and demographic variables, such as religious beliefs and political leaning, and attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, which have been shown to be highly important in predicting negative reactions toward gay men and lesbians.

In recent years in Portugal, there has been a few political and legislative changes regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights. After the legal recognition of same-sex couples in civil partnerships in 2001, it was only in 2010 that same-sex couples were allowed to marry with the same rights as different-sex couples. However, the same law that allowed same-sex couples to get married, explicitly precluded these couples to adopt or to access assisted reproductive technology. The few studies about prejudice toward gay and lesbian people in Portugal showed that negative attitudes were somewhat prevalent among high school and university students, particularly more subtle forms such as heterosexism (Gato, Leme, & Leme, 2010; Costa, Almeida, et al., in press; Costa & Davies, 2012), and document the existence of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenthood (Costa, Caldeira, et al., in press; Gato, Fontaine, & Carneiro, 2010; Xavier, Mendes, Martins, & Fernandes, 2011).

The main purpose of this study was to contribute to the understudied field of attitudes toward same-sex parenting. The following research questions were posed: Are attitudes toward different-sex and same-sex parenting different? And if so, are these differences based on participants' individual characteristics such as gender, and religious and political affiliation.

Method

Participants

Participants were 993 Portuguese self-identified heterosexuals (27% men and 73% women), aged between 18 and 69 years ($M = 34$, $sd = 11$). The majority of the participants were single (55%), highly qualified (undergraduates: 43%, graduates: 44%), and with no children (67%). About half of the sample identified as catholic, 11% as Spiritual but not religious and 31% as atheists. Regarding political ideology, and using the European parties framework, 18% identified with the People's party (CDS and PSD), 14% with the Socialist party (PS), 5% with the Communist party (CDU), 11% with the European Left party (BE), 5% with other smaller parties, and almost half with none. The five political parties between parentheses are the ones represented in the Portuguese parliament.

Measures

Besides a demographic questionnaire which included questions regarding participants' religious affiliation, and political ideology, participants' were presented with one of three case vignettes describing a family wishing to adopt a child. Using a quasi-experimental research design, each participant only responded to one of the three scenarios (a different-sex couple, a male same-sex couple, and female same-sex couple; Figure 1).

Figure 1

Case vignette depicting the male same-sex couple

“John and Will have been a couple for 10 years, committed to each other and happy. However, they have a strong desire to be parents, and because they can't have children they decided to adopt. John and Will both have a university degree, are professionally successful, and are beloved by their families and friends. Both their parents are very excited with the idea of becoming grandparents, and are available to help them in whatever they need to welcome the child into the family. John and Will have a two-bedroom apartment in the same city where they work. Their friends and colleagues describe them as calm, available and attentive persons, believing that they both possess the qualities needed to be good parents. They have some child-caring experience, especially with John's nephews. After a lot of thought about this, they initiated the adoption process and are going to the meeting with the adoption worker. They are very excited to fulfill their desire to be parents. They are waiting to be accepted as candidates to adopt a child.”

After reading the case vignette, participants were asked to evaluate the potential quality of these families in three questions: a) Do you believe that 'Person A and Person B' would be good parents? b) Do you believe that if 'Person A and Person B' adopt, the child may be at risk of having emotional problems? And c) Do you believe that if 'Person A and Person B' adopt, the child may be at risk of being teased or harassed at school by their peers? Participants were asked to respond in a 4-point Likert scale (certainly not, probably not, probably yes, certainly yes).

The names of Person A and Person B were manipulated to present a man and a woman, two men, or two women. The case vignette was loosely based on the work of Camilleri and Ryan (2006), but was culturally adapted for Portugal, and face validity was investigated through a focus group conducted by the first author with five other researchers in clinical and/or health psychology familiarized with parenting and family research.

Procedures

Participants were recruited online through posts on different social networks such as Facebook, forums, and discussion groups. This post gave a brief description of the study and a link to access the online questionnaire. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of the three versions of the questionnaire.

Results

Evaluating the adoptive couples

All the participants evaluated positively the different-sex couple, while 27% said that female same-sex couple would certainly be good mothers and 68% probably would. In the case of the male same-sex couple, 27% said they would be good parents and 67% that they would probably be.

To explore the existence of differences between participants who evaluated the different-sex couple and the same-sex couples, one-way ANOVAs were conducted with type of family as independent variable, and the three questions about the couples as dependent variables (Table 1).

Table 1

ANOVA test results for the evaluations of different-sex and same-sex couples

	Type of couple						
	Different-sex		Female same-sex		Male same-sex		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (sd)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (sd)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (sd)</i>	
Parenting ability	333	1.89 (.33)	359	1.80 (.59)	301	1.81 (.60)	$F(2,992)=2.916,$ $p = .055$
Child emotional problems	333	1.92 (.44)	359	2.14 (.79)	301	2.17 (.82)	$F(2,992)=12.464,$ $p < .001$
Child social problems	333	1.79 (.53)	359	2.81 (.60)	301	2.93 (.63)	$F(2,992)=377.550,$ $p < .001$

For question 1, regarding the evaluation of parenting suitability, no differences were found although it approached significance ($p = .055$). However, significant differences were found for both questions 2 and 3, and Tukey post-hoc tests were conducted to further explore these differences. It was found that participants anticipated more emotional problems if children were adopted by a same-sex couple (either two men or two women) than by a different-sex couple ($p < .001$). It was also found that participants were significantly more likely to be concerned that children would be teased by their peers if adopted by a female same-sex couple ($p < .001$), and even more if adopted by a male same-sex couple ($p = .025$), in comparison to those adopted by a male same-sex couple.

Considering the gender effect found, factorial ANOVAs were conducted contrasting gender of participant and gender of same-sex couple in the anticipation of children's developmental problems (questions 2 and 3). For emotional problems, it was found a gender of participant effect, but no gender of same-sex couple effect. For social problems, however, it was found both gender of participant and gender of couple effects, but no significant interaction (Table 2).

Table 2

Gender of same-sex couple x Gender of participant Factorial ANOVA for children social and emotional problems

Source	Question 2 Emotional problems	Question 3 Social problems
(A) Gender of same-sex couple	$F(1,660) = .013, p = .908$	$F(1,660) = 4.160, p < .05$
(B) Gender of participant	$F(1,660) = 30.546, p < .001$	$F(1,660) = 5.234, p < .05$
A x B (interaction)	$F(1,660) = .014, p = .906$	$F(1,660) = .027, p = .870$

These results showed that male participants anticipated more emotional and social problems of children adopted by same-sex couples on the one hand, and on the other hand that male participants were more likely to anticipate that children would be more teased by their peers if they had two fathers than if they had two mothers.

Religious and political effects on the evaluation of the adoptive couples

Considering that the results were somewhat different depending on gender of the couples evaluated, the effects of religious and political beliefs were explored separately for each version of the questionnaire - different-sex couple, female same-sex couple, and male same-sex couple. Due to the low number of people on different religious categories, only the group of catholics and atheists were in sufficient number to be compared, thus independent samples t-tests were conducted. In regards to political ideology, only participants who identified with one of the five parties currently represented in Portuguese parliament were included in the analysis. To test the differences between these groups, one-way ANOVAs were conducted.

As expected, whereas participants who evaluated the different-sex couple did not differ among them based on either their political or religious beliefs, participants who evaluated the same-sex couples revealed both religious and political effects. When evaluating the female same-sex couple, catholics evaluated them more negatively and anticipated more emotional and social difficulties in children than atheists. When evaluating the male same-sex couple, the only significant difference between these two groups was found for the anticipation of children's emotional problems (Table 3).

Table 3

T-test results for the evaluation of different-sex and same-sex couples for catholics and atheists

	Different-sex			Female same-sex			Male same-sex		
	Catholics (N=185)	Atheists (N=98)		Catholics (N=202)	Atheists (N=103)		Catholics (N=156)	Atheists (N=107)	
Parenting ability	1.90 (.32)	1.88 (.33)	$t(281)=.629$ $p = .530$	1.86 (.62)	1.67 (.62)	$t(303)=2.494$ $p = .01^*$	1.90 (.62)	1.77 (.58)	$t(261)=1.726$ $p = .081$
Child emotional problems	1.94 (.47)	1.90 (.39)	$t(281)=.665$ $p = .506$	2.29 (.82)	1.99 (.77)	$t(303)=3.109$ $p < .01^*$	2.38 (.83)	1.98 (.74)	$t(261)=3.981$ $p = .001^*$
Child social problems	1.75 (.55)	1.79 (.50)	$t(281)=.519$ $p = .605$	2.91 (.64)	2.66 (.55)	$t(303)=3.383$ $p = .001^*$	3.00 (.63)	2.92 (.57)	$t(261)=1.103$ $p = .271$

*Note: Significant results

Regarding the effects of political leaning, Tukey post-hoc tests were conducted when ANOVA test results were significant (Table 4).

Table 4

ANOVA test results for the evaluations of different-sex and same-sex couples for political parties

	Different-sex (N=143)			Female same-sex (N=180)			Male same-sex (N= 154)		
	<i>M (sd)</i>			<i>M (sd)</i>			<i>M (sd)</i>		
Parenting ability	1.84 (.37)	$F(4,142) = 2.077$	$p = .087$	1.77 (.63)	$F(4,179) = 4.536,$	$p < .01^*$	1.88 (.64)	$F(4,153) = 2.083$	$p = .086$
Child emotional problems	1.87 (.48)	$F(4,142) = .091$	$p = .985$	2.11 (.78)	$F(4,179) = 2.998,$	$p < .05^*$	2.20 (.87)	$F(4,153) = 9.300$	$p < .001^*$
Child social problems	1.73 (.51)	$F(4,142) = .328$	$p = .859$	2.80 (.63)	$F(4,179) = 2.272,$	$p = .063$	2.96 (.61)	$F(4,153) = 4.429$	$p < .01^*$

*Note: Significant results

It was found that when evaluating the female same-sex couple, participants who identified with the right-wing party CDS scored higher than the other four groups on the evaluation of

the couples' parenting suitability (all p values $< .05$). Significant differences on the anticipation of children's emotional problems were also found between participants who identified with CDS when compared to Socialist participants ($p = .05$), Communist participants ($p = .05$), and left-wing party BE participants ($p = .01$). Finally, when evaluating the male same-sex couple, a similar trend was found on the anticipation of children's emotional and social problems, but not on the evaluation of parenting suitability. On the anticipation of children's emotional problems, CDS participants scored significantly higher than the other groups (all p values $< .05$) except for PSD participants, and PSD participants also scored higher than the other 3 groups (all p values $< .01$). Regarding the anticipation of children's social problems, significant differences were found between participants identified with PSD and participants identified with the Socialist party ($p < .01$), with the Communist party ($p < .05$), and with the BE party ($p < .05$). In general, these results showed that the more religious and politically conservative, the more likely were participants to evaluate same-sex couples negatively and to anticipate more children's problems.

Discussion

The results of the present study confirm the existence of differences in the evaluation of same-sex and different-sex couples by heterosexual people. Although participants were not significantly more negative in evaluating the quality of parenting by two men and by two women, than in evaluating a different-sex couple, it was close to significance, and it is expected that with a more gender-balanced sample, significant differences would be found. A similar same trend was found when participants anticipated more social and emotional problems in children raised by same-sex couples. These results are in line with previous research on the perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting (Bliss & Harris, 1999; McLeod et al., 1999). Interestingly, participants only distinguished male and female same-sex couples when asked to evaluate the perception of children being victimized by their peers, in which male same-sex couples were perceived as posing more risks to the child. This difference may be based on a perception that gay men usually suffer more prejudice and discrimination than lesbians, as reported in the literature (Herek, 2000b). On the other hand, women, even if lesbians may have been regarded as being more competent to raise children, in which the competences associated with maternity would mitigate the effects of victimization for the children.

Moreover, in line with research that shows that men tend to hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Costa & Davies, 2012; Herek, 2000b; Kite & Whitley, 1996), it was found that men anticipated more emotional and social problems in children adopted by a

same-sex couple and that this anticipation was more pronounced in male same-sex couples than in female same-sex couples, as also reported by Money and Cain (1997).

It is noteworthy that regardless of how participants evaluated the suitability of same-sex couples as parents, most of them expressed the concern that children in gay and lesbian families would be more victimized at school. In fact, the mean value for both men and women was three, which represents that participants believed that children would probably be teased and/or harassed by their peers. Not only is this belief a common concern (see, for example, Clarke, 2001), but it also has important implications in the sense that it implies that gay and lesbian families may face difficulties in their integration in social contexts, particularly in schools. This concern should call the attention of professionals to develop programs to tackle homophobic bullying and harassment in schools so to ensure that children of gay and lesbian families have a good social and psychological adjustment. One important fashion to pursue the development of these programs is to promote an open dialogue about not only the different sexual orientations and identities, but also about the relational dimensions of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, and their family configurations. Furthermore, it has been shown that contact with people from different sexual orientations is one of the most important variables in lowering the levels of prejudice towards them (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993), and this phenomenon should also be observed in contact with gay and lesbian families.

In terms of the correlates of negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting, it was found that religious affiliation and political leaning had significant effects. In fact, preexistent attitudes largely account for the negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting, and religion plays a very important role in the formation of these attitudes. Although the only religious belief evaluated in this sample was catholicism (against atheism) because of the small size of other groups, it is representative of Portuguese as catholicism is the main religion. When people with religious beliefs were compared with those who do not have any religious beliefs, the former held more negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting. Moreover, politically conservative people also held more negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting. These two variables are commonly highly correlated, and in Portugal, the two conservative parties are catholics in their ideologies.

In contrast, research about gay and lesbian-headed families do not confirm the existence of motives to justify concerns over children's development in these families (Anderssen, Amlie & Ytteroy, 2002; Patterson, 2006; Tasker, 2005). Policy statements from the American Psychological Association and from the American Academy of Pediatrics state that the development of children and adolescents is similar in gay, lesbian and heterosexual families (Paige, 2005; Perrin & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002). Furthermore, a technical report produced by the European Council about the rights of children have concluded that the well-being of children depends not so much on family

configuration, but especially on the legal protection that they enjoy, further stating that the biggest threat to the well-being and stability of the children is the discrimination that they are victims of in European states that do not legitimate their families (Lowe, 2009). However, there are just a few countries that extend the same rights and protection to same-sex families, and the attitudes of European people in relation to the quality of parenting by gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are still predominantly negative. In 2006, in Portugal, 81% of people did not accept that same-sex couple would be allowed to adopt a child in equal circumstances to different-sex couple, and 71% affirmed their disagreement with the access to civil marriage by same-sex couples (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011).

