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Czech psychology students' attitudes towards same-sex parenting

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ABSTRACT

Czech society has been increasingly more liberal toward LGBTI individuals and their parenting rights, although the Czech legislative system still does not treat same-sex couples equally to heterosexual couples. Attitudes of professionals who work with children and families are particularly important, as prejudice might be harmful in these circumstances. The present study aimed to evaluate the attitudes of future psychologists, participants were 164 psychology students from a university in Prague, the Czech Republic. They were presented with a vignette depicting a situation of a couple in a restaurant with their 4-year-old son who gets upset during the meal. The vignette was followed by a set of Likert scale items evaluating the parents' and the child's behaviour. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight versions of the vignette varying by the way how the couple solved the situation, the sexual orientation of the parents, and the gender of the acting parent. Overall, the couples were rated more favourably in the positive parenting situation than in the negative, and participants evaluated gay and lesbian parents more favourably than heterosexual parents. Results are discussed taking into account specific sample characteristics and the social climate regarding LGBTI rights in the Czech society.

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Same-sex parenting; modern sexual prejudice; quasi-experiment; Czech Republic; psychology students

Introduction

Same-sex parenting has become a frequently discussed topic in the Czech Republic in the recent years. Many European countries have already granted gay and lesbian couples the right to marry and jointly adopt children, most recently Portugal (2016) and Germany (2017). Nonetheless, the Czech Republic is still awaiting such steps that would guarantee equal rights to same-sex couples as to heterosexual couples. Since 2006, same-sex couples can officially register their partnership; however, registered partnership is rather a formal status seen as inferior to marriage in many ways. Registered partners cannot share property; do not become related to one another's family; cannot earn widow pension in case of death of the partner; cannot jointly adopt children, nor officially stepparent their partner's children. Furthermore, until recently, individuals who registered in a same-sex partnership automatically lost their right to adopt a child individually. The government approved an amendment to the law that abolished such discriminatory policy in 2016.

Along with other post-communist countries, the Czech Republic is below the EU average in the rating of legal and human rights policies for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTI)

population, ranking 21st out of the 28 EU countries (The European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association [ILGA-Europe], 2019). Takács and Szalma (2011) suggest that former communist countries have been slower in the legalisation of same-sex relationships than other European countries. Accordingly, more than a half of the Czech population (53%) believe that life would be difficult for anyone openly homosexual in their town or community (Černá, 2017). Moreover, a survey on discrimination of LGBTI community revealed that 56% of respondents experienced discrimination, with gay participants being more likely to experience discrimination than lesbians (Pechová, 2009). Yet, in spite of the aforementioned facts, trends show a constant liberalisation in Czech public opinion regarding LGBTI issues (Beňová et al., 2007; Weiss, 2012). In fact, the Czech Republic has been found to be considerably more accepting of homosexuality than other post-communist European countries¹ (Štulhofer & Rimac, 2009). Recent polls have shown that 68% of the Czech population think that gay and lesbians should have the right to adopt the children of their partner, and 51% think that they should have the right to jointly adopt a child from foster care (Černá, 2017).

In general, public opinion across Europe has become increasingly more supportive of equal marriage rights for same-sex and heterosexual couples; however, they are more hesitant in granting gay and lesbian couples equal rights to become parents (Hollekim, Slaatten, & Anderssen, 2012; Vecho, Poteat, & Schneider, 2016). Although scientific evidence constantly shows that same-sex couples can be as competent parents as heterosexual couples, same-sex parenting has been a persistently controversial topic (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Carone, Baiocco, Ioverno, Chirumbolo, & Lingiardi, 2017; Farr, 2017; Fedewa, Black, & Ahn, 2015; Gartrell, Bos, & Koh, 2018; Green, Rubio, Rothblum, Bergman, & Katuzny, 2019; Schneider & Vecho, 2015). Negative attitudes usually stem from the concerns about the psychological and sexual development of children growing up with gay and lesbian parents (Hollekim et al., 2012). Evidence shows, however, that there are no significant differences in psychological and sexual development of children and adolescents raised by same-sex couples compared to those raised by heterosexual couples (e.g. Carone, Lingiardi, Chirumbolo, & Baiocco, 2018; Farr, Bruun, Doss, & Patterson, 2018; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Lavner, Waterman, & Peplau, 2012; Schneider & Vecho, 2015).

