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Beyond Blood and Legal Ties The Impact of Dominant Conservative Socializing Agents on Attitudes toward Adoption by Same-Sex Couples

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Abstract

Even though public opinion may be more supportive of sexual minorities and marriage equality there may be less support for same-sex adoption rights and same-sex parenthood. This study examines if individual-level differences in religiosity and political positioning have significant discriminative power by examining a model in which religious opposition to equal adoption rights is motivated, at least in part, by conservative political ideology and opposition to adoption in general. A cross-sectional study was conducted between May 2 and July 2, 2022, via an online survey. One hundred ninety-six respondents aged between 18 and 56 years old ($M= 24.93$; $SD= 0.50$) participated in the study. A bivariate correlation was generated to explore the associations between variables of interest. Next, hypotheses were examined by performing a bootstrapping analysis for parallel multiple mediation models (Hayes, 2013; Model 4). Both political positioning and attitudes toward adoption partially mediated the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples. This study's results demonstrate that exposure to less permissive and more traditional socializing agents can significantly influence individuals' attitudes toward same-sex adoption.

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Introduction

Even though attitudes toward sexual and gender minority individuals are among the areas that have benefitted most from social change large within-and between-country differences persist in the extent to which public attitudes oppose sexual minorities and their rights (Dotti-Sani & Quaranta, 2021; Fetner, 2016; Takacs et al., 2016). As of 2020, 43 states worldwide (16 within Europe) have introduced laws on marriage or civil union for same-sex couples indicating that marriage is still a privilege of different-sex couples. Accordingly, full joint adoption by same-sex couples is currently legal in 17 countries suggesting that this specific issue is less approved of (Dotti-Sani & Quaranta, 2021). Therefore, even though public opinion may be more supportive of sexual minorities and marriage equality there may be less support for same-sex adoption rights and same-sex parenthood (Dotti-Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Hence it appears that the issue of full-joint adoption by same-sex partners is even more sensitive as same-sex parent families confront the heteronormative societal ideals of sexual and romantic relationships. In addition, restrictions in access to parenthood by same-sex couples demonstrate that the construction of a family is the result of religion, state-level politics, and the localized experiences of everyday life (Monaco & Nothdurfter, 2022).

Despite the growing recognition of same-sex partnerships as important relational and familial formations, key issues remain underexplored, especially in certain socio-cultural contexts, such as Greece, where a certain amount of cultural representation and acceptance has been achieved, but legal recognition is still pending (Grigoropoulos, 2022a, 2018). Consequently, in such a socio-cultural context same-sex couples and families cannot rely on protection through family law. Overall, same-sex partners' rights to kinship pose a threat to the societal norms that support the foundation of the heterosexual nuclear family (Callahan & Loscocco, 2021). Thus, the public debate concerning adoption equality demonstrates that much remains to be accomplished to ensure same-sex couples' equal family and adoption rights. In addition, already-known variables accounting for opposition toward same-sex couples might not have the same explanatory power when it comes to same-sex couples' adoption rights because of the higher sensitivity of this issue (Dotti-Sani & Quaranta, 2020). The current study promotes research on attitudes-based discrimination towards same-sex couples' adoption rights and also examines the impact of context-related socializing agents in stigma formation regarding adoption equality. Equal adoption rights have received limited scientific attention not only in the Greek socio-cultural context but also worldwide (see Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Another significant contribution of the study is to challenge the dominant homonegative stance towards equal adoption and parenting rights for same-sex couples.

Adoption by same-sex couples

Whereas in recent years, we have witnessed the burgeoning of research concerning the general acceptance of sexual and gender minority individuals (Donalson et al., 2017; Takacs & Szalma, 2020) there are limited research data as regards the issue of same-sex couples' adoption rights (Gato & Fontaine, 2016; Sani & Quaranta, 2020; van de Rozenberg & Scheepers, 2022). In addition, the debate on same-sex couples' family rights is still heated in several southern and eastern European countries wherein same-sex couples are denied the right to marry or adopt (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Levitt et al., 2020). More specifically, research findings demonstrate that people strongly oppose the

idea of same-sex couples adopting children, compared to marriage equality (Costa et al., 2014; Hermosa-Bosano et al., 2022; Takacs et al., 2016). Expressing positive attitudes towards sexual and gender minority individuals is the first step toward acceptance whereas adoption equality and same-sex parenthood echo a deeper commitment toward equality in formal rights (Sani & Quaranta, 2020).