Although the results reported here show similar trends to those reported in the international literature, there are some limitations to acknowledge. First, the sample does not seem to faithfully represent the attitudes of the general population, when comparing the prevalence of negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting to the prevalence found in the European reports, and this calls for attention in the generalizability of the results. Because an online approach was used, the sample may have been biased in the direction of a more tolerant attitude. Second, in terms of demographics, the majority of participants were single, with no children, and highly qualified. Moreover, there was a significant gender imbalance in favor of women, who, as shown, tend to hold less negative attitudes. Third, only 50% of participants identified with a political party. Although it may be interesting to measure the levels of prejudice according to Portuguese political parties, this approach could not take into account about half of the sample in this regard. However, it does allow comparisons across European Union member-states as Portuguese political parties belong to European political parties' families. Future research should consider measuring both political leaning as party affiliation and as a continuous variable in a left-right political spectrum.

Future studies should also include measures of people's beliefs about the origins of sexual orientation, and the relationship between these beliefs and other demographic and personal characteristics such as political ideology, religious affiliation, and other variables not considered in this study, such as gender-roles beliefs, contact with gay and lesbian people and gay and lesbian families, and attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights.

In conclusion, this was one of the few studies about attitudes toward same-sex parenting, particularly in Portugal. Given the recent social and legal changes in the Western World in regards to the rights of LGBT people, the right to marry and to have a family is still under a lot of controversy, and whereas research has shown that there are no motives to deny same-sex couples the right to be parents, people are still concerned about the quality of parenting by same-sex couples, and the potential effects of having two fathers or two mothers on child development. The study of the correlates of negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting is highly necessary in order to develop programs specific to inform people about gay and lesbian relationships, and about gay and lesbian families. In particular, it is extremely important as a

basis for the development of programs to protect children of gay or lesbian parents from being teased or harassed at school based of their family configuration.

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Chapter 4

University Students' Attitudes toward Same-Sex Parenting and Gay and Lesbian Rights in Portugal

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore university students' attitudes toward same-sex parenting and toward gay and lesbian rights. A total of 292 participants, aged between 18 and 27 ($M = 21$) responded to a questionnaire measuring attitudes toward parenting by gay men and lesbians, gay and lesbian rights, and beliefs about the etiology of homosexuality. Results revealed that the majority of students were against gay and lesbian parenting, gay and lesbian civil rights, and believed that homosexuality has a social/environmental basis. It was found that sexual prejudice is highly prevalent in Portuguese university students, and implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: same-sex parenting, gay and lesbian rights, homosexuality, university students, attitudes, etiology, homonegativity.

Introduction

The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that over 150.000 same-sex couples were raising children under the age of 18, and that over 270.000 children were growing up with two same-sex parents and over 540.000 children with one gay father or one lesbian mother (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). Other community estimates revealed that approximately 20% of lesbian women and 11% of gay men were parents (Bryant & Demian, 1994), estimating that the number of children being raised by a lesbian, gay or bisexual parent was between six and 14 million (Patterson & Friel, 2000; Ryan & Martin, 2000). In Europe, however, the immense diversity in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) families, mostly due to the

different legal and social contexts, makes it more difficult to estimate the number of children and parents in LGBT families. Community studies have revealed that, for example, between 5% and 8% of Italian gay men and lesbians, and between 3% and 8% of Portuguese gay men and lesbians are raising children (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2013; Lelleri, Prati, & Pietrantonio, 2008).

The first impetus for the study of lesbian and gay-led families came from a concern with the developmental outcomes of children being raised in these families (Patterson, 1992; 1994). Both in the United States and throughout Europe there have been several legal custody cases in which parents' sexual orientation is used as a motive for denying parental rights to gay and lesbian parents.

Although the first studies with gay parents started in the late 1980's, it is only close to the turn of the century that the number of studies in this research area starts to proliferate (Patterson, 2006), overall concluding that parental sexual orientation do not negatively influence child's development, and that gay men and lesbians are as fit parents as heterosexuals (Anderssen, Amlie, & Ytteroy, 2002; Cowl, Ahn, & Baker, 2008; Tasker, 2005). Similar conclusion was echoed by both the American Psychological Association (Paige, 2005) and the American Association of Pediatrics (Perrin & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002) among other international scientific associations. Nevertheless, societal attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting do not seem to mirror these scientific conclusions.

Attitudes toward gay and lesbian families are founded on attitudes toward gay, lesbian and bisexual people themselves. Literature has revealed that negative attitudes toward homosexual people are common and widespread in Western societies (Kite & Whitley, 1996), showing that people who hold more negative attitudes toward homosexual people are more likely to hold sexist attitudes, and to adhere to traditional gender roles, to have a more traditional view of nuclear family, to be more religious, and to identify with a conservative political ideology (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Costa & Davies, 2012; Davies, 2004; Herek, 2000a; Lingardi, Falanga, & D'Augelli, 2005; Nagoshi et al., 2008; Sotelo, 2000; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). It has also been observed that gender plays a significant role on negative attitudes toward homosexual people. Men hold more negative perceptions of homosexual people than women, and there are more intense toward gay men than toward lesbians (Costa & Davies, 2012; Herek, 2000b; Lingardi et al., 2005; Sotelo, 2000; Steffens & Wagner, 2004).

Another key variable in predicting negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians is how people perceive the controllability of homosexual orientation and behaviors. The developmental origins of homosexuality can be seen as either controllable, thus changeable (social, environmental, individual choice), or not controllable and thus unchangeable (biological or genetic basis) (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008).

The body of research on this particular association revealed that people whose beliefs are of a controllability of homosexuality hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, as well as less support to gay men and lesbians rights and gay and lesbian-relevant legislation (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Hewitt & Moore, 2002; Smith, Zanotti, Axelton, & Saucier, 2011; Whitley, 1990; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004). Noteworthy, the beliefs about the origins of homosexuality seem to be rooted in people's religious affiliation and political ideology (e.g. Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008). These attitudes thus foster negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as parents (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; McLeod, Crawford, & Zechmeister, 1999).

Although attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenthood are part of a general attitude toward gay and lesbian rights, the topic of parenthood is more likely to have an affective basis as an extension of a reaction toward gay and lesbian people, rather than a cognitive response to their civil rights. The most common arguments against gay men and lesbians as parents are either based on judgments of parents as immoral or unfit due to their sexual orientation or based on the negative effects that these parents have on child development (Clarke, 2001).

Research about people's attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents are still scarce, and have not been following the increase in the scientific enquiring into family and child development in gay and lesbian-headed families. Earlier studies have found that university students held low to medium levels of negative reactions toward gay men and lesbians, but more negative perceptions of gay and lesbian-headed families (Crawford & Solliday, 1996). The authors also reported that not only students tended to grant custody significantly less to same-sex couples, but they justified this with judgments of instability in same-sex couples.

Similar results were found in North-American psychology students (Fraser, Fish, & McKenzie, 1995; King & Black, 1999; Money & Cain, 1997). However, even in studies where no differences in judgments between same-sex and different-sex couples were found, participants still revealed concern with the possibility of the children being harassed in school, and being exposed to more difficulties in their daily life (Bliss & Harris, 1999; McLeod et al., 1999).

In contrast, a more recent study with Australian social work students revealed that the participants held a positive attitude toward gay men and lesbians as parents and showed low levels of negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006). However, none of these studies have tried to evaluate the relation between these attitudes and demographic variables, such as religious beliefs and political inclination, attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, or beliefs about origins of homosexuality that has been shown to be highly important in predicting negative reactions toward gay men and lesbians.

The Portuguese context

In recent years, there have been a few political and legislative diligences regarding LGBT rights. After the legal recognition of same-sex couples in civil partnerships in 2001 (Bill 7/2001), it was only in 2010 that same-sex couples were allowed to marry with the same rights as different-sex couples (Bill 9/2010). However, this same law that allowed same-sex couples to get married, explicitly precluded these couples to adopt or to access assisted reproductive technology, and it was not approved without controversy. After the majority of votes obtained in the Portuguese Parliament by the center- and left-wing political parties, the President of Portugal (former prime-minister from a conservative party) decided to convene a press conference to inform about his displeased endorsement of the law. After the Supreme Court verdict stating that same-sex marriage was not unconstitutional, his endorsement was due to the existence of more pressing economic matters in the country that needed undivided attention, adding that he recognized that this matter was not sufficiently debated within the civil society. In fact, according to a European report (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011), Portuguese citizens were mostly opposed to several LGBT rights, namely same-sex marriage and same-sex parenting.

Recent changes in the Portuguese Government, with the election of a coalition of right-wing political parties in 2011, fuelled opposite actions and gave rise to civil platforms committed to revoke the law regarding same-sex civil marriage, as well as laws designed to protect other social rights such as reproductive rights, family planning, and gender/sex identity transitioning.

The few scientific and empirical studies about levels of prejudice toward gay and lesbian people in Portugal show that negative attitudes are prevalent among adolescents (Costa & Davies, 2012), and document the existence of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting (Costa et al., in press; Xavier, Mendes, Martins, & Fernandes, 2011). Moreover, recent actions promoted by left-wing parties together with LGBT advocacy organizations have tried to approve a law allowing same-sex couples to adopt a child, to access reproductive technology, and recognizing co-parents in same-sex families. Not only have these actions been rejected by the majority of conservative parliamentarians, but they have also been received with disdain. On a legal report from the Portuguese Lawyers Association regarding the legitimacy of a law that recognizes co-parents in same-sex families, it reads:

The right of the child to be adopted implies that the adoption respects the principle of natural family, i.e., a family constituted by a father (man) and a mother (woman) and not by a man playing a mother or by a woman playing a father. (Pinto, 2012, p. 2).

Whilst North-American research has been prolific in developing measures to evaluate attitudes and beliefs toward gay and lesbian issues, there are few measures developed and/or

adapted to the European context. Even more so, considering the different social, cultural, and economic differences among European countries, attitude measures need to be adjusted to each country's specific context. The purpose of this study was, thus, to develop measures to evaluate attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, gay and lesbian rights, and the influence of demographic variables and of beliefs about the origins of homosexuality in these attitudes in Portugal.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 292 university students from Lisbon, Portugal, aged between 18 and 27 years ($M = 21$, $sd = 2$), 54% males e 46% females. The vast majority of participants identified as heterosexual (92%), 39% identified as catholic, 43% as atheist, and 11% as spiritual but with no religious affiliation. From the 112 participants that identified as catholics, less than one third attended church more often than once or twice a year, 30% once or twice a year, and 40% only on religious holidays and ceremonies. Regarding political orientation, 25% identified as left-wing (or liberal), 35% as center (or moderates), 33% as right-wing (or conservatives), and 7% did not respond. Regarding subject of study, the majority of participants were studying engineering (52%), followed by psychology (27%), law (5%), languages and literature (4%), and social sciences (3%).

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 regarding beliefs about the etiology of homosexuality.

With regard to the measures used in this study, all are currently under development as part of a larger study about "Attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting in Portugal". The Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting Scale consists of 11 items intended to measure participants' beliefs about gay men and lesbians as parents. Six items represent the most common beliefs about the negative impact of gay and lesbian parents on child development and about gay men and lesbians as unfit parents. These items were loosely based on

arguments identified by Clarke (2001) in the United Kingdom, and arguments identified by Costa and colleagues in Portugal (Costa et al., in press). Another five items represent a more positive view of gay and lesbian parented families based on evidence found in literature about the differences between children in lesbian and gay-led families and in heterosexual-led families.

The Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Scale consists of eight items, which were developed based on the most common topics currently under discussion in Portugal, in face of recent legislative initiatives regarding same-sex unions, and same-sex parenting. Finally, the Beliefs about the Etiology of Homosexuality were measured using six questions addressing the most common beliefs and assumptions about the developmental origins of homosexuality. Although this is not a scale, the questions in this measure are expected to be significantly correlated among each other.

Procedure

Participants were approached on university campuses in Lisbon, Portugal, by three researchers, and asked to participate in a study about “Attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting in Portugal”. The questionnaires were distributed to students from six different faculties, and they were asked to fill in a questionnaire and to return it to the researcher. Participants were also informed of the study’s aims, of how to fill in and return the questionnaire, and they were asked for their written participation consent. All participants that agreed to take part in this study returned their questionnaires. This study conformed to ethical research guidelines set by the Portuguese Psychological Society (OPP).

Results

Principal component analysis

Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting Scale. Final solution revealed three factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, and accounting for 56% of explained variance. An examination of the Scree Plot and factor loadings revealed that two factors should be retained and these were rotated to Varimax criteria. Factor 1 comprised six items that pertained negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, thus named “Negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting” (AHPN). This factor accounted for 29% of explained

variance with a coefficient α of .78. Factor 2 comprised five items that reflected a positive view of gay and lesbian parenting and it was named “Perception of benefits of gay and lesbian parenting” (AHPP). This second factor accounted for a total of 17% of explained variance, and revealed a coefficient α of .57 (Table 1).

Table 1

Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting scale factor loadings, means, standard deviations, and percentage of agreement with individual items.

	Item	factor 1 AHPN loadings	factor 2 AHPP loadings	agree / strongly agree	disagree / strongly disagree	M (sd)
1	Gay men and lesbians should not have children because it is a sin.	.66		84%	9%	1.61 (1.08)
3	Gay and lesbian parents do not care about children's best interests.	.62		92%	2%	1.35 (.70)
6	Children of gay and lesbian parents are more victimized in school.	.49		74%	6%	3.94 (.88)
7	Children of gay and lesbian parents will be homosexual or will be confused about their sexuality.	.81		72%	11%	1.91 (1.14)
9	Children of gay and lesbian parents do not have the needed masculine and feminine references for their normal development.	.78		48%	33%	2.75 (1.34)
11	It is not natural for gay men and lesbians to have children.	.75		55%	31%	2.59 (1.47)
2	The main difficulties of gay and lesbian parents are due to society prejudice.		.55	10%	74%	3.97 (1.01)
4	The difficulties that gay and lesbian parents face prepare them to be good parents.		.66	34%	18%	2.74 (.99)
5	Children of gay and lesbian parents are more tolerant.		.53	31%	20%	2.80 (.98)
8	Children of gay and lesbian parents are more acceptant of other people's differences.		.70	10%	54%	3.57 (.92)
10	There are gay and lesbian people with a high desire to have children, and to be available for them.		.30	3%	85%	4.36 (.84)

Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Scale. Final solution revealed two factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, and accounting for 59% of explained variance, although there was evidence that only one factor should be retained (AGLHR). This factor comprised all eight items accounting for 45% of explained variance, with a Coefficient α of .77 (Table 2).