For instance, a recent study by Green et al. (2019) explored well-being of children raised by gay fathers by surrogacy. The results have shown that children raised by gay fathers presented lower scores in externalising (i.e. aggression) and internalising (i.e. depression) problems compared to a normative sample. Baiocco, Carone, Ioverno, and Lingiardi (2018) compared the psychological development of children aged 3–11 years raised by gay, lesbian and heterosexual parents. Children of gay fathers and lesbian mothers showed fewer psychological problems than children of heterosexual parents. Moreover, gay fathers described themselves as more competent and satisfied with their couple relationship and reported higher levels of family cohesion than did heterosexual parents.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study (Farr, 2017) with a sample of adoptive families with school age children provided evidence that children's well-being and family functioning do not differ on the basis of parental sexual orientation, but children's behaviour problems and family functioning are more related to earlier child adjustment issues and parenting stress. In fact, rather than parents' sexual orientation and gender, the key variables that impact the child's welfare seem to be the quality of family relationships, parental status and perceived stigma, national policies and the legal recognition of the couple as parents (Carone et al., 2017, 2018; Farr, 2017; Patterson, 2006, 2017). As a result, many organisations such as American Academy of Paediatrics (Perrin, 2002), American Psychological Association (2008), or American Psychiatric Association (2013) have issued statements in which they have unanimously supported same-sex marriage and parenting.

Attitudes of heterosexuals towards LGBTI individuals have been extensively studied over several decades and reviews have indicated that, in general, negative attitudes have been less evident than in the past (Herek, 1984, 2000; Herek & McLemore, 2013). In fact, the expression of prejudice has become subtler as overt discrimination is considered inappropriate and criminalised in most modern societies. Recent studies indicate, however, that prejudice towards same-sex parenting is still

prevalent. In particular, male gender, older age, religiosity, having a lower level of educational attainment, having less contact with lesbian and gay people, and holding conservative political ideologies seem to be the most important predictors of high prejudice towards same-sex parents (Averett, Strong-Blakeney, Nalavany, & Ryan, 2011; Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2015; Costa & Salinas-Quiroz, 2018; Gato & Fontaine, 2016, 2017; Ioverno et al., 2018).

Nonetheless, while the overt expression of sexual prejudice may have decreased, the question remains as to whether sexual prejudice might be expressed in more covert or subtle ways. Previously, McConahay (1986) introduced the idea of modern racial prejudice, namely as people become less willing to overtly display racial prejudice, they express it in more indirect ways. For instance, rather than overtly engage in hate speech, people are more likely to express their prejudice in situations by criticising a person's behaviour, judging them responsible for a negative outcome or by making other such causal attributions (Massey, 2007). The concept of modern prejudice has also been applied to sexual orientation (Massey, 2009). Instead of focusing directly on the attitudes towards same-sex parents as a group, sexual prejudice may be better evaluated by assessing, for example, the parenting abilities of same-sex couples or the psychological development of their children.

Several studies explored the modern prejudice towards same-sex parenting in this way. Most studies have used samples of university students (Massey, 2007; Massey, Merriwether, & Garcia, 2013; Morse, McLaren, & McLachlan, 2007) and, in particular, students from helping professions such as psychology and social work (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Gato & Fontaine, 2016, 2017; Rye & Meaney, 2010). Some of these studies used a quasi-experimental design in which participants were first presented with a vignette describing a family situation and then subsequently answered questions related to the vignette. The vignettes depict an adoption scenario (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999; Gato & Fontaine, 2016; Gato, Freitas, & Fontaine, 2012; Rye & Meaney, 2010), or a disruptive family situation such as parents dealing with a child having a temper (Massey, 2007; Massey et al., 2013; Morse et al., 2007). Participants are given identical vignettes except that the couples' sexual orientation is described or presented as gay, lesbian, or heterosexual, and in the case of the adoptive situation the gender of the child may also vary.

Overall, vignette studies consistently found higher levels of prejudice towards same-sex parents than towards their different-sex counterparts. One of the pioneer works using the quasi-experimental design revealed that in the U.S.A., psychologists were less likely to recommend custody to gay and lesbian couples than to heterosexual couples (Crawford et al., 1999). In other studies, participants believed that children raised by same-sex parents were more likely than those raised by heterosexual couples to experience confusion over their sexual orientation and gender identity, grew up to be gay or lesbian themselves, and experience teasing and difficulties in relationships (Crawford et al., 1999; Gato & Fontaine, 2016; Morse et al., 2007; Rye & Meaney, 2010). Some studies, however, found opposite results as same-sex parents were rated more favourably than heterosexual couples (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Massey, 2007). Interestingly, in Massey's (2007) study, it was the gender of the parent who actively intervened in disciplining the child that appeared to make a difference as participants evaluated women less favourably than men. Massey (2007) argued that compared with fathers, mothers are subjected to greater expectations regarding parenting and as such, women are more likely than men to be criticised when their child is seen to misbehave.