Monaco & Nothdurfter (2022) argue that same-sex couples take on a long pathway toward parenthood described by many uncertainties and significant obstacles. In particular, it involves challenges that include a series of decisions (e.g., how to conceive the child, which clinics to contact) and considerable economic capital. Moreover, same-sex couples might experience several other difficulties in everyday life such as meeting psychologists and social workers who may assess their parental suitability (Monaco & Nothdurfter, 2022). Even though research findings indicate no significant differences in children's upbringing between different-sex and same-sex parents, same-sex parenthood represents a threat to the natural societal order that considers the heterosexual nuclear family as the basic family model (Callahan & Loscocco, 2021; Farr & Vazquez, 2020). Also, Brewae et al. (1997) demonstrate that parental sexual orientation does not influence children's gender development. Along the same line, Patterson and Riskind (2011) demonstrate that parental sexual orientation has no impact on child and adolescent development. On the contrary family relationship quality and parenting style are reported to have a much larger impact on child and adolescent development (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Thus, even though stereotypical concepts about sexual and gender minority individuals, especially gay men, being more promiscuous and non-committed in relationships are challenged same-sex parenting is still considered a taboo issue (Carneiro et al., 2017; Carone & Lingardi, 2022; Pinsof & Haselton, 2017). Whitehead and Perry (2016) argue that because adoption concerns the well-being of a child, moral beliefs play a critical role in shaping an individual's opinion in this respect. Since family-related messages in our society are heteronormative, heterosexual marriage is acknowledged as the prototype of a stable relationship and the dominant family formation for raising children (Day et al., 2011; Costa et al., 2019). In addition, distinct complementary roles for women and men are emphasized, and traditional life is glorified (van de Rozenberg & Scheepers, 2022). Thus, heteronormative normalcy works as a system of oppression that opposes non-normative parenthood and forbids its recognition. Opposition to full-joint adoption by same-sex partners is also based on the fears that the adopted child will be socially stigmatized or from firmly held moral beliefs and/or religious declarations that sanction those family formations that do not conform to heteronormative societal ideals of sexual and romantic relationships. In all, children raised in same-sex parent families are considered "worse off" than those raised in cisgender heterosexual families due to the possible social and psychological consequences that could result from the absence of different-sex parents (Golombok, 2015). The consequences of the aforementioned ideas involve not only the establishment of a hierarchical ideological concept wherein specific types of families are considered as more legitimate and better than others, but also the reinforcement of stigma toward different family formations such as same-sex parented families as well as adoptive families (Hermosa-Bosano et al., 2022). All in all, same-sex-headed families challenge gendered parenting roles, social concepts of exclusivity, and social policies creating new avenues for parenting roles. Accordingly, equal adoption rights remain a sensitive social issue in which personal moral beliefs may play a significant role as this family formation is not (fully) accepted by the larger public (see Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Hence, it is most significant to examine which socializing factors are related to the rejection of equal adoption rights to decrease uncertainties and discrimination against same-sex couples in institutional and social encounters.

Religiosity: a significant predictor of attitudes toward sexual minorities and their rights

Starting from religiosity studies find that church and religious attendance are strongly associated with attitudes toward sexual and gender minority individuals and marriage equality (Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015; Whitehead & Perry, 2016). Also, Legerski and Harker (2018) argue that religiosity (i.e., the degree to which one is involved with religion) is a significant predictor of attitudes toward sexual minorities and their rights. More specifically, those who are more religious and have more frequent worship attendance oppose same-sex relationships and marriage (Twenge & Blake, 2021; Worthen et al., 2017). In addition, Takacs's et al. (2016) comparative study on 28 European countries demonstrates church and religious attendance as significant predictors of opposition to adoption by same-sex couples. Studies also demonstrate a positive relationship between macro-level religiosity and individual-level attitudes. That is people on average oppose sexual minorities' rights more in countries with higher levels of religiosity (Dotti-Sani & Quaranta, 2021). Along the same line, a large number of studies confirm a negative relationship between religiosity (in terms of self-reported religiosity) and acceptance of sexual minorities (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020; van den Akker et al., 2013). According to Worthen et al. (2017), more religious students are less likely to favor same-sex marriage, which is consistent with opposition toward sexual and gender minority individuals and different-gender parents. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for spiritual leaders to express their views against same-sex love and same-sex relationships (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). As Halman & van Ingen (2015) note "religion provides a moral compass by which devout people are more reluctant to accept [...] homosexuality". Overall empirical studies demonstrate the negative relationship between religiosity and acceptance of sexual and gender minority individuals (Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015). However, most of the aforementioned studies focus on general attitudes rather than attitudes toward equal adoption rights. In addition, there has simultaneously been a significant effect of religiosity and right-wing political views in public debates and attitudes toward same-sex parenthood (Scandurra et al., 2021). Overall, adoption is considered a significantly sensitive topic because people tend to consider it as a public rather than a private matter like for example sexual orientation (Takacs et al., 2016). Therefore, individuals may be reluctant to support same-sex adoption rights even though they support same-sex relationships. Hence, this study examines if individual-level differences in religiosity and political positioning have significant discriminative power.