Table 2

Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Scale factor loadings, means, standard deviations, and percentage of agreement with individual items.

item	factor AGLHR loadings	agree / strongly agree	disagree / strongly disagree	<i>M (sd)</i>
1 Homosexuality is not morally acceptable.	.58	61%	23%	2.26 (1.40)
2 I would not mind having gay or lesbian friends.	.73	6%	84%	1.57 (.94)
3 Nowadays, homosexual people have the same rights as heterosexual people.	.91	40%	37%	3.14 (1.26)
4 Same-sex marriage should not be allowed.	.86	78%	13%	1.80 (1.27)
5 I agree that gay men and lesbians fight for their rights in society.	.72	6%	82%	1.68 (.95)
6 Homosexual people should not have children because it is not natural.	.83	66%	16%	2.14 (1.33)
7 I do not mind that same-sex couples have the same rights as different-sex couples, but marriage should only be possible for different-sex couples.	.69	67%	16%	2.11 (1.28)
8 I think that gay pride does not make sense because there is no heterosexual pride.	.55	50%	24%	2.54 (1.45)

Attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting

As a whole, the majority of the university students were against gay and lesbian parenting. When evaluating the arguments behind these attitudes, moral and religious motivations were highlighted as 92% agreed with the statement “Gay and lesbian parents do not care about children’s best interests” and 84% with “Gay men and lesbians should not have children because it is a sin”. A smaller but significant percentage of the participants based their arguments on concerns about the children, such as the likelihood of them being harassed by peers or being confused about their sexuality.

Significant differences in Negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting were found for religious affiliation, political ideology, sex, and subject of study. Young men, as compared to young women, were generally more negative toward gay and lesbian parenting ($t(290) = 3.18$, $p = .001$). In particular, arguments against lesbian and gay parenting based on sin ($t(290) =$

2.96, $p < .01$), children's best interests ($t(290) = 3.10$, $p < .01$) confusion about sexuality ($t(290) = 2.61$, $p = .01$), and unnatural ($t(290) = 3.01$, $p < .01$) were significantly more endorsed by men than by women. In contrast, women agreed significantly more with the statement that there are homosexual people with the emotional availability to be parents ($t(290) = 2.19$, $p < .05$).

Catholic people scored significantly higher than atheist people on negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting ($t(238) = 3.81$, $p < .001$). Catholics were more likely to agree with statements such as "Gay and lesbians should not have children because it is a sin" ($t(238) = 2.84$, $p < .01$), "Gay and lesbians do not care about children's best interests" ($t(238) = 1.97$, $p = .05$), "Children of gay and lesbian parents will be homosexuals" ($t(238) = 2.92$, $p < .05$), "Children of gay and lesbian parents do not have the needed masculine and feminine references for their normal development" ($t(238) = 5.08$, $p < .001$), and "It is not natural for gay men and lesbians to have children" ($t(238) = 1.99$, $p < .05$).

Participants with a right-wing political leaning were more likely to agree with statements such as "Gay and lesbian parents do not care about children's best interests" ($t(167) = 2.40$, $p < .05$), "Children of gay and lesbian parents will be homosexuals" ($t(167) = 3.04$, $p < .01$), and "Children of gay and lesbian parents do not have the needed masculine and feminine references for their normal development" ($t(167) = 3.87$, $p < .001$), compared to people with left-wing leaning, and held more negative perceptions overall ($t(167) = 3.44$, $p = .001$).

Group differences were also found for major subject of study. Engineering students were more likely than psychology students to endorse negative statements that characterized gay and lesbian parenting as a sin ($t(231) = 2.25$, $p < .05$), as unnatural ($t(231) = 2.23$, $p < .05$), as not caring for children's best interests ($t(231) = 2.10$, $p < .05$), and that their children will later be homosexuals themselves ($t(231) = 2.50$, $p = .01$). When evaluating the global scores on each sub-scale, engineering students held more negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting ($t(231) = 2.58$, $p < .01$) whereas psychology students scored higher on the perception of benefits of gay and lesbian parenting ($t(231) = 2.77$, $p < .01$).

Attitudes toward gay and lesbian civil rights

The vast majority of the participants were against gay and lesbian equal rights in general, and against same-sex marriage (78%) and same-sex parenting (66%) in particular. Seventy-eight per cent of the participants agreed with the statement "Same-sex marriage should not be allowed", and 67% stated that "I do not mind that same-sex couples have the same-rights as different-sex couples, but marriage should only be possible for different-sex couples". This latter statement was included to evaluate if participants who did not support same-sex

marriage would still acknowledge same-sex couples' rights and this was not supported, which reinforces the high level of prejudice found in this sample.

Gender differences were found in relation to gay and lesbian civil rights ($t(290) = 4.15, p < .001$). Young men were more likely than young women to be uncomfortable with having gay or lesbian friends ($t(290) = 5.96, p < .001$), and with same-sex marriage ($t(290) = 4.27, p < .001$), and to disagree with gay and lesbian people fighting for their rights ($t(290) = 3.05, p < .01$), and to have children ($t(290) = 3.58, p < .001$).

Catholic people were also found to hold more negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights than atheist people ($t(238) = 4.37, p < .001$), judging homosexuality as immoral ($t(238) = 4.46, p < .001$), to be against same-sex marriage ($t(238) = 3.53, p = .001$), same-sex couples' rights ($t(238) = 4.08, p < .001$), same-sex parenting ($t(238) = 3.64, p < .001$), and against gay and lesbian people fighting for their rights ($t(238) = 3.62, p < .001$).

Similarly, right-wing participants were more likely to be against same-sex marriage ($t(167) = 4.03, p < .001$), same-sex couples' rights ($t(167) = 3.64, p < .001$), same-sex parenting ($t(167) = 3.54, p = .001$), lesbian and gay people fighting for their rights ($t(167) = 2.29, p < .05$), judging homosexuality as morally unacceptable ($t(167) = 3.84, p < .001$), and agreeing with the statement "Gay pride does not make sense because there is no heterosexual pride" ($t(167) = 3.13, p < .01$), and more negative overall ($t(167) = 4.85, p < .001$).

Engineering students were more likely to endorse negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights than psychology students ($t(231) = 3.35, p = .001$) and statements such as "Same-sex marriage should not be allowed" ($t(231) = 2.27, p < .05$), "Homosexual people should not have children because it is not natural" ($t(231) = 3.07, p < .01$), "Marriage should only be possible for different-sex couples" ($t(231) = 3.07, p < .01$), and disagreeing with gay men and lesbians fighting for their rights ($t(231) = 2.27, p < .05$).

Beliefs about the origins of homosexuality

Most of the participants showed a number of misconceptions about the developmental origins of homosexuality. Almost three quarters of the sample stated that children of gay and lesbians parents are likely to develop a homosexual orientation, with the underlying assumption that sexual orientation can be learned. In fact, 56% of the participants agreed that homosexuality is a choice, and 80% that it can be learned in contact with homosexual persons. Moreover, 87% of the participants believed that homosexuality is a mental illness, and less than a third of the sample agreed that homosexuality is genetic and therefore not changeable (Table 3).

Table 3

Beliefs about the Origins of Homosexuality items, means, standard deviations, and percentage of agreement with individual items

	basis	item	agree / strongly agree	disagree / strongly disagree	M (sd)
1	social - choice	Homosexuality is a choice.	56%	29%	2.50 (1.51)
3	social - family	Parents have an important role on their children's sexual orientation.	46%	27%	2.65 (1.28)
6	social - learned behavior	Homosexuality is learned in contact with homosexual people.	80%	7%	1.72 (.97)
2	biological	Homosexuality has a biological basis (hormonal or genetic), thus cannot be changed.	29%	41%	3.09 (1.26)
4	pathology	Homosexuality is a mental illness.	87%	5%	1.46 (.90)
5	natural behavior	Homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality.	33%	53%	3.38 (1.43)

Gender differences were also found for the beliefs about the origins of homosexuality. Young men were significantly more likely than young women to believe that “Homosexuality is a choice” ($t(290) = 2.79, p < .01$), that “Parents play an important role on the development of their children’s sexual orientation” ($t(290) = 3.34, p = .001$), that “Homosexuality is learned in contact with homosexual people” ($t(290) = 2.23, p < .05$) that “Homosexuality is a mental illness” ($t(290) = 4.80, p < .001$), and to disagree that “Homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality” ($t(290) = 4.61, p < .001$).

Similarly, catholic people were more likely to sustain environmental causes of homosexuality such as being a choice ($t(238) = 2.56, p = .01$), being learned ($t(238) = 2.30, p < .05$), being a mental illness ($t(238) = 2.69, p < .01$), and an unnatural expression of sexuality ($t(238) = 3.29, p = .001$) than atheist people.

Right-wing people were not significantly more likely to endorse environmental basis for homosexuality than left-wing people, but were significantly more in agreement with statements such as “Homosexuality is a mental illness” ($t(167) = 3.01, p < .01$), it is not as natural as heterosexuality ($t(167) = 4.00, p < .001$), and it is a choice ($t(167) = 3.04, p < .01$).

Psychology students were more likely than engineering students to disagree with the statement “Homosexuality is a mental illness” ($t(231) = 3.08, p < .01$), and to agree with the statement “Homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality” ($t(231) = 3.50, p = .001$).

Correlations between attitude measures

To investigate the association between the scales that measure attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, toward gay and lesbian rights, and beliefs about the basis of homosexuality, Pearson's bivariate correlations were performed. As shown in Table 4, there was a strong association between negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting and gay and lesbian rights. These attitudes were also associated, although not as strongly, with beliefs about a social/environmental origin of homosexuality, as well as with homosexuality as a mental illness. In contrast, the perception of benefits of gay and lesbian parenting was negatively associated with negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, with the belief of homosexuality as a learned behavior, and as a mental illness. The perception of benefits was also weakly positively associated with the belief of a biological basis for homosexuality.

Table 4

Pearson's correlations on attitudes scales and beliefs about the origins of homosexuality

	AHPN	AHPP	AGLHR	Social <i>choice</i>	Social <i>family</i>	Social <i>behavior</i>	Pathological
Negative Perceptions of Gay and Lesbian Parenting (AHPN)	---						
Perception of Benefits of Gay and Lesbian Parenting (AHPP)	-0,35**	---					
Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Rights (AGLHR)	0,74**	-0,39**	---				
Social <i>choice</i>	0,28**	-0,08	0,27**	---			
Social <i>family</i>	0,47**	-0,1	0,40**	0,43**	---		
Social <i>behavior</i>	0,43**	-0,19**	0,41**	0,24**	0,31**	---	
Pathological	0,54**	-0,27**	0,54**	0,26**	0,38**	0,44**	---
Biological	-0,11	0,17*	-0,11	-0,36**	-0,14*	-0,11	-0,06

** $p < .001$; * $p < .005$

Discussion

The present study aimed at evaluating Portuguese university students' support for gay and lesbian parenting and gay and lesbian civil rights. The scales used in this study are currently under development as no other measure exists in the Portuguese scientific literature, therefore these results should be read as exploratory. As expected, the underlying two-factor structure of the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting Scale was supported, measuring both negative perceptions of gay and lesbian families, and perception of benefits of these

families. This multidimensional scale was developed to measure the most common negative and positive perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting that would allow exploring inconsistencies in evaluating these families, and the negative relation between the two factors seems to confirm this assumption.

The items on the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Scale were developed in face of recent legislative and societal changes in Portugal, in which same-sex marriage and same-sex parenting have been under dispute. As expected, the more negative a participant's attitude toward gay and lesbian civil rights, the more likely they would hold negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting. The strength of these scales, we believe, rely on the fact that the items measure endorsed arguments and values, which provide a more accurate and reliable portrait of people's attitudes toward gay and lesbian issues.

Although these scales were developed in Portugal with the purpose of being culturally sensitive, we were able to find similar patterns in this study's participants' attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights to those reported in the international literature. Males are usually more negative than females toward gay men, lesbians, and gay and lesbian rights (Ellis, Kitzinger, & Wilkinson, 2002; Herek, 2000b; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Whitley, 2001), and this is also true among young male university students (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; LaMar & Kite, 1998). Homonegative respondents are also more likely to be religiously affiliated and politically conservative (or right-wing), (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Nagoshi et al., 2008; Schulte & Battle, 2004; Whitley, 2009). The same trend was found in the few research papers on attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, that were mostly conducted with university students (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Fraser et al., 1995; McLeod et al., 1997). However, these studies used a quasi-experimental design with the use of case vignettes as opposed to survey designs.

Recent studies have also highlighted the importance of the beliefs about the origins of homosexuality in explaining attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. The belief of a social or environmental basis for homosexuality is strongly related to negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, and to a lesser support of gay and lesbian rights (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Smith et al., 2011; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004). This relation was also found in the present study, and although beliefs about social and environmental basis of homosexuality were only weakly correlated with attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting and toward gay and lesbian civil rights, the belief that homosexuality is a mental illness was not only highly prevalent but also more strongly correlated with these attitudes. As such, these beliefs may not be direct predictors of attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, but more closely linked to negative affective reactions toward lesbian and gay men, i.e., homonegativity (Costa & Davies, 2012; Smith et al., 2011).

As Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2008) argue, “Perceiving responsibility for the behavior naturally evokes questions about the morality of homosexuality and support for policies that favor conventional relationship follows” (p. 307). Considering that these beliefs are strong predictors of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, it is not surprising that psychology students, who are more likely to be familiar with research on the development of sexual orientation, held more positive views of gay and lesbian rights and gay and lesbian parenting. Although this hypothesis is supported by North-American evidence that psychologists hold somewhat affirming attitudes toward gay men and lesbians and their families (Choi, Thul, Berenhaut, Suerken, & Norris, 2006; Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999), a survey with British psychology students did not report strong negative attitudes toward lesbian and gay individuals, or against gay and lesbian rights in general, but showed that students were not supportive of gay and lesbian access to legal marriage and parenting (Ellis et al., 2003).