Political Ideology

One of the most significant factors influencing attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities and their rights is the conservative political ideology. In particular, political conservatives are more likely to oppose these rights (Armenia, 2017; Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021; Sherkat et al., 2011; Woodford et al., 2013). Furthermore, in the European context conservative defenders in several countries, including Greece, still oppose the legal recognition of same-sex couples' rights to kinship legitimating one dominant family formation and framing same-sex parenthood as a threat to heteronormative normalcy (Lasio & Serri, 2019). Moreover, those who identify with more conservative political views are

more likely to oppose same-sex marriage (Armenia & Troia, 2017; Grigoropoulos, 2018). Previous research data show that political conservatism is associated with negative attitudes toward same-sex marriage and parenting (Baiocco et al., 2018; Costa et al., 2014). Petruccelli et al. (2015 as cited in De Simone et al., 2020) showed that left-wing political leaning correlated with positive beliefs about same-sex parenthood. Kuntz et al. (2015) demonstrate the positive relationship between openness to change and acceptance of sexual and gender minority individuals while conservatism is linked to opposite outcomes. All in all, research data show that right-wing individuals are considered less favorable towards sexual and gender individuals and towards same-sex couples' family rights (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020).

Grounded on a social cognition framework, political ideology is a powerful motivational force (Jost et al., 2003; Jost & Amodio, 2012). Conservatism emphasizes that existing socio-political and economic arrangements are fair justifying in this way inequality (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). In addition, conservative ideology is driven by implicit needs for security and certainty (Jost & Amodio, 2012). Thus, in the current research, we suggest that political ideology as a fundamental belief system that drives the endorsement of social inequality serves to justify prejudice toward sexual minorities' rights (Hegarty & Golden, 2008).

Sexual prejudice

Herek (2009, p.67) defines sexual stigma as “stigma attached to any nonheterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community”. Heterosexism (a form of structural sexual stigma) reinforces power differentials through the existence of sexual stigma in social institutions (Herek, 2009). This is evident in laws against same-sex marriage and same-sex couples' adoption rights as well as the lack of non-discrimination laws (Kaufman et al., 2022). Thus, hegemonic heteronormative norms perpetuate homonegativity, stigmatization, and discrimination against sexual minorities and same-sex-parent families (Lingiardi et al., 2016).

Transitioning to and doing parenthood for same-sex parent families differ in social and legal recognition in different socio-cultural contexts. More specifically, while there are countries where same-sex couples can marry, adopt, or utilize artificial reproductive techniques and be acknowledged as parents even without biological kinship, these rights are denied in other countries or are only partially recognized (ILGA, 2021). Thus, due to different levels of social stigma and legal constraints concerning access to adoption, the pathway toward same-sex parenthood negotiates a complex social terrain formed by social pressures while creating new avenues for parenting roles (Reczek, 2020). Moreover, opposition to raising children in lesbian and gay households derives from the wider cultural and political context and from a dominant institutionalized heteronormativity, that opposes same-sex parenthood (Baiocco et al., 2013; Bettinsoli et al., 2020; Lasio et al., 2020). The stigmatization of child-care practices that deviate from the default of heterosexual couple-based monogamy and go beyond the biological definitions of kinship highlight that much remains to be accomplished to support and ensure sexual and gender minority individuals' equal treatment in all aspects of life (Bruun et al., 2020; Iraklis, 2020; 2010).

The “differences as deficit model” (Herek, 2010) provides a theoretical explanation for this stigmatization: those who deviate from normal or typical orientations find themselves the targets of prejudice since they oppose deeply held beliefs about sexuality and relationship formation. As already mentioned even though adoption is a significant pathway toward

same-sex parenthood (Baumle & Compton, 2015) research data suggest the opposition of some religiously-affiliated adoption agencies grounded on the stigmatization of same-sex couples as unfit parents (Farr et al., 2018). Thus, same-sex parent families are put in a position of high uncertainty, influencing all aspects of thinking about, transitioning to, and doing parenthood. Hence, same-sex parenting has to be considered against a background of prejudice and discrimination that stems from a macro and micro-environmental setting lessening possible social support and creating additional difficulties.

According to the theory of socializing agents, individuals' attitudes are affected by socializing agents to which individuals are exposed. This means that various forms of socialization influence the attitudes of people (see Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Examples of socializing agents related to opposition to sexual and gender minority individuals are, as aforementioned, religiosity and conservative political ideology. To summarize religiosity and conservative political views are two critical factors as regards attitudes toward sexual and gender minority individuals. In particular, they consider the recognition of parenting rights to same-sex couples as a threat against a natural order or natural family confirming in this way heterosexuality as a prerequisite to good parenting (Lasio et al, 2019).

As Hogg and Vaughan (2005, p.150) argue “attitudes are made of beliefs, feelings and behavioral tendencies” towards significant topics in someone's life or community's life. The competence to acknowledge negative attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples could provide a more detailed understanding of the societal challenges same-sex couples and same-sex parent families may face, promote research on attitudes-based discrimination, offer ways to counteract society's negative beliefs that may affect same-sex couples lives in different ways, and provide a better comprehension of dominant stereotypes which inform the public on specific topics. To accomplish the above-mentioned aims research data illustrating the existence or inexistence of specific attitudes is necessary. Also, the examination of such biases can inform researchers about the supporting base of outgroup dislike.

The current study

Greece is among the European countries (e.g., Cyprus, Italy, Poland) that took considerably longer to adopt laws regulating same-sex partnerships (Dotti-Sani & Quaranta, 2021). Even though sexual and gender minority organizations and activist groups over the last twenty years advocate and advance the rights of queer community Greek governments seem to lag suggesting half-solutions to significant problems. In 2015, civil unions, or cohabitation agreements for same-sex couples, have been legislated in Greece as the first but inadequate step toward marriage equality. This is because this type of union provides fewer rights and protection in comparison to opposite-sex marriage. In 2018 a law that grants same-sex registered partners the right to foster care for children has been passed.

In addition, same-sex couples' access to parenthood and parenting rights are at the forefront of instrumentalized societal and political debates on family and sexual politics. Specifically, joint adoption is not allowed for same-sex couples in Greece. Only married heterosexual couples can adopt a child, provided they comply with certain requirements. Also in Greece, only heterosexual couples have access to assisted fertilization. It is forbidden for female couples and single women. Moreover, practices of third-party gestation are illegal (Grigoropoulos, 2022; Iraklis, 2021a,b; Voultsos et al.,

2021). Thus, because of these constraints, same-sex couples who want to become parents might travel abroad to countries where the law permits them access to artificial reproductive techniques and third-party gestation. Importantly the Greek Orthodox Church is an important institution affecting strongly moral issues, and family values, including same-sex couples' right to become adoptive or foster parents (Papadaki et al., 2022). At the same time, it promotes traditional gender and family roles arguing that the bill "denies certain children the right to grow up in a normal family environment with father and mother role models" (Smith, 2018). Same-sex parents also face several hurdles in their everyday life caused by legal and institutional constraints. For example, neither the non-biological parent nor their family of origin is acknowledged as a relative by law. Most importantly, the non-biological (i.e., the social parent) cannot exercise the rights and duties of parental authority. Moreover, the non-legally recognized parent has no rights to custody or even visitation with a child in the case for example of relationship dissolution or if something happens to the legally recognized parent.

Overall, since the nuclear family continues to be considered "core" to Greek society, same-sex couples are not allowed to adopt. Even though there is a lack of statistical information on sexual and gender minority parenting in the country there is information implying that many children are living in same-sex adoptive households (Iraklis, 2021a, 2020).

Research findings report that several individual-level characteristics are significantly related to attitudes towards sexual and gender minority individuals and marriage equality (Dotti-Sani & Quaranta, 2021). Van den Akker et al. (2013) report that conventional individuals who value traditions oppose sexual minorities to a larger extent than less conventional and less traditional ones. Other studies also report that being religious, and having a right-wing political ideology are significantly associated with opposition toward same-sex parenthood (Vecho et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2017).

Thus in the current study, we focus on two individual-level traits that have received much attention in previous literature, namely religiosity and conservative political ideology. We emphasize our analyses of these two variables because they have been largely used to predict general attitudes toward sexual minorities and can therefore be utilized as a starting point from which to study attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples.