In Portugal, the number of studies about attitudes toward gay men and lesbians in general, or about attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting in particular, are very scarce. A study about high school students’ attitudes toward gay, lesbian and transgender people showed that negative attitudes were generally prevalent, and that young men held higher levels of homophobia and transphobia than young women (Costa & Davies, 2012). In relation to attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, other studies revealed the existence of negative attitudes toward these families among university students (Xavier et al., 2011) and among the general population (Costa et al., in press), showing that the majority of participants were indeed against extending parenting rights to gay men and lesbians (Xavier et al., 2011).

As previously stated, recent legislative diligences in Portugal made it possible for same-sex couples to marry in equal circumstances to different-sex couples. However, the same legislation introduced a ban for same-sex couples to adopt or to have access to assisted reproductive technologies, and these topics are still highly controversial. According to a recent European Human Rights Commission report (2011) 81% of Portuguese people were against same-sex couples adopting a child, and 71% were opposed to allowing same-sex couples to marry. In that sense, and although homophobic behaviors are not very frequently reported, Portuguese people are in general still reluctant in granting equal rights to gay men and lesbians.

These results are cause for concern. Not only were most university students against gay and lesbian parenting, but they were also against gay and lesbian rights, and held misconceptions and prejudicial beliefs about the origins of homosexuality. Our initial assumption was that university students, in face of recent social and legal developments in Portugal and throughout Europe, would be more informed and comfortable with gay and lesbian issues. Instead, our results showed a rather opposite picture. It seems likely that homonegative beliefs may be more highly prevalent than we anticipated.

This study is not without limitations. Although the scales in this study held acceptable to good internal reliabilities, more work is needed to validate these measures with other more established measures, such as the Affective Reactions toward Gay Men and Lesbians (Costa & Davies, 2012; Davies, 2004), or the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (Herek, 1994). Moreover, the questions measuring the beliefs about the etiology of homosexuality should be further developed into a scale that could tap into more specific arguments and beliefs.

Another limitation regards the sample used in this study, which was a young and educated sample of students, and although it makes a contribution to the understanding of university students' attitudes, the results cannot be generalized to the Portuguese population. Future endeavors should be made to use larger and more representative samples, not just to evaluate the prevalence of negative attitudes, but more specifically to explore the causal relations between sociodemographic and psychological attributes and negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, and gay and lesbian rights.

Conclusion

This study helped to cast light on the prevalence of prejudicial attitudes toward gay men and lesbians in Portugal, paving the way for the development of research in this field. Although these results were exploratory in its scope, the development of these new socially and culturally relevant scales that measure attitudes toward same-sex parenting, gay and lesbian rights, and etiology beliefs, are instrumental for the advancement of empirical research on LGBT issues. We found that the beliefs about the origins of homosexuality, support for gay and lesbian rights, political conservatism, religious affiliation and attitudes toward same-sex parenting were closely related, and we suggest that future research should extend these findings by investigating causal relations between them. In particular, etiology beliefs may play a major role in predicting attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, and the ways in which these etiology beliefs are formed are extremely important for the understanding of sexual prejudice, as well as for the development of policies to confront it. We believe that educating people, particularly youth, about LGBT issues and about the developmental origins of homosexuality is extremely important in order to promote change in attitudes toward them.

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Chapter 5

“The Contact Hypothesis” Revisited: The Case of Attitudes toward Same-Sex Parenting in Portugal

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Abstract

“The contact hypothesis” was first addressed in the early 1990’s, and describes the value of heterosexual’s interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians to the lowering of negative attitudes toward them. With the increasing numbers of families headed by lesbians and gay men, in spite of a lack of appropriate social and legal protection enjoyed by their heterosexual counterparts, the issue of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as parents gains special relevance. A total of 1690 Portuguese heterosexuals were asked about their interpersonal contact with gay and lesbian people, their attitudes toward them, and toward gay and lesbian parenting. The majority of participants was acquainted with at least one gay/lesbian person and had at least one gay/lesbian friend. Female participants, however, were significantly more likely to have contact with gay/lesbian people, and to feel comfortable in their company than male participants were. Regression analysis revealed that in predicting attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, comfort, closeness, and number of gay and lesbian friends were the strongest predictors of favorable attitudes. Being younger, female, and non-religious were also significant predictors of more acceptance toward these families. These findings help cast light on the efforts needed to reduce stigma associated with gay and lesbian families.

Keywords: interpersonal contact, attitudes, gay parenting, lesbian parenting, friendship with gay and lesbian people.

Introduction

Allport's contact hypothesis postulates the value of intergroup contact in reducing prejudice, although it argues that this process can only be achieved in optimal conditions: equal group status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and authority support (Allport, 1954). Recent findings, however, have shown that these optimal conditions have greater impact but are not essential for prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). One key finding consistently reported is that the amount of contact between majority and minority groups alone is predictive of less intergroup prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), and these changes have been shown to be stable in longitudinal studies (Brown, Eller, Leeds, & Stace, 2007; Vezzali, Giovannini, & Capozza, 2010). Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) explain this finding as *familiarity becomes liking*, and they have shown that this process has the potential to be generalizable to entire group members and transferable to other contexts and outgroups. More recent developments also suggest that affective, rather than cognitive, processes may mediate the relation between contact and prejudice. In particular, empathy toward the minority group plays an important role in reducing the level of prejudice of the majority group, whereas anxiety toward the minority group may reduce the amount of intergroup contact and, therefore, hinder the improvement of intergroup relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Vezzali et al., 2010).

Whereas extensive social research has devoted attention to contact hypothesis applied to racial and ethnic minority groups (see, for example, Eller & Abrams, 2003, 2004), there have been a few studies addressing the value of contact on attitude change toward gay and lesbian people. Earlier work from Herek and his colleagues (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993) have provided evidence that interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians is strongly associated with a positive attitude towards them. As Herek and Glunt (1993) suggest, "learning that a friend is gay or lesbian increases a heterosexual individual's likelihood of perceiving all members of the category 'gay' in a more individuated and personalized way" (p. 242). This finding has also been confirmed in countries other than the US, such as Canada (Mohipp & Morry, 2004), Norway (Anderssen, 2002), and Turkey (Cirakoglu, 2006; Sakallı & Ugurlu, 2001).

In addition to interpersonal contact, both contact with multiple gay/lesbian people and closeness of the relationship with them are also important predictors of favorable attitudes (Herek & Capitano, 1996). In fact, some studies have shown that the closeness of the relationships with gay/lesbian people (friends, as opposed to just acquaintances), or the interaction effect between contact and closeness are strong predictors of positive changes in these attitudes (Anderssen, 2002; Lemm, 2006).

In contrast, negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians are strongly associated with heterosexual individuals' psychological and sociodemographic characteristics. Research has shown that the most constant and stronger predictors of these prejudicial attitudes are gender and gender-role attitudes (i.e., being male and holding highly gendered beliefs; Davies, 2004; Herek; 2000a; Kite & Whitley, 1996). Additionally, being well-educated, older, possessing authoritarian personalities, being religious, and holding politically conservative values are also among the strongest predictors of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Herek, 2000b; Schulte & Battle, 2004).

The aforementioned social, psychological, and demographic predictors of attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals also reliably predict attitudes toward same-sex marriage and same-sex families. However, interpersonal contact appears to have a weaker effect on attitudes toward same-sex marriage and parenting than to gay and lesbian people in general (Barth & Parry, 2009; Herek, 2011). Being religious and politically conservative have been shown to be strong predictors of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian couples and gay and lesbian families (Brumbaugh, Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2008; Schwartz, 2010). In this regard, men hold more negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage than women, but are less prejudicial toward lesbian couples than toward gay couples (Moskowitz, Rieger, & Roloff, 2010). Nevertheless, research to date has provided far less insight about heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, and specifically the role that interpersonal contact plays in predicting these attitudes.

Recent findings by Costa and his colleagues provided further evidence that Portuguese heterosexuals' negative perceptions of lesbian and gay parenting are highly associated with homonegativity, gender, gender-roles beliefs, political conservatism and catholicism (Costa, Almeida, et al., in press; Costa, Caldeira, et al., in press). Interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians, in contrast, is a significant predictor of favorable attitudes toward them (Costa & Davies, 2012). Other studies have shown that negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting are prevalent among Portuguese university students, and that the majority of these were against extending parenting rights to gay men and lesbians (Gato, Fontaine, & Carneiro, 2010; Xavier, Mendes, Martins, & Fernandes, 2011), although none of these studies have evaluated the impact of interpersonal contact in these prejudicial attitudes.

Although legal recognition of same-sex couples in Portugal has been granted in the form of civil partnerships since 2001, it was not until 2010 that same-sex couples were allowed the right to marry. Despite representing a major victory for the recognition of equal rights for gay and lesbian couples, the same law precluded these couples from adopting or from accessing assisted reproductive technologies. Whilst both national surveys and community studies conducted in the United States have shown that there are millions of children being raised by single and coupled gay men and lesbians (Bryant & Demian, 1994; Patterson, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003), few studies have been conducted in Portugal, and only community

studies have suggested that between 3% and 8% of gay men and lesbians are parents (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2013a) which suggests that the number of gay and lesbian families may be well over twelve thousand.

The purpose of this study was to assess the contact hypothesis in relation to attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as parents. As such, we expected that interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians would predict a more favorable attitude toward gay and lesbian families. Specifically, we hypothesized that favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents were predicted by (1) knowing gay/lesbian people, (2) having gay/lesbian friends, (3) having a gay/lesbian family member, (4) knowing a gay- and/or lesbian-headed family, (5) having multiple as opposed to one individual acquaintance/friend/family member, (6) having regular contact with gay/lesbian people, and (7) feeling comfortable in the company of gay/lesbian people. Moreover, we also hypothesize that (8) closer contact with gay/lesbian people would be a greater predictor than superficial contact, and, finally, (9) that there might be an interaction effect among number of contact experiences, frequency of contact, and level of comfort.

Method

Participants

The participants were 1690 self-identified Portuguese heterosexuals (26% men and 74% women), aged between 18 and 80 years ($M = 33$; $sd = 11$). The vast majority held at least a college degree (84%). 56% of the participants identified themselves as Catholics, 11% as spiritual but not religious, 30% as atheists, and 3% with other religious beliefs. From the 56% of participants that identified themselves as Catholics, only a quarter reported attending religious ceremonies. Regarding political leaning, almost half of the sample did not identify with any political party; from those who indicated a political party (56%), 33% identified with a right-wing party (*European People's Party*), 27% with a socialist party (*European Socialist Party*), 11% with a communist party (*European Communist Party*), and 20% with a left-wing party (*European Left Party*).

Measures

Participants were asked to respond to some basic demographic questions, a questionnaire designed for this study to address the contact hypothesis, and three attitudinal scales.

The contact hypothesis questionnaire asked participants if they had gay and/or lesbian acquaintances, friends, family members, and if they knew any gay and/or lesbian families, measured on a yes or no format. They were also asked how many gay and lesbian acquaintances, friends, and family members they knew. Two more questions were included measuring how comfortable participants felt with gay and lesbian people, and how frequently they spent time with them, measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

Negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians were measured using the Affective Reactions toward Gay Men Scale (Davies, 2004; Costa & Davies, 2012) and the Affective Reactions toward Lesbian Women Scale (Costa & Davies, 2012). Both scales comprise eight items, measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'completely disagree' to 5 = 'completely agree') (e.g. "Gay men are disgusting" and "Lesbian women are disgusting"). Both scales showed high internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$ and $\alpha = .92$, respectively).

Negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting were measured using the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting Scale (Costa, Almeida, et al., in press). The original scale consists of 11 items distributed into two factors: Negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting and Perception of benefits of gay and lesbian parenting. The Negative perceptions subscale is comprised of six items (e.g. "Children of gay and lesbian parents will be homosexual, or will be confused about their sexuality"), with good internal consistency ($\alpha = .78$). The Perception of benefits of gay and lesbian parenting is comprised of 5 items (e.g. "Children of gay and lesbian parents are more tolerant"), and showed acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .57$). Items are presented randomly, and measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'completely disagree' to 5 = 'completely agree'). For this study, only the Negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting subscale were used.

Procedures

Participants were recruited online through a call for study participation posted on different social networks such as Facebook, several forums, blogs, and discussion groups. Further efforts to collect a heterogeneous sample were made by posting an advertisement on an internet search engine. Posted advertisements presented the study as a survey about attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, provided a brief description of the study, and

included a link to the online questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were downloaded into SPSS version 20.

Results

The contact hypothesis

The overwhelming majority (90%) reported knowing at least one gay or lesbian person. From these, 74% had between one and 10 gay and/or lesbian acquaintances, while the remainder had between 11 and 50 acquaintances. Mean number of gay/lesbian acquaintances was 10 ($sd = 13$), and mode was two. The majority of participants (57%) reported having a gay and/or lesbian friend. 53% of this subset had between one and six friends, with the total number of gay or lesbian friends ranging from one to 30; mean number of gay/lesbian friends was lower than that of acquaintances ($M = 3$, $sd = 5$), and mode was two. Sixteen percent of the participants also had at least one gay or lesbian family member, and from these, 80% had only one. Number of gay/lesbian family members ranged from one to seven (only one participant reported seven gay and/or lesbian family members). Mean number and mode was two ($sd = 1$). Finally, 22% were acquainted with a gay/lesbian-parented family.

Overall, participants reported feeling comfortable in the company of gay/lesbian people ($M = 4$, $sd = 1$), and having regular contact with them ($M = 4$, $sd = 1$). Female participants were slightly more likely than male participants to be acquainted with a gay/lesbian person (91% vs. 87%), to have a gay/lesbian friend (60% vs. 49%), to have a gay/lesbian family member (17% vs. 15%), and to know a gay/lesbian-parented family (23% vs. 18%). Female participants were significantly more likely than male participants to be comfortable in the company of gay men and lesbians ($t(1688) = 12.897$, $p < .001$). In contrast, male participants reported significantly more frequent contact with gay and/or lesbian people than female participants ($t(1688) = 5.027$, $p < .001$).

Affective reactions toward gay men and lesbians

Participants reported a general accepting attitude toward gay men ($M = 2$, $sd = 1$) and toward lesbians ($M = 2$, $sd = 1$). However, male participants were significantly less accepting than female participants of both gay men ($t(1688) = 11.248$, $p < .001$) and lesbians ($t(1688) = 5.611$, $p < .001$).

Negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting

Similar to the previous analysis, participants reported a favorable attitude toward gay and lesbian-parented families ($M = 2, sd = 1$). Also consistent with previous results, male participants held significantly less favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting than female participants ($t(1688) = 8.410, p < .001$). Negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting was significantly correlated with affective reactions toward gay men ($r = .81, p < .001$) and toward lesbian ($r = .79, p < .001$).

Predictors of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting

In order to investigate if contact with gay and lesbian people would predict attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting after controlling for relevant sociodemographic variables, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. Sociodemographic variables - age, gender, years of study, religion, and religious attendance - were introduced in the first step, followed by having a gay/lesbian acquaintance, friend, family member, and knowing a gay/lesbian family in the second step. In the third step only the number of acquaintances, friends, and family members were introduced, followed by comfort and frequency of contact with gay/lesbian people in the fourth step. In the final step, we decided to test if comfort with gay/lesbian person interacted with the number of gay/lesbian acquaintances, friends, and family members (Table 1).

The first step of the analysis explained 10% of the variance, in which the significant predictors were age, gender, and religion. In the second step, only having gay and/or lesbian friends added to the overall model with 2% of explained variance. In the third step, number of gay/lesbian friends emerged as a significant predictor, adding 1% of explained variance. In the fourth step, comfort was a significant predictor, adding 10% to the model explained variance. In the final step, most of the interaction effects were not significant. The overall model accounted for 22% of explained variance of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting.

Table 1

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting Negative Perceptions of Gay and Lesbian Parenting

Negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting		
Predictor	R^2	β
Step 1	.090*	
Age		.088*
Gender		.206*
Years of study		.002
Religion		.209*
Religious attendance		.001
Step 2	.105*	
Contact with acquaintances		.011
Contact with friends		.114*
Contact with family members		.044
Contact families		.007
Step 3	.111**	
Number of acquaintances		.008
Number of friends		.084*
Number of family members		.009
Step 4	.211*	
Frequency of contact		.004
Level of comfort		.363*
Step 5	.214	
Comfort * n acquaintances		.075
Comfort * n friends		.353
Comfort * n family members		.087
Comfort * frequency		.171

* $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The present study's findings provided further support for the "contact hypothesis" applied to attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, that is, the effect of interpersonal contact with gay man and lesbians on lowering negative beliefs about them as parents. However, only contact with gay/lesbian friends and number of gay/lesbian friends was significant predictors of favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. Whereas these findings confirmed

two of the study's hypotheses, corroborating Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) *familiarity becomes liking*, contact and amount of contact alone did not predict less intergroup prejudice. It was the closeness of the relationship with gay/lesbian people that determined prejudice reduction, which is in line with previous studies (Anderssen, 2002; Hodson, Harry, & Mitchell, 2009; Lemm, 2006). This finding also suggests that empathy toward gay men and lesbians is an important mediator of the effect of interpersonal contact on lowering negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as parents.

Conversely, level of comfort with gay men and lesbians was also a significant predictor of favorable attitudes. However, considering that friendship with gay men and lesbians, and comfort with them were both significant predictors, it was expected that there would be an interaction effect. This finding suggests that comfort with gay/lesbian people is independent of having close relations with them, and in fact, comfort was the single strongest predictor of favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. It may, however, predispose heterosexual individuals to become friends with gay/lesbian people. The possible determinants of levels of comfort with gay/lesbian people seems to be key for understanding how the process of prejudice reduction works, and future research should address this question. As suggested by the literature, heterosexual people who feel comfortable and hold more favorable attitudes towards gay men and lesbians are more likely to experience contact with them (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993). In this study, frequency of contact was not a significant predictor of attitudes, and this may be explained by the fact that frequency of contact was not controlled for the context. Men, who held more negative attitudes but reported more frequent contact, may have more contact with gay men and lesbians involuntary, namely at work.

Another interesting, yet surprising finding was that contact with gay/lesbian family members, and number of gay/lesbian family members did not predict attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. There are two possible explanations for this finding: one the one hand, family tie was not controlled for, and considering that closeness of relationship is an important aspect of attitude change, it may have been the case that among the reported gay/lesbian family members some were not very close, for example, if they were members of the extended family. On the other hand, having a gay/lesbian family member may not independently help to reduce negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, or toward gay and lesbian parents. Studies have shown that gay and lesbian youth are much more likely to disclose their sexual orientation to their friends before their parents and family (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2013b; Savin-Williams, 1998), and the disclosure to parents and family may not be well-received (Savin-Williams, 1998). Applying the contact hypothesis to families' attitudes should further investigate whether contact is dependent on the tie and closeness to family members, or which other variables mediate this effect.

Knowing a gay and/or lesbian-headed family also did not predict attitudes towards them, and that may be at least partially explained by the low number of people who reported knowing gay/lesbian-headed families. In alternative, or complementary, these families may be considered friends and for that reason not adding individual effects when among the other predictors. Similarly, in their study about interpersonal contact, Barth and Parry (2009) have found that contact with gay and lesbian couples was not a significant predictor of attitude change, although contact with gay and lesbian individuals was.

In line with the literature, gender, age, and religious beliefs were among the sociodemographic variables that predicted attitudes (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Herek, 2000b; Kite & Whitley, 1996). As expected, more favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting were reported by female, young, and non-religious heterosexuals. Furthermore, participants revealed a general favorable attitude toward gay men, lesbians, and gay and lesbians parents, and this result may be explained by the fact that the sample was composed by a majority of women, who were accepting, more likely to have gay/lesbian friends, and reported higher levels of comfort with gay/lesbian people than men. Moreover, given that interpersonal contact leads to more favorable attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, the overwhelming majority of participants was acquainted with gay men and lesbians, and had gay/lesbian friends.

A strong association was also found between negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians and negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting, although attitudes toward gay men and lesbians was not introduced in the regression analysis. It is still somewhat unclear the relation between these two constructs, specifically, whether negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians are predictors of negative attitudes towards them as parents, or these attitudes are part of a more general homonegative attitude. Research has previously shown the association between these two constructs (see, for example, Camilleri & Ryan, 2006), but further theoretical and empirical studies are needed to further clarify the relation between them.

There is one important limitation to this study. The study was presented as a survey about heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, and it may have been the case that the sample was skewed in the direction of more favorable attitudes. In fact, as with other survey designs, the sample was self-selected, and fairly young, highly educated women were overrepresented. Considering the recent debates in Portugal over same-sex marriage and parenting, and political and legislative initiatives to allow same-sex couples to adopt, heterosexual people with more favorable attitudes are more likely to want to be voiced and to support this issue.

To conclude, whereas much of the existing research on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians has focused on gender and gender-roles, this study highlights the critical need for an

examination of individual differences that contribute to such attitudes. Specifically, it was shown that being friends with gay/lesbian people, number of gay/lesbian friends, and comfort with them were strong predictors of favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. What determines comfort with gay men and lesbians has not yet been explored, nor has it how the process of contact with gay and lesbian people influences heterosexuals' attitudes toward them as parents. With the significant increase in number of children raised in same-sex households, it is pivotal to understand how to promote societal acceptance and support of gay and lesbian parents.

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Chapter 6

Heterosexuals' Beliefs about Gay and Lesbian Parenting: A Path Analysis Model

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Abstract

Despite changes in heterosexual's perceptions of gay and lesbian people, attitudes toward gay and lesbians as parents are still negative throughout Europe and the United States. Previous research has highlighted several predictors of negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, but no study to date has explored the factors associated with the negative beliefs about gay and lesbian as parents. Through a path analysis model, the purpose of this study was to explore which sociodemographic and psychological variables predicted these beliefs. A sample of 1933 Portuguese heterosexuals filled in a questionnaire including several sociodemographic variables, interpersonal contact with gay and lesbian people, beliefs about the etiology of homosexuality, homonegativity toward gay men and lesbians, and attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. The results revealed that with the exception of age, all variables included in the model predicted negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents, although etiology beliefs was the strongest predictor. Implications of these findings of this study are discussed.

Keywords: attitudes; gay and lesbian parenting; homonegativity; etiology of homosexuality; interpersonal contact.

Introduction

Despite the growing number and increasing visibility of families headed by gay men and lesbians throughout Europe and the United States, negative beliefs about their competences as parents are still highly prevalent (Clarke, 2001; Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2013; Crawford & Solliday, 1996; McLeod, Crawford, & Zechmeister, 1999). Literature about the predictors of

negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians document changes in people's acceptance throughout the decades, but research about attitudes toward gay men and lesbians as parents are still scarce. Moreover, considering that it involves children's well-being, research on attitudes toward these gay and lesbian families is of extreme importance to understand what personal and social characteristics shape the negative attitudes toward these families.

In the United States, general attitudes toward homosexuality have become less negative in the last years (Gallup Organization, 2013). Throughout Europe, little is known about the evolution of such attitudes, although a recent report documents the immense variability of attitudes among European Union member states (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011), as well as an "uneven landscape with respect to freedom of movement and family reunification for same-sex couples" (European Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010, p. 8). Whereas the Netherlands and Sweden report the highest levels of acceptance of same-sex marriage (82% and 71%, respectively) and same-sex parenting (69% and 51%, respectively), Portugal is on the low end of acceptance, with only 29% of people favorable to same-sex marriages, and 19% favorable to the adoption of children by same-sex couples (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011). Furthermore, a study comparing 32 European countries on several attitudinal patterns reported that Portugal, clustered with mostly ex-communist countries, were the least supportive of homosexuality (Lottes & Alkulia, 2011).

In Portugal, same-sex couples were given access to civil partnerships in 2001 and to civil marriages in 2010. However, same-sex couples are still not allowed to apply for adoption, or to access assisted reproductive technologies. The few scientific studies available show that negative perceptions and prejudicial beliefs about gay and lesbian people are prevalent among adolescents and young adults (Costa, Almeida, et al., in press; Costa & Davies, 2012), and document the existence of negative attitudes toward same-sex parenting (Costa, Almeida, et al., in press; Costa, Caldeira, et al., in press).

Attitudes toward gay and lesbian families are rooted in attitudes toward gay and lesbian persons, although these are complex and multifaceted (Kite & Whitley, 1996; LaMar & Kite, 1998). In a meta-analysis, Kite and Whitley (1996) identified three components of negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians: attitudes toward homosexual persons, attitudes toward homosexual behavior, and attitudes toward homosexual civil rights. Drawing from this homonegativity conceptualization, attitudes toward gay and lesbian families would be part of the attitudes toward homosexual rights, particularly, parental rights. We argue, however, that these attitudes are more affective and beliefs-based than merely cognitive and stereotypical reasoning about civil rights (for further discussion, see Davies, 2004). Herek (2000) conceptualizes these attitudes as sexual prejudice, moving away from terms such as homophobia, which imply fear and irrational beliefs. This conceptualization encompasses three components of sexual prejudice: attitudes toward homosexual behavior, toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, and toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT)

communities, reframing negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people from intrapsychic conflicts to intergroup oppression (Herek, 2000).

Previous research has revealed several sociodemographic predictors of sexual prejudice toward gay and lesbian people. Gender and gender-role beliefs are among the most consistent predictors: Men, and people who hold traditional gender beliefs and/or are more sexist, are more negative toward gay men and lesbians (Costa & Davies, 2012; Davies, 2004; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Nagoshi et al., 2008; Sakall1, 2002), and these negative attitudes are stronger toward gay men than toward lesbians (Costa & Davies, 2012; LaMar & Kite, 1998). Older people, living in larger urban centers and with less formal education are also more negative toward homosexuals (Herek, 1994). Religiosity and right-wing conservatism are also significant predictors (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Nagoshi et al., 2008; Schulte & Battle, 2004; Whitley, 2009), although causal relationships between these variables and negative attitudes are still somewhat unclear.

Being religious and politically conservative are also strong predictors of negative attitudes toward same-sex couples and families (Brumbaugh, Sanchez, Nock, & Wright, 2008; Schwartz, 2010). As for gender differences, literature about attitudes toward same-sex couples has revealed the same trend, in which men have stronger beliefs against same-sex marriage, but are less negative toward female same-sex couples than toward male same-sex couples (Moskowitz, Rieger, & Roloff, 2010; Sotelo, 2000; Steffens & Wagner, 2004).

A growing number of studies have also explored the predictive value of beliefs about the developmental origins of homosexuality on sexual prejudice. It has been hypothesized that the perception of controllability of homosexual orientation and behavior is associated with negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian persons. In fact, people who believe that homosexuality is inherent and/or acknowledge that sexual orientation has a complex and interactive etiological process hold more acceptant attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, whereas people who perceive homosexuality as a choice and/or socially influenced hold higher levels of sexual prejudice (Hans, Kersey, & Kimberly, 2012; Sheldon, Pfeffer, Jayaratne, Feldbaum, & Petty, 2007). A genetic attribution also seems to predict more affirmative attitudes regarding gay and lesbian civil rights, civil unions, and same-sex marriage (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004).

Together with the perception of the controllability of homosexuality, intergroup contact in the context of Allport's contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) is one of most studied predictor of sexual prejudice. Earlier work from Herek and his colleagues (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993) have provided evidence that contact with gay and lesbian persons may improve heterosexuals' attitudes toward them, in particular if this contact is with multiple gay and lesbian persons, and if the relations between them are close (Herek & Capitano, 1996). Again, evidence from Europe, namely from Portugal, has confirmed the North-

American findings (Anderssen, 2002; Cirakoglu, 2006; Costa & Davies, 2012; Costa et al., 2013; Sakallı & Ugurlu, 2001). Sex of target (whether a lesbian women or a gay man) seems to influence the strength of the effect of both etiological beliefs and interpersonal contact on attitudes toward homosexual people (Hewitt & Moore, 2002).