Also, grounded on the theoretical line that exposure to less permissive and more traditional socializing agents, such as religious institutions and conservative political ideology, can significantly influence individuals' attitudes (Jakobson et al., 2013; Whitehead & Perry, 2016) we aimed to examine whether the effect of religiosity on opposition to same-sex adoption rights would be mediated by the endorsement of conservative ideology. The second aim of the current research was to investigate whether the effect of religiosity on opposition to same-sex adoption rights would be mediated by the opposition to adoption in general. The current study examined (a) whether religious opposition to equal adoption rights for same-sex couples has ideological roots. More specifically, we examined a model in which religious opposition to equal adoption rights is motivated, at least in part, by conservative political ideology. The current study also examines (b) the hypothesis that opposition to equal adoption rights for same-sex couples would be related to opposition to adoption in general. All in all, we tested a model in which religious (religiosity) opposition to same-sex adoption rights would be, at least in part, motivated by conservative ideology and accounted for by opposition to adoption in general.

Method

Procedure and Participants

A cross-sectional study was conducted between May 2 and July 2, 2022, via an online survey. The platform google forms were used. Convenience sampling with a snowball-like technique was utilized as the URL of the questionnaire was publicized on social media accounts (e.g. LinkedIn) and posts on different social networks and also on the researcher's university networks. Participants were also asked to email the study link to other possible respondents. The online study was completely anonymous, and participants indicated their agreement to participate by choosing the consent checkbox. The inclusion criteria were: a) agreeing to take part; b) being at least 18 years old. The process lasted approximately 9–12 minutes. This study followed all principles of the Declaration of Helsinki on Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects and all the ethical instructions and directions of the institution to which the researcher belongs. One hundred ninety-six respondents aged between 18 and 56 years old ($M = 24.93$; $SD = 0.50$) participated in the study: 55.1% (108) were female and 44.9% (88) male. Regarding respondents' level of education, 79.6% (156) had a degree/ or were in the process of getting a degree, 1.5 % (3) had a postgraduate degree, and 18.9 % (37) had a high school diploma. All participants were Orthodox Christians and exhibited low levels of religiosity ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .06$; see Table 1 for detailed demographic characteristics).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics presented as mean \pm stand. deviation or numbers (%)

	<i>n</i> = 196
sexual orientation	
heterosexual	140 (71.4)
Gay/Lesbian	37 (18.9)
Bisexual	14 (7.1)
Pansexual	5 (2.6)
Political positioning	
Left party	16 (8.2)
Center-left party	81 (41.3)
Center party	82 (41.8)
Center-right party	12 (6.1)
Right party	5 (2.6)

Footnote. Percentages are column percentages.

Measures

Explanatory variables

Socio-Demographic Variables

In the demographic section of the questionnaire, participants gave background information about their age (reported by participants in a numerical entry box), gender (male, female, transgender, other—any descriptor of gender participants' felt comfortable with), sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, other), level of education (below high school, high school diploma, university degree/ undergraduate student, postgraduate degree), political positioning (assessed via a question that asked participants to place themselves on a five-point political scale; left, center-left, center, center-right, right), and religiosity (frequency of religious services attendance and frequency of praying; 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*). A single religiosity index was created. Participants' scores were averaged.

Attitudes toward Adoption

The scale used was that by Gibbons et al. (2006; Attitudes towards Adoption), whose translation accuracy for the Greek context has been verified through back-translation (e.g. "Adoptive parents love their children as though they were birth children" and "Adoption can interfere with a child's well-being"). Participants completed 11 items on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree). Two items were reversed-scored so that higher scores reflect more positive opinions toward and/or greater acceptance of adoption (Gibbons et al., 2006). In this study, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.73, 95% CI [0.66,0.80].

Outcome measure

Attitudes towards Homosexual Adoption Scale

A 10-item instrument, namely the Attitudes toward Homosexual Adoption Scale, was used to examine participants' attitudes toward same-sex adoption rights (see Whatley et al., 2016). Translation accuracy for the Greek context has been verified through back-translation (e.g., "Children adopted by same-sex couples are socially stigmatized"). A seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree) was used to evaluate responses. The negatively worded questions were re-coded so that higher scores were indicative of more positive attitudes toward same-sex adoption. In this study, Cronbach's alpha value was 0.87, 95% CI [0.84,0.89].