As shown, there is a significant amount of studies addressing the sociodemographic and psychological predictors of attitudes toward gay and lesbian people and gay and lesbian rights, particularly same-sex marriage. Nevertheless, little is known about the predictors of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parented families, and few attempts were made to explore the relations among these variables beyond simple associations. A path model exploring multiple predictors and mediators of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians has shown that none of the sociodemographic variables included in the model (gender, intergroup contact, race, religions, and age) had a direct influence on attitudes, but were rather mediated by level of religiousness, political leaning, and gender-role beliefs (for further details, see Brown & Henriquez, 2008). This suggests that further complex and interactive models are needed as a basis for future efforts in gay-affirming policies.

In addition, research about heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents is still scarce, and focused on comparing attitudes toward same-sex and different-sex couples (Costa, Caldeira, et al., in press; Crawford & Solliday, 1996; McLeod et al., 1999). Although this body of research has clearly demonstrated that there are differences in the evaluation of same-sex and different-sex families, none of these studies have explored the relations between the aforementioned sociodemographic and psychological variables and attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents. Not only is gay and lesbian parenting currently one of the most debated gay-related topics in both the North-American society and in several European societies, but it is also one of the most controversial. The aim of the present study is, therefore, twofold. On the one hand, we aimed to explore possible predictors of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents, which no other published study has done before. On the other hand, we wanted to further contribute to the body of knowledge on the complex process of formation of sexual prejudice.

Method

Participants and procedures

The Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting Study was a Portuguese cross-sectional online survey involving heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals, with a total of 2574 participants

taking part in the study. Potential participants were contacted through calls posted on different social networks such as Facebook, forums, and discussion groups. In addition, efforts to collect a heterogeneous sample were made by posting an advertisement on an internet search engine, and an advertisement on Facebook. All participants were invited to participate in an online survey about attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, and directed to an online questionnaire. For the purpose of this study, only 1933 self-identified heterosexual participants were retained. Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1. Participants were fairly young (more than a half under 35 years old) and highly educated. The majority was single, and close to 40% were either married or in a civil partnership. Regarding religion, about half of the participants identified with catholicism, a small but significant portion with agnosticism, and about 30% with atheism. Close to 20% identified with a right-wing political party, but the majority identified with a center and/or left-wing party. Comparing to national statistics, this sample had fewer catholics and right-wing participants than the general population (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2011). Most participants were acquainted and friends with gay and lesbian people, and a significant percentage also knew a gay/lesbian-headed family. More than half of the sample reported having regular contact with gay and lesbian people.

Table 1
Sample characteristics (*N* = 1933)

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Age		
18-24	473	24,5
25-34	721	37,3
35-44	375	19,4
45-54	227	11,7
> 55	137	7,1
Gender		
Male	511	26,4
Female	1422	73,6
Relationship status		
Single	1083	56,0
Married	525	27,2
Civil partnership	178	9,2
Divorced	135	7,0
Widowed	12	0,6

Education		
Less than high school	24	1,2
High school degree	286	14,8
University undergraduate degree	803	41,5
University graduate degree	813	42,1
Religion		
Catholic	1071	55,4
Jewish	2	0,1
Muslim	1	0,1
Spiritual / Agnostic	205	10,6
Atheist	592	30,6
Other	62	3,2
Political party		
CDS (right-wing)	90	4,7
PSD (right-wing)	258	13,3
PS (center/left-wing)	281	14,5
CDU (left-wing)	119	6,2
BE (left-wing)	211	10,9
Other / None	875	41,8
Knows gay/lesbian people	1768	91,5
Have gay/lesbian friends	1123	58,1
Have gay/lesbian family member	328	17,0
Knows gay/lesbian families	452	23,4

Note: where accumulated percentages do not add up to 100 is due to missing values.

Measures

Affective Reactions toward Gay Men / Lesbians scales. Attitudes toward gay men and lesbians were measured with the Affective Reactions toward Gay Men and Lesbians scales (Costa & Davies, 2012; Davies, 2004). Both scales are comprised of eight items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = “completely disagree” to 5 = “completely agree”), and revealed high internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$ and $\alpha = .92$, respectively).

Etiology Beliefs. Beliefs about the origins of homosexuality were measured with six affirmations designed to address the most common (mis)conceptions about the basis of homosexuality: (1) lifestyle choice, (2) family influence, (3) modeled behavior, (4) biological, (5) natural expression of sexuality, and (6) psychopathological (Costa, Almeida, et al., in press). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = “strongly agree” to 5 = “strongly disagree”).

Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting scale. Attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting were measured with the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting scale (Costa, Almeida, et al., in press). It is an 11-item scale composed of two factors: (1) negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting (6 items, $\alpha = .78$) and (2) perception of benefits of gay and lesbian parenting (5 items, $\alpha = .57$). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = “strongly agree” to 5 = “strongly disagree”). For this study, only the negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting factor was used, as the purpose was to assess the predictors of negative attitudes.

Statistical analysis

Variables in the Model. Prior to evaluating the proposed structural equation model, confirmatory factor analyses of the latent variables were conducted. Both affective reactions toward gay men and toward lesbians were indicated by two eight-item parcels. Etiology beliefs were indicated by a six-item parcel, and negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting were indicated by a six-item parcel.

From the sociodemographic variables group, only age was measured as continuous variables. Political leaning, religious beliefs, and gender were collapsed and dummy coded to create single dichotomous variables. For political leaning: 0 = left-wing and 1 = right-wing; for religious beliefs: 0 = non-catholicism and 1 = catholicism; and for gender: 0 = male and 1 = female. To measure interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians, three variables were included: (1) level of comfort with gay/lesbian people (measured on a 5-point Likert scale), (2) having a gay/lesbian friend (measured as a dummy variable, 0 = no and 1 = yes), and (3) number of gay/lesbian friends (measured as a continuous variable). The choice of these three variables is explained elsewhere (Costa et al., 2013).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the Predictive Analysis Software (PASW) Statistics version 20 and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 20. The path analysis model with multiple mediators was estimated using the robust maximum likelihood estimator. Confirmatory factor analyses of the latent variables were performed to evaluate the existence of outliers by inspecting Mahalanobis distance (D^2), and multivariate normality. There was no evidence of multivariate outliers, and no variable showed values of skewness and of kurtosis that indicated violations to the assumption of normality ($|Sk| < 3$ and $|Ku| < 10$; Kline, 2005). All confirmatory factor analyses provided evidence of good model fit, with all items significantly loading onto their factor.

For the path analysis model, the significance of direct, indirect, and total effects was evaluated with χ^2 , and an alpha level of .05 was used to determine statistical significance. With models with multiple mediators, it can be assumed that if the trajectories among the mediators are significant, the global mediation effect is significant (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Model fit of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting was assessed using the Chi-square test, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI; Bentler, 1990), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990). Values above .90 on the CFI and TLI, and below .10 on the RMSEA were indicators of an acceptable model fit, and values above .95 on the CFI and TLI and below .05 on the RMSEA were indicators of good model fit (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006).

Results

Preliminary model fit

The initial path model failed to produce adequate fit ($\chi^2 = 13817.399$, $df = 526$, $p < .001$, CFI = .785, TLI = .756, RMSEA = .114, CI = .113, .116). The modification indices identified that the items from the Affective Reactions toward Gay Men scale and from the Affective Reactions toward Lesbians scales had highly correlated residuals, which is suggestive of redundancy. Although preliminary analysis showed there were no multicollinearity among the latent variables included in the model, these correlated residuals suggested that the items from both scale were measuring the same psychological construct of homonegativity, and we decided to remove the Affective Reactions toward Lesbians scale from the model.

Moreover, although individual confirmatory factor analysis of the latent variables revealed a good model fit in all cases, with acceptable individual items loadings, one item from the negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting factor (item 6: “Children of gay and lesbian parents are more victimized in school”) had a factor loading below .3, and it was deleted. From the Etiology Beliefs scale, one reversed item (item 2: “Homosexuality has a biological basis, thus cannot be changed”) also had a factor loading below .3, and was removed. The correlations among the variables included in the model are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Pearson’s correlations among the variables included in the model

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender ^a	-								
2. Age	-.124*	-							
3. Religion ^a	-.078*	.056**	-						
4. Political leaning ^a	.030	.019	.193**	-					
5. Comfort with gay/lesbian people	.285*	-.051**	.167*	.099*	-				
6. Having gay/lesbian friends ^a	-.081	-.076*	-.112*	-.038	-.330*	-			
7. Number of gay/lesbian friends	.018	.129*	.063*	.014	.176*	-.408*	-		
8. Etiology Beliefs	-.254*	.120*	-.111*	-.065*	-.404*	.142*	-.058**	-	
9. Affective Reactions toward Gay Men	-.258*	.076*	-.124*	-.100*	-.463*	.176*	-.120*	.766*	-
10. Negative Perceptions of Gay and Lesbian Parenting	-.198*	.092*	-.190*	-.122	-.420*	.161*	-.120*	.761*	.819*

^a point-biserial correlations; * $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$.

Overall model fit

The final measurement model produced a good model fit ($\chi^2 = 2974.215$, $df = 246$, $p < .001$, CFI = .918, TLI = .900, RMSEA = .076, CI = .073, .078), with an $R^2 = .923$ which provides evidence that the path analysis model explains a large proportion of the negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting (Figure 1). Scale items, factor loadings, and reliabilities are shown in Table 3.

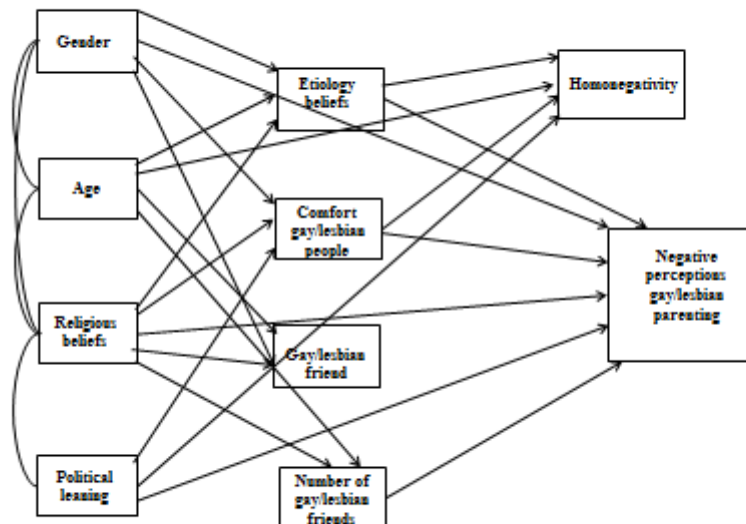
Table 3

Factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and descriptive statistics for the latent variables

Factor and items	Loadings	CR	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Etiology Beliefs</i>		.74	(1-5)	2.12	0.91
1. Homosexuality is a choice.	.41		(1-5)	2.24	1.35
3. Parents have an important role on their children's sexual orientation.	.37		(1-5)	2.61	1.27
4. Homosexuality is a mental illness.	.83		(1-5)	1.53	1.11
5. Homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality. (reversed score)	.69		(1-5)	2.21	1.40
6. Homosexuality is learnt by contact with homosexual people.	.68		(1-5)	1.98	1.25
<i>Affective Reactions toward Gay Men</i>		.96	(1-5)	1.82	1.12
1. Homosexual behavior between men is morally wrong.	.91		(1-5)	1.75	1.29
2. Gay men are disgusting.	.90		(1-5)	1.77	1.24
3. Male homosexuality is a perversion.	.95		(1-5)	1.68	1.23
4. If a man has homosexual feelings, he should overcome them.	.87		(1-5)	1.70	1.24
5. If I saw two men holding hands, I would be more disgusted than if I saw a man and a woman holding hands.	.80		(1-5)	2.04	1.42
6. I won't associate with gay men if I can help it.	.88		(1-5)	1.65	1.21
7. The thought of two men having sex is more disgusting than the thought of a man and a woman having sex.	.67		(1-5)	2.42	1.53
8. Gay men are a threat to the safety of children.	.86		(1-5)	1.54	1.11
<i>Negative Perceptions of Gay and Lesbian Parenting</i>		.88	(1-5)	2.07	1.08
1. Gay men and lesbians should not have children because it is a sin.	.80		(1-5)	1.51	1.11
3. Gay and lesbian parents do not care about children's best interests.	.72		(1-5)	2.22	1.31
7. Children of gay and lesbian parents will be homosexual or will be confused about their sexuality.	.84		(1-5)	1.87	1.20
9. Children of gay and lesbian parents do not have the needed masculine and feminine references for their normal development.	.76		(1-5)	2.45	1.39
11. It is not natural for gay men and lesbians to have children.	.75		(1-5)	2.29	1.50

Figure 1

Path analysis model of Negative Perceptions of Gay and Lesbian Parenting



Direct effects

There were several direct effects on negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting (Table 4). Female participants held less negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting ($\beta = -.033$), as well as participants who reported having a large number of gay/lesbian friends ($\beta = -.025$), and felt comfortable with them ($\beta = -.050$). In contrast, being catholic ($\beta = -.069$) and right-wing political identified ($\beta = -.042$) predicted more negative perceptions. Etiology beliefs was, however, the strongest predictor ($\beta = .936$).

There were also some sociodemographic variables that significantly covaried. Being catholic was significantly associated with affiliating with a right-wing political party ($r = .194$), with being male ($r = -.084$), and being older ($r = .052$). Age also covaried with gender ($r = -.124$), showing that being male was associated with being older.

Indirect effects

There were also some significant indirect effects on negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting (Table 4). The effect of gender on negative perceptions was mediated by both etiology beliefs and comfort with gay/lesbian people, suggesting that women held fewer misconceptions about homosexuality ($\beta = -.238$) and were more comfortable with gay/lesbian people ($\beta = .300$), which in turn predicted less negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents, though they were significantly less likely to have gay/lesbian friends ($\beta = -.088$). Older participants held more social beliefs about the etiology of homosexuality ($\beta = .092$), which predicted more negative attitudes, although they were significantly more likely to have gay and lesbian friends ($\beta = .126$), and this was related to less prejudicial attitudes. Catholic participants had significantly more misconceptions about homosexuality than non-catholics ($\beta = -.117$), had significantly less gay/lesbian friends ($\beta = .056$), and were significantly less comfortable with gay/lesbian people ($\beta = .183$), which in turn predicted more negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parents. Right-wing participants reported significantly more misconceptions about homosexuality ($\beta = .042$), which was associated with more negative attitudes. Homonegativity was not a significant predictor of negative attitudes toward same-sex families, although it was predicted by age ($\beta = -.027$), comfort with gay/lesbian people ($\beta = -.078$), political affiliation ($\beta = -.034$), and etiology beliefs ($\beta = .919$), suggesting that these negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parents may be a more subtle form of a general negativity toward gay men and lesbians.