Factorial structure of the Attitudes towards Homosexual Adoption Scale

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted on the ten items of the Attitudes towards Homosexual Adoption Scale, to test the measurement model. Using AMOS software, the CFA was conducted using the maximum likelihood method. Sample size recommendations of a minimum of 100 to 200 participants for CFA were adequately met (Kline, 2005). The model-fit measures were used to assess the model's overall goodness of fit (CMIN/df, GFI, CFI, TLI, SRMR, and RMSEA). Initially, CFA did not demonstrate a satisfactory fit to the data: CMIN/df = 3.128, GFI = .896, CFI = .931, TLI = .911, SRMR = .0683, RMSEA = .104. Next, the Modification Indices suggested that an improved model fit could be achieved through the inclusion of additional covariance paths (Figure 1). A new CFA was computed to test the

measurement model and all values were within their respective common acceptance levels (see Bentler, 1990; Hu & Bentler, 1998; Ullman, 2001). The one-factor model yielded an adequate fit (Figure 1) for the data: CMIN/df = 1.598, GFI = .950, CFI = .982, TLI = .975, SRMR = .048, RMSEA = .055 (Table 2). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the Attitudes towards Homosexual Adoption Scale was $\alpha = 0.87$, 95% CI [0.84,0.89].

Table 2. CFA model Fit

Fit Indices	Recommended Value	Source(s)	Obtained Value
GFI	>.90	Hair et al. (2010)	.950
CFI	>.90	Bentler (1990)	.982
TLI	>.90	Bentler (1990)	.975
SRMR	<.08	Hu & Bentler (1998)	.048
RMSEA	<.08	Hu & Bentler (1998)	.055

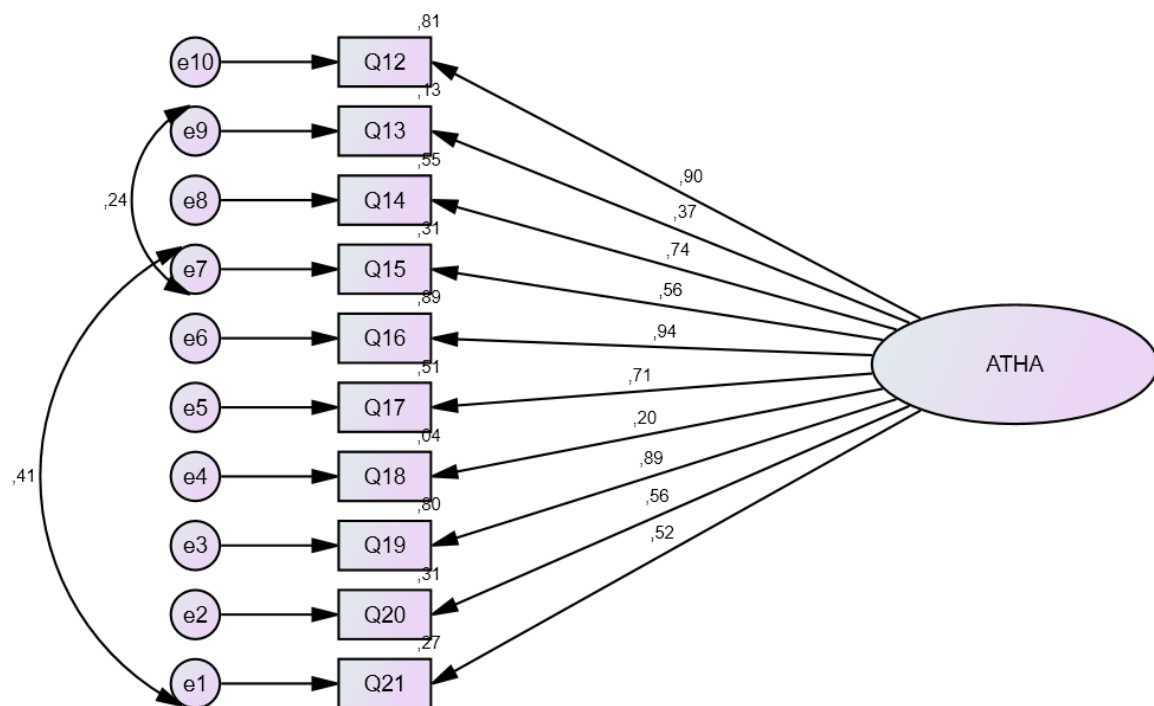


Figure 1. CFA of the proposed model

Note. ATHA = Attitudes towards Homosexual Adoption

Design and Statistical analysis

A between-subject, correlational design was employed. For the attitudes towards homosexual adoption scale (ATHA), religiosity, and attitudes towards adoption a single value was computed based on the average of all scale- items (see also section Measures). IBM SPSS Statistics version 19 and IBM AMOS 20 were used to analyze the data. Data screening techniques were used before the main statistical analysis. The Mahalanobis distances were used to examine outliers in the data. No outliers were detected (see Hair et al., 1998). Next, the normal range for skewness and kurtosis is considered to be between +2 and -2 for normal distribution according to the criteria by George and Mallory (2010), and that assumption was satisfied as no outliers were detected. A bivariate correlation was generated to explore the associations between variables of interest. Next, we examined our hypotheses by performing a bootstrapping analysis for parallel multiple mediation models (Hayes, 2013; Model 4). Bootstrapping bypasses power concerns in samples less than 200 (Hoyle & Kenny, 1999). The alpha level was set at 0.05.

Results

Descriptive results

To investigate the relationship between the variables of the research, Pearson correlation analysis was performed between all variables of interest, after the statistical assumptions were checked. The results are presented in Table 3. ATHA was positively associated with attitudes towards adoption ($r_{181} = .56, p < .01$), and negatively related with political positioning ($r_{181} = -.58, p < .01$) and religiosity ($r_{181} = -.44, p < .01$). Religiosity was positively related to political positioning ($r_{181} = .43, p < .01$), and negatively related to attitudes towards adoption ($r_{181} = -.203, p < .01$). Attitudes toward adoption was negatively associated with political positioning ($r_{181} = -.30, p < .01$). Overall, it seems that support for left parties, lower levels of religiosity, and positive attitudes towards adoption are related to positive attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples.

Table 3. Cross-Scale Correlations for the study variables (n = 196)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
<i>Variables</i>						
1. Political positioning	2.78	.05	—			
2. Attitudes towards Adoption	2.63	.091	-.308**	—		
3. Religiosity	2.88	.359	.433**	-.203**	—	
4. ATHA			-.586**	.566**	-.441**	—

Note. ATHA = Attitudes towards Homosexual Adoption. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Mediation Analysis

Based on our hypotheses and the pattern of bivariate correlations we assessed the mediating role of political positioning and attitudes toward adoption on the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples (ATHA). The results revealed a significant indirect effect of religiosity on attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples through political positioning ($b = -.215$) as confidence intervals did not include zero. The study also found a significant indirect effect of religiosity on attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples through attitudes toward adoption in general ($b = -.1110$), as confidence intervals did not include zero, supporting this study's hypothesis. Furthermore, the direct effect of religiosity on attitudes toward homosexual adoption in presence of the mediators was also significant ($b = -.2600$, $p < .001$). Hence, both political positioning and attitudes toward adoption partially mediated the relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples. The mediation summary is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Mediation Analysis

Total Effect Religiosity → ATHA	Direct Effect Religiosity → ATHA	Relationship	Indirect Effect	Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
-.5869	-.2600 (.000)	H1: Religiosity → Political positioning → ATHA	-.2158	-.3484	-.1201
		H2: Religiosity → Attitudes toward Adoption → ATHA	-.1110	-.2137	-.0280

Note ATHA = Attitudes toward Homosexual Adoption

Discussion

The current study highlights the social normative pressures that same-sex partners face due to negative social attitudes around the heated issue of same-sex adoption rights. In their studies, Lasio and Serri (2017) and Garbagnoli et al. (2014) argue that same-sex parenthood is represented as a threat to the natural order or natural family. Papadaki et al. (2022) report that same-sex couples' adoption rights represent a challenge on several levels as the existing Greek laws restrict same-sex couples from adoption. Thus, although attitudes toward sexual and gender minority individuals may have improved the issue of adoption by same-sex couples remains strongly sensitive since people make use of their own moral assumptions concerning what is best for a child. In addition, their attitudes toward same-sex couples' adoption rights may be more difficult to change (Sani & Quaranta, 2020). More specifically, even though there have been legal advancements against discrimination toward sexual and gender minorities and their rights in Greece adoption is currently limited to heterosexual couples (Papadaki et al., 2022). In addition, although previous studies in Greece have explored attitudes toward sexual minorities (Grigoropoulos, 2022c; Grigoropoulos & Kordoutis, 2015; Grigoropoulos et al., 2010; Iraklis, 2010; Iraklis & Kordoutis, 2015) there is limited research regarding attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples (Papadaki et al., 2022). Therefore, this study expands the literature analyzing the attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples in

Greece.