Table 4

Direct, indirect, and total effects of path analysis model on negative perception of gay and lesbian parenting

Variable *	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect
Gender	-.033	.238	.271
Age	0	.089	.089
Religion	-.069	.120	.189
Political leaning	-.042	.002	.044
Comfort with gay/lesbian people	-.050	0	.050
Having gay/lesbian friends	0	0	0
Number of gay/lesbian friends	-.025	0	.025
Etiology Beliefs	.936	0	.936
Affective Reactions toward Gay Men	0	0	0

* Only significant effects are shown.

Discussion

Consistent with previous studies on sociodemographic predictors of attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Kite and Whitley, 1996) the present results provided further evidence of predictors of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. As expected, gender, religious beliefs, political leaning, etiology beliefs, and interpersonal contact were all significant predictors of sexual prejudice toward same-sex families. However, with the exception of etiological beliefs, all sociodemographic predictors had small to moderate effects on negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. Our proposed model accounted for 92% of explained variance in predicting negative evaluation of gay and lesbian parenting.

Higher levels of prejudice toward gay and lesbian families were shown by men, catholic participants, and right-wing conservatives. As shown by the significant covariances, men were more likely than women to be older, and to identify with catholicism. Being catholic was also significantly associated with being politically conservative. Thus, male, catholic, and right-wing participants reported feeling less comfortable with gay and lesbian people, which in turn predicted higher levels of negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. Younger and catholic participants reported having less gay and lesbian friends. In contrast, male, younger, and catholic participants were significantly more likely to have gay and lesbian friends, which seem to be in contradiction with the previous results. However, having gay/lesbian friends was measured with a “yes” or “no” answer and it was not a significant predictor of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, suggesting that this was not a reliable measure of interpersonal contact. A small number of gay and lesbian friends and a low level of comfort with them, however, were more reliable predictors of negative attitudes.

Beliefs about the controllability of homosexuality were predicted by gender, age, and religious beliefs, in which male, older, and catholic participants held more misconceptions about the etiological factors associated with a homosexual orientation and consequently, more negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian families. Etiological beliefs had a very large effect on negative attitudes, which is in our view the most important result in this study. Moreover, it was also a strong predictor of affective reactions toward gay men. Although previous studies have shown the importance of etiological beliefs on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Hans et al., 2012; Sheldon et al., 2007), the complex model presented here clearly highlights its strong effect. As previously stated, the belief of a controllability and socially influenced homosexuality was predicted by gender, age, and religious beliefs, and although it did not completely cancelled the direct effects of these sociodemographic variables on negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, it had a very significant mediation role. Noteworthy, it had a much greater mediation role than did interpersonal contact.

Affective reactions toward gay men did not predict negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, and, therefore, did not have a mediation effect in this path analysis model. Nevertheless, levels of negative reactions toward gay men were directly predicted by age and political leaning. The effects of both gender and religious affiliation on affective reaction were mediated by comfort with gay and lesbian people and etiological beliefs. As such, not surprisingly, more negative affective reactions toward gay men were shown by older male, religious, and political conservative participants, who were also less comfortable with gay and lesbian people, and believed that homosexuality was socially influenced. As to the reason why homonegativity was not a significant predictor of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, we argue that attitudes toward gay-parented families, as measured in the present study, is another affective component of sexual prejudice directed at gay and lesbian people as opposed to attitudes toward gay rights.

This study is not without limitations. Sexual prejudice is a complex and multifactor process of attitudes. Although there are enough research that shed some light on the variables that influence attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, this was a correlational study, and with all correlational studies, significant associations do not necessarily signify causality. We sustain, however, that more complex models that attempt to explore the relations between sociodemographic and psychological variables that influence these negative attitudes are more needed than simple correlation studies. Moreover, structural equation modeling has its own set of limitations, in particular regarding the number of variables that can be included in the model. Previous research has suggested that Openness to Experience and Gender Role Beliefs may be important mediators of some of the variables in the present model (Brown & Henriquez, 2008).

Another important implication is the sampling strategy employed in the study. We collected the data by means of self-reports, which resulted in a fairly young, mostly single, and highly educated sample. Furthermore, three quarters of the sample were women who held less prejudiced attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. These sample characteristics could have attenuated or inflated some of the relations between variables, and further research should employ other sampling strategies to overcome this limitation. As shown by the means obtained for each scale, participants were in general favorable to gay and lesbian parenting, suggesting that because gay adoption and parenting rights is currently a highly debated topic in Portuguese society, people with more affirming attitudes were more invested in participating in this study.

In conclusion, path analysis models with multiple mediators were shown to be fundamental for the understanding of sexual prejudice. The present results highlighted the pivotal role of etiological beliefs in predicting negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, and gay and lesbian parenting, which may help to inform policy to address the inequalities between gay and lesbian and heterosexual people in our societies. As such, there is a need to educate

and inform people about the etiological development of homosexuality in order to confront sexual prejudice since it mediates the influence of sociodemographic variables on the formation of negative attitudes.

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General Discussion

For a Scientific Understanding of Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Families

The general aim of this thesis was to understand the attitudes toward gay and lesbian families among Portuguese heterosexuals. As stated, the importance of understanding these attitudes rests on the fact that societal attitudes toward sexual minorities form the basis for the oppression of this community in general, and of gay and lesbian families in particular. Sexual Prejudice, as coined by Herek (2009), is understood as the adoption of a system of beliefs and values by a majority group of society (heterosexuals) that devalues and denigrates a minority group (nonheterosexuals). For this thesis, six studies with different approaches were developed and carried out, with the intention of being complementary in understanding sexual prejudice. We will next highlight the main results and conclusions drawn from these studies, discuss its implications for theory and practice, and suggest future important research.

Sexual Prejudice

The quasi-experimental design studies provided evidence of differences in the evaluation of same-sex and different-sex couples wishing to adopt a child. Portuguese heterosexuals anticipated more social and emotional difficulties for children adopted by a same-sex couple than for children adopted by a different-sex couple. These concerns were higher for children adopted by a male same-sex couple than by a female same-sex couple. Although no sex of target effect was found, it is noteworthy that the significance value obtained approached significance, showing a trend that heterosexual people evaluated different-sex parents more favorably than same-sex parents. Furthermore, whilst 100% of the participants evaluated the different-sex couple as certainly having the qualities needed to be good parents, only 27% of the participants perceived same-sex couples as certainly having these same qualities.

Male participants evaluated less favorably both gay and lesbian couples than female participants, and anticipated more emotional difficulties for children of gay and lesbian parents. These results are in line with previous research conducted in Portugal (Gato, Fontaine, & Carneiro, 2010; Xavier, Mendes, Martins, & Fernandes, 2011).

Religious and political effects on the evaluation of the adoptive parents we also found. Catholic participants evaluated same-sex couples more negatively, and anticipated more difficulties for children with same-sex parents than did atheist participants. Conservative, or right-wing, participants also evaluated same-sex couples more negatively, and anticipated more child emotional and social problems due to being raised by same-sex parents. These

political and religious effects were previously reported in research about attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, and gay and lesbian rights (Barringer, Gay, & Lynxwiler, 2013; Brown & Henriquez, 2008; Whitley, 2009).

However, the group' comparisons conducted in those studies were able to detect differences that have practical implications for the Portuguese society by taking into consideration the significant religions and political parties in Portugal. On the one hand, catholicism is the main religion in Portugal, and although north-American research has shown the effect of religious beliefs on attitudes toward LGBT-related topics, no previous study has collected a sample of catholic people. On the other hand, the comparisons between political parties represented both in the Portuguese Parliament and in the European Parliament provided results that can be informative for public policy initiatives regarding gay and lesbian rights, and gay and lesbian parenting. These implications will be discussed later in this chapter.

The qualitative study revealed 11 arguments against same-sex parenting, contrasting with only six identified by Clarke (2001) in the United Kingdom: (1) gender roles, (2) biological impossibility, (3) homosexuality as pathological, (4) moral superiority of heterosexuality, (5) society values, (6) parental non-capability, (7) religion, (8) acceptance of children's sexual identity, (9) victimization, (10) gender identity development, and (11) socioemocional development. Whereas the first eight arguments referred to same-sex parents, the latter three referred to child's development.

The three arguments that referred to child development were similar to those found by Clarke (2001), although the present study was able to extend her findings, and identified more specific arguments. Portuguese heterosexuals hold both heterosexist attitudes based on the belief of a moral superiority of heterosexuality (and heterosexual parents), and homonegative attitudes that pathologize gay and lesbian people. This suggests that, at least to some extent, the arguments against gay and lesbian parenting in the Portuguese society are affective-based and 'homophobic'. The most evoked arguments against gay and lesbian parents were focused on the inability of same-sex parents to instill in their children the necessary (traditional) gender roles. Regarding the consequences for children with gay and lesbian parents, the most evoked argument focused on the likelihood of children being harassed at school based on their family configuration.

These arguments against same-sex parenting served as a basis for the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting scale. As expected, the preliminary analysis of the scale revealed the existence of two factors: (1) Negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting, and (2) Perception of benefits of gay and lesbian parenting. For this study, it was also developed the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Scale, and a measure of Beliefs about the Origins of Homosexuality.

It was found that negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting were strongly associated with attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, and with a perception of controllability of homosexuality. Attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights were also associated with etiology beliefs. In particular, the belief that homosexuality is a mental illness was the strongest correlate of attitudes toward both gay and lesbian rights and gay and lesbian parenting among the different etiological beliefs.

This study highlighted a strong account of sexual prejudice among university students, as well as highly prejudicial misconceptions of the developmental origins of homosexuality. In fact, an overwhelming majority of the participants was strongly against extending rights, such as parenting rights, or marriage equality, to gay and lesbian people. Moreover, most of the participants endorsed the belief that homosexuality is acquired by modeled behavior, and that homosexuality is a mental illness.

Noteworthy, there were differences regarding the beliefs that homosexuality was socially influenced. Whereas most participants agreed that homosexuality could be learned, less than half of the participants believed that parents could shape their children's sexual orientation. Furthermore, the responses to the statement that homosexuality was innate were less skewed, with the average situated at the middle point of the scale. These results suggest that the misconceptions regarding the etiology of homosexuality are closely tied with affective attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, and contrastingly, less rationalized or cognitive-based.

Overall, these studies' results confirmed the role of religious affiliation, political conservatism, and gender in shaping heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, gay and lesbian rights, and perceptions of controllability of homosexuality. Not surprisingly, subject of study was also found to be a correlate of these attitudes and beliefs, showing that psychology students were less prejudicial toward gay and lesbian parenting and rights, and held fewer misconceptions about etiology than engineering students.

As stated in the General Introduction, another important cluster of predictors of sexual prejudice is interpersonal contact. The articles included in Chapter 5 aimed at exploring the effects of interpersonal contact with gay and lesbian people on attitudes towards them as parents. Surprisingly, a large majority of the participants had lesbian and gay acquaintances and friends, and were overall comfortable in their company. This study's results showed that while interpersonal contact was an important predictor of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, there were some important distinctions to take into account. As suggested by Herek and his colleagues, and corroborated in this study, the closeness of the relationship between heterosexuals and homosexuals are more likely to affect heterosexuals' attitudes than merely having gay or lesbian acquaintances (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt 1993).

In predicting attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, having contact with gay and lesbian people, or having a gay or lesbian family member did not have significant effects. Having gay/lesbian friends, and the number of gay/lesbian friends were, in contrast, significant predictors of these attitudes. Comfort with gay and lesbian people was the strongest predictor of attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. Gender, age, and religious beliefs were also, as expected, significant predictors. Based on these results, only the significant predictors of attitudes among the interpersonal contact measured variables were selected for inclusion in the path model study. Structural equation modeling does not allow for a large number of variables to be included in the model, in particular in a path analysis model with multiple latent variables, and this provided the rationale for previously conducting the multiple regression analysis, and identifying the significant predictors of attitudes.

The last chapter presented a path analysis model of negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting with multiple mediators. The final model accounted for 92% of explained variance, which attest the reliability of the relations explored in this model in explaining attitudes toward gay and lesbian families. Previous studies with a similar design and methodology (see, for example, Brown & Henriquez, 2008) have provided insight into the predictors of attitudes toward gay men and lesbian, although failed to account for the strongest predictor of sexual prejudice: Etiology beliefs.

Other studies have suggested the value of the perception of the controllability of homosexuality in shaping attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Hans, Kersey, & Kimberly, 2012; Sheldon, Pfeffer, Jayaratne, Feldbaum, & Petty, 2007). This study further explored this relation, by evaluating this effect relative to other significant predictors. Etiology beliefs had a predictive weight of over .90 on both negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting, and affective reactions toward gay men. It was also a significant mediator of the effects of gender, age, and religious beliefs on attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting.

As discussed in the previous chapter, with the exception of having gay/lesbian friends, all variables included in the model were significant predictors: gender, age, religious affiliation, political leaning, number of gay/lesbian friends, comfort with gay/lesbian people, and etiology beliefs. In general, men, who were older, conservative, and religious, were more likely to endorse the belief of the controllability of homosexuality, had less gay and lesbian friends, and reported feeling less comfortable with gay and lesbian people, which in turn predicted more negative perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting. This same path was observed in predicting levels of homonegativity toward gay men.

With the general aim of evaluating societal oppression in the form of attitudes towards gay and lesbian families, there are some important conclusions to be drawn for the studies presented in this thesis. Firstly, it was found that there are unquestionable differences in how

Portuguese heterosexual people perceive same-sex and different-sex parented families. The key to understanding sexual prejudice is to identify how the social beliefs and values regarding the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community are shaped. Individual beliefs about a specific group or community are structured by society as a whole, through its different institutions, but they can be pervious to change, and in turn, influence institutions and policy (Herek, 2009).

Particularly in the case of religious and political institutions, it was shown that religious and conservative people endorsed more negative arguments and values toward gay men and lesbians, gay and lesbian rights, and gay and lesbian families. These values are conveyed and reinforced by these institutions, although people can, nevertheless, challenge this form of sexual prejudice from inside the institutions, or by participating in the policy process. Conversely, both law and public policy can effectively influence both institutional heterosexism and individuals' sexual prejudice.

On the one hand, empirical evidence has shown that public policy regarding LGBT people is, to some extent, independent from individual attitudes towards this community (Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013). They are, however, mutually influenced, which implies that changes in policy may indeed induce changes in people's attitudes toward sexual minorities. The studies presented here further confirmed the strong associations among attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights, the endorsement of homonegative beliefs regarding gay men and lesbians, and negative perceptions of gay and lesbians as parents. Policy initiatives addressing unequal rights are very likely to promote a decrease in the negative affective beliefs regarding gay men and lesbians.

On the other hand, the studies presented here provided strong evidence of prejudiced misconceptions regarding the developmental origins of homosexuality among Portuguese heterosexuals. As stated, people who believed that homosexuality is socially influenced were more likely to hold prejudicial beliefs about gay men and lesbians, and in particular toward gay and lesbian parents (Frias-Navarro, Monverde-i-Bort, Pascual-Soler, & Badenes-Ribera, 2013; Rye & Meaney, 2010). That is to say that people may justify their sexual prejudice on the basis of the controllability of homosexual orientation. This conclusion leads to important implications of this study. Individual beliefs and attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents may be reshaped by informing individuals about the scientific evidence that shows that children of gay and lesbian parents fare at least as well as children of heterosexual parents, and also educating people about gay and lesbian relationships, and their capabilities as parents comparable to those of heterosexuals. Moreover, promoting a shift from individuals' beliefs of a personal responsibility for a homosexual orientation to an understanding of the process of sexual orientation development as complex and multi-influenced, is likely to lead to more favorable and accepting attitudes of gay and lesbian people and families.

Finally, whereas previous research has shown the value of interpersonal contact in lowering sexual prejudice toward gay men and lesbians, and in promoting acceptance of gay and lesbian civil rights (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993), the present study showed that interpersonal contact did not have an effect on these attitudes as strong as previously suggested. It may be that having a close friendship with a gay/lesbian person leads to heterosexual individuals perceiving gay men and lesbians in a more personalized way, thus more favorably, and perceiving homosexual sexual orientation as biologically determined is far more effective in improving their attitudes. The path analysis model accounted for 92% of explained variance in attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting, which is indicative of a very comprehensive model.

In terms of theoretical contributions, our definition of *Attitude* draws from Allport's theory of attitudes as a person's predisposition to respond to an object in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner (Allport, 1954). The concept of attitudes, particularly attitudes toward gay and lesbian people (homonegativity) is complex and multifaceted (Allport, 1954; Kite & Whitley, 1996), thus investigating its subcomponents provides a broader basis for its scientific understanding. In this research, we studied an affective component of attitudes, which is not only more resistant to change, but also more closely linked to homonegative behaviors, such as discrimination or violence. In this sense, attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, and attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting were measured as affective reactions' attitudes. All of the scales used in this study were also developed under the assumption that beliefs-based arguments provide a better understanding of people's affective attitudes toward gay and lesbian issues.

We also attempted to empirically explore the arguments against gay and lesbian parenting that could contribute to further developments of the theory of sexual stigma (Herek, 2009). The items that compose the Negative Perceptions of Gay and Lesbian Parenting subscale were reflective of the arguments used by Portuguese heterosexuals in the qualitative study, as well as arguments identified in previous studies (Clarke, 1999, 2001) against gay and lesbian families. The fact that these arguments have not changed for decades is indicative of the affective and beliefs-based component of attitudes toward these families, closely related to affective reactions toward the LGBT community as a whole. Moreover, in face of scientific evidence that homosexuality is not chosen, nor is it a mental illness, Portuguese heterosexuals continue to hold prejudicial misconceptions about lesbians and gay men. It is thus pivotal to identify and discuss these arguments in order to develop ways to challenge them.

However, challenging these beliefs through comparisons between gay and lesbian families and heterosexual families may undermine a theoretical understanding of the experiences of gay and lesbian parents and their children. Previous research has challenged homonegative arguments against gay and lesbian parenting by deconstructing them and showing that there

are no differences between these two types of families (Anderssen, Amlie, & Ytteroy, 2002; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Whilst this approach may have been useful in despathologizing gay and lesbian people (and gay and lesbian parents, by extension), it incurs in the reproduction of heterosexist messages about gay and lesbian parents by denying their unique experiences. As research has identified, there are differences between the two types of families due to the social oppression that victimizes gay and lesbian families, particularly by not providing them with the same legal protection that are granted to heterosexual families.

Limitations of the studies

The studies that compose this thesis are not without limitations. In addition to the limitations of the studies already acknowledged in each study, there are four main limitations of the overall research that merit some further reflection.

The first limitation regards the sampling strategy employed in the online surveys presented in chapters 2, 3, 5, and 6. The demographic variables indicated that the participants were fairly young, mostly single, highly educated, and from large urban areas, which is usually one of the main shortcomings of conducting online surveys. Furthermore, there was a gender imbalance in favor of women who, as shown, hold lower levels of sexual prejudice. We made an effort to collect a large and heterogeneous sample by placing advertisements on Facebook and on Google. However, particularly on Google, these ads would show when people searched for information about same-sex parenting. As a result, the sample was skewed in favor of more acceptant participants, which were both more likely to be searching for information on this topic, and to want to voice their affirmative attitudes. These sample characteristics could have attenuated or inflated some of the relations between variables, and may not be representative of the Portuguese population. However, this sampling process made it possible to collect such a large pool of participants.

Another important limitation regards the results reported in chapter 4, in the development of the three measures that were used in other studies. The scales held acceptable to good internal reliabilities with the sample of university students, and in the study reported in chapter 6, with a sample of the general population, they provided further evidence of construct validity and reliability. However, convergent and discriminant validity were not completely demonstrated, as these scales were not used against other more established measures of sexual prejudice.

In terms of the study's designs, there are two limitations that also need to be acknowledged. The qualitative study reported in chapter 2, using content analysis, provided insight into the arguments against gay and lesbian parenting. However, because most of the participants did

not have high levels of prejudice toward gay and lesbian parenting, the number of arguments used in the analysis was very small. The studies presented in chapters 4, 5, and 6 were correlational, and while the results, grounded in the literature, may suggest causal relations among the variables, causality cannot be determined using these designs.

Finally, the path analysis model reported in chapter 6 accounted for a large proportion in explaining attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting. However, we did not include a gender roles beliefs and/or sexism measure which could have had a mediating role between some of the variables. In particular, literature has shown that the effect of gender on homonegative attitudes may be mediated by gender roles beliefs (Kite & Whitley, 1996; Whitley, 2001). We further suggest that gender roles beliefs may also be associated with social conservatism and religious beliefs, considering that traditional gender roles are part of a general conservative system of beliefs and values. The inclusion of a gender beliefs measure could have accounted for a significant portion of the overall model, and better illuminated the relations among the variables.

Suggestions for future research

In contrast to a significant body of research about the prevalence and predictors of sexual stigma and prejudice, little research regarding ways of reducing sexual prejudice among heterosexual individuals has been conducted (Walch et al., 2010). It has been shown that interventions such as courses or workshops in university settings are effective in reducing negative attitudes toward sexual minorities. These interventions are based on the interpersonal contact theory (Allport, 1954), inviting panels or individual speakers identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, to talk about their personal experiences related to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Hodson, Choma, & Costello, 2009; Kwon & Hugelshofer, 2012). LGBT associations worldwide have been conducting similar interventions for decades, particularly for adolescents, and reporting evidence of its positive long-term effects on sexual prejudice. The work of the Portuguese youth-led association Rede Ex Aequo “Projecto Educação LGBT” is an example of the use of these interventions in high schools, wherein LGBT-identified peers are invited as speakers (rede ex aequo, 2013).

Although we found that interpersonal contact was an important predictor of sexual prejudice, etiology beliefs, in comparison, had a much stronger effect. We suggest that future research efforts aimed at reducing sexual prejudice would benefit from this finding by designing experimental studies that present relevant studies about the developmental origins of sexual orientation in a group-appropriated fashion, or by combining lecture presentations with presentations by LGBT-identified speakers.

Another important suggestion for research is the development of larger prevalence studies about the arguments against gay and lesbian parenting. As shown, although a large proportion of these attitudes were explained by etiology beliefs, interpersonal contact, and other sociodemographic variables, some of the participants in the qualitative study argued that the children of gay and lesbian parents would be at a higher risk of being bullied and harassed at school. In fact, according to the results presented in chapters 2 and 3, the average Portuguese heterosexual believed that these children would probably suffer from homonegative behaviors by their peers. Future research should also endeavor to explore interventions with children and young people that would prevent homonegative-based behaviors, based on larger and more comprehensive studies about the arguments and beliefs that create an environment where these behaviors can occur.

Finally, in terms of measure development, the scales created and used in some of the studies presented here could benefit from larger validation studies, particularly to evaluate their validity against other more established sexual prejudice measures. Scales aimed at evaluating social phenomena, such as attitudes, are susceptible to rapidly becoming irrelevant or inadequate in face of cultural differences and constant social changes. However, self-report scales are, for the most part, convenient to use, and psychological research has relied heavily on surveys to explore many psychological dimensions. This fact reinforces the need to devote research efforts toward the development and validation of these scales, particularly the Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting scale, and the Beliefs about the Etiology of Homosexuality. The latter could also benefit from the introduction and testing of new items that take into account other possible etiological beliefs.

Final considerations

Not only are the behaviors that follow sexual prejudice responsible for the inequalities between heterosexuals and nonheterosexuals, but more importantly, for the discriminatory practices and violence that affects sexual minorities. Compared to other minority groups, sexual minorities are disproportionately affected by violence throughout their lives; from bullying and harassment, rejection by parents and family, unfair treatment in health or employment settings, to violence and hate crimes (Herek & Berrill, 1992; Rayburn & Davidson, 2002; Willis, 2004).

The case of Matthew Shepard became one of the most shocking examples of antigay violence in the United States, that resonated throughout Europe. Matthew Shepard was a college student perceived as having nonconforming gender behaviors (thus, as being gay), which justified his abduction, violent physical assault, and being left to die by two of his college peers (Matthew Shepard Foundation, 1998). Fortunately, this particularly brutal example of

violence perpetrated against a sexual minority individual led to several psychologists and other social scientists, to become more aware of the need to educate citizens and politicians about the consequences of sexual prejudice (see, for example, Savin-Williams, 1999). In Portugal, the case of Gisberta, a pre-operative Male-to-Female (MtF) transsexual, was not any less violent or shocking; Gisberta was also brutally attacked by a group of 13 teenagers, and left to die in a ditch, in the city of Oporto (Diário de Notícias, 2006).

These behaviors are justified by societal mild responses to violence against sexual minorities, and unwillingness to correct inequalities between heterosexual and homosexual individuals. Sexual prejudice toward gay and lesbian families may not elicit such violent reactions, though the underlying system of beliefs and values is the same. In the perpetuation of institutional stigma and inequalities, by not allowing the access to civil marriage or not granting parental rights to gay and lesbian people, underlies the message that gay and lesbian people are less deserving than heterosexual people. We believe that this thesis can be an important contribution for public policy by informing the Portuguese institutions of the system of beliefs and values that results in sexual prejudice attitudes, and justify an unfair treatment of sexual minorities. The Portuguese Parliament has recently taken a positive action by relying on scientific evidence and expert testimonies to inform the debate on co-adoption by gay fathers and lesbian mothers. It is our hope that this thesis can also serve to shed light on the phenomenon of sexual prejudice in Portugal in order to foment a reflection about the social mechanisms that can promote a more fair society. Moreover, within Portuguese societies' institutions, such as the catholic church, and conservative parties (CDS and PSD⁵), sexual prejudice was shown to be more prevalent and negative than in other institutions analyzed in these studies. Both the institutions and the individuals that are part of the institutions can and should work towards abolishing structural stigma.

Another important facet of sexual prejudice that was not studied in this thesis but nevertheless merits some final considerations, is self-stigma. Self-stigma is the enactment of sexual prejudice by sexual minorities (Herek, 2009), usually referred to as internalized homonegativity. Sexual minorities are confronted with the same set of beliefs and values as heterosexuals, and are inevitably vulnerable to internalize negative beliefs about themselves, which can have pervasive consequences for their mental health (Meyer, 1995, 2003). Since sexual minorities are disproportionately affected by violence and prejudicial beliefs, they may also be more affected by mental health difficulties, namely suicide and depression (Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993).

⁵ CDS stands for Centro Democrático e Social, and PSD stands for Partido Social Democrata. Both parties are part of the European People's Party.

Afterword

Families headed by single and coupled gay men and lesbians are faced with several sources of additional stress brought by society's sexual stigma. Both individuals' sexual prejudice and institutional heterosexism creates an atmosphere that can be unsafe, and even harmful, for children raised in same-sex households. Despite most international professional associations adopting official statements affirming that there is no scientific evidence that child development is compromised by being raised by gay men or lesbians (see, for example, American Psychological Association: Paige, 2005; American Academy of Pediatrics: Perrin & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002; Portuguese Psychological Association: Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses, 2013), sexual prejudice is still highly prevalent throughout the Western world. Individuals' sexual prejudice is detrimental to the emotional and psychosocial health of gay and lesbian parents and their children, and may lead to social isolation, felt stigma, discrimination, and harassment (Pawelski, Perrin, Foy, Allen, Crawford, Del Monte, Kaufman, Klein, Smith, Springer, Tanner, & Vickers, 2006). Furthermore, the lack of legal and social protection is one the biggest threat to the adjustment and well-being of parents and children in gay and lesbian families (Lowe, 2009; Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2013). The often evoked argument that children of gay and lesbian parents may be victims of bullying and harassment cannot serve as a justification to deny families rights, stability, and well-being that are afforded to heterosexual-parented families, but instead should call the attention to the social mechanisms that allow people to be victimized.

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Appendices