Grounded on the theoretical line that individual attitudes are significantly influenced by exposure to specific socializing agents such as religious institutions, and conservative political ideology (Whitehead & Perry, 2016) this study examined whether the effect of religiosity on attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples would be mediated by political positioning and attitudes toward adoption in general. The findings of this study support the role of specific socializing agents in determining participants' attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples. Specifically, political positioning and attitudes toward adoption in general, mediated the association between religiosity and attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples. At the same time, the fact that religiosity remained significant when political positioning and attitudes toward adoption were entered into the model proposes that religiosity also exerted an independent effect on opposition towards adoption by same-sex couples. This study's results coincide with previous studies in this field showing that attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples may be negatively affected by the society's-wide system notion of "normality" (Callahan & Loscocco, 2021). The "differences as deficit model" (Herek, 2010) provides a theoretical explanation for this stigmatization: those who deviate from normal or typical orientations find themselves the targets of prejudice since they oppose deeply held beliefs about sexuality and relationship formation. Importantly, already known variables accounting for opposition toward same-sex couples, such as religiosity and conservative political ideology, have also a significant explanatory power when it comes to adoption by same-sex couples. Thus, dominant conservative socializing agents devalue adoption by same-sex couples. Taking into account that religions provide believers with a precise moral framework, that forms specific attitudes toward different social groups, attitudes toward adoption equality may echo religious proscriptions. Any violation of the heteronormative model frames the non-conforming individuals as deviant (Herek, 2010). In addition, if this notion of "normality" is left unchallenged it may further isolate sexual and gender minority individuals and their children (see Glass et al., 2016). Hence, based on this study's results we could argue that opposition to the "difficult" issue of adoption by same-sex couples may be ameliorated through exposure to more permissive and less traditional socializing agents.

The fact that participants in certain social groups are more likely to oppose same-sex couples' adoption rights demonstrates that homonegativity at the individual level persists, especially in a country such as Greece that lags in the process of equalizing family rights. Therefore, institutional change may be a prerequisite when changes in public opinion occur at a slower pace. Understanding predictors of same-sex couples' adoption rights can reveal the ways sex normativity functions as a dominant social system and suggest new ways to avoid it. Thus, the current study by examining the attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples, in contexts that are less developed in terms of sexual and gender minority rights, can suggest ways of altering individuals' attitudes. For example, a key policy implication of the current study is to persuade policymakers to utilize educational institutions together with legal institutions to protect same-sex couples' adoption rights and same-sex parent families from discrimination. In addition, ongoing seminars or courses for adoption practitioners may promote affirmative practice with same-sex families and their children (Papadaki et al., 2022). Likewise, activists could use this study's results to examine from where negative attitudes originate and thus be in a better position to prevent opposition to adoption by same-sex couples. However, it should be noted that simply emphasizing this study's findings would not change negative attitudes and opposition. Research on belief perseverance suggests that these results may be ignored or devalued as usually individuals fail to revise their (negative) beliefs in light of new

information (see Nestler, 2010).

Importantly, the child is the most significant individual in the adoption process and all efforts should be made to improve the life of a child. This study's results can benefit children of same-sex parents by producing and promoting greater knowledge concerning opposition to same-sex parent families since adults in many cases project their views onto children making them the targets of prejudice (see Patterson, 2013). Overall, the current study makes two significant contributions. First, it addresses a dearth in same-sex couples' adoption rights research, especially in Greece, and second, it identifies specific context-related socializing agents that influence attitudes towards same-sex couples' adoption rights.

Limitations

The generalizability of the current research results is influenced by the sampling procedures used to gather our data. Furthermore, research on the internet limits the participation of different social groups. Hence, another limitation is the homogeneity of the participants' group, who are mostly well-educated Orthodox Christians. Future studies could emphasize collecting data from a more diverse sample.

Conclusion

This study's results propose that despite the increasingly supportive attitudes towards sexual and gender minority individuals in Western countries citizens do not fully support same-sex couples' adoption rights displaying that the full integration of same-sex relationships and same-sex parent families is out of reach (Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Although it is always a question of whether public beliefs form legal modifications or vice versa (Kazyak & Stange, 2018) attitudes may have significant implications for policy and law. In addition, growing up in a socio-cultural context that offers different and multiple models of relationships and family formations may have a profound influence on broader notions of gender and sexuality. Overall, this study's findings demonstrate that individual-level variables such as religiosity and conservative political ideology are powerful predictors of both general and more specific attitudes towards adoption. This study's results demonstrate that exposure to less permissive and more traditional socializing agents can significantly influence individuals' attitudes toward same-sex adoption.

Ethical Compliance Section

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The authors have no funding to disclose

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare they have no conflict of interest.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Compliance with Ethical Standards: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the International Hellenic university research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent

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

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