This study

This study is part of a larger international study comparing attitudes towards same-sex parenting in five countries (the Czech Republic, Brazil, Chile, Portugal, and the UK). It is the first to explore expression of modern sexual prejudice in a country that has upheld a traditional legislation on marriage and parenting in the face of pressure to endorse equal right legislation that supports and promotes LGBTI rights across Europe. The study develops previous research and aims to evaluate the indirect expression of modern prejudice towards same-sex parents among Czech psychology students. We were interested in how modern prejudice towards gay men and lesbians affects the evaluation of the parenting skills of

same-sex parents, and to what extent parental sexual orientation influences causal attributions about the child's behaviour. Some previous studies (e.g. Barron, Struckman-Johnson, Quevillon, & Banka, 2008; Ellis, Kitzinger, & Wilkinson, 2003; Webb & Chonody, 2014) have focused on exploring factors that may influence attitudes towards gay men and lesbians such as gender, religiosity, social status, education; however, the effect of these variables was not addressed in our work as the sample was fairly homogenous in this regard (i.e. university students, mostly female and non-religious). The design was based on the previous studies using a vignette depicting a disruptive family situation in a restaurant (see Massey, 2007; Massey et al., 2013). We adopted the design of Massey et al. (2013) using vignettes with a positive and a negative parenting situation, followed by a set of Likert-type scale items.

In this study, we expected that the parenting skills of all couples and their handling of the situation would be evaluated more favourably in the positive parenting situation than in the negative parenting situation (Hypothesis 1; Massey et al., 2013). Most previous studies yielded more positive attitudes towards heterosexual couples than towards same-sex couples (e.g. Crawford et al., 1999; Gato & Fontaine, 2016; Massey, 2007; Morse et al., 2007). We thus hypothesised that the parenting skills of the same-sex parents and their handling of the situation would be evaluated more negatively than those of heterosexual parents (Hypothesis 2). Such results were expected in both the positive and the negative parenting situation. Women are usually attributed communal/warmth traits (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Eagly & Steffen, 1984;) and are therefore expected to perform better in family tasks. Given this and based on Massey's (2007) assumption of higher parenting expectations regarding women, the gender of the acting parent was expected to influence participants' evaluation with women being evaluated less favourably than men in the negative parenting situation, irrespective of sexual orientation (Hypothesis 3). Furthermore, judgements about the normality and age-appropriateness of the child's behaviour are expected to become more negative in same-sex couples. The modern prejudice literature suggests that people who do not want to express prejudice overtly will express it in more subtle ways. Evaluating the parenting of same-sex couples provides an ideal context in which sexual prejudice may be expressed in this way. A heterosexual observer's explanations for the cause of the undesirable behaviours may shift from the child to the fact that the parents are of the same sex. Behaviours otherwise viewed as normal and attributed to the child's age then may be seen as abnormal and caused by the child's family situation (Massey, 2007). Therefore, participants were expected to make an external causal attribution in the case of same-sex parents and attribute the undesirable behaviour of the child to the family situation more frequently in these circumstances than in the case of heterosexual parents (Hypothesis 4). In the same light, participants were expected to evaluate the child's undesirable behaviour as less normal (Hypothesis 5), less age-appropriate (Hypothesis 6), less likely to be a consequence of child's personality (Hypothesis 7), and more indicative of a deeper developmental problem (Hypothesis 8) in a same-sex couple family than in a heterosexual couple family. In sum, it was expected that the couples' sexual orientation, the gender of the acting parent, and the positive/negative parenting scenario (independent variables) would have a direct effect on the evaluation of the parenting competency of the couples and the child's behaviour (dependent variables).

Methods

Instruments

The data were collected using an online questionnaire composed of a vignette and items in the form of multiple choice and 7-point Likert-type scales. Participants were instructed to read a case vignette and then answer questions related to that vignette. Further measures included a socio-demographic questionnaire and a set of variables that were not explored in this study.

Case vignette. The vignette was adapted from the previous work of Massey et al. (2013). It depicts a situation of a couple and their 4-year-old son in a restaurant, the child gets upset during the meal and the reaction of the couple to the child's behaviour is described in two different scenarios. In the

positive scenario, the parents solve the situation in a calm and thoughtful manner; in the negative scenario, they become frustrated by the child's behaviour and one of the parents eventually slaps the child's hand. Eight versions of the vignette were produced by varying the positive and negative scenario, the sexual orientation of the couple, and the gender of the acting parent in the case of the heterosexual couple.

Parenting questions. The vignette was followed by seven items to evaluate the parenting skills of the couple and the child's behaviour (Massey, 2007). Three items evaluated the parenting competency ('How would you rate the parenting skills of the two adults?'; 'How well did the parents handle the situation?'; 'How likely is it that the behaviour is a consequence of the child's family situation?'), and four items evaluated the child's behaviour ('How normal is the child's behaviour?'; 'How likely it is that the child's behaviour indicates a deeper developmental problem?'; 'How likely it is that this behaviour is the consequence of the child's personality?'; 'How likely is it that this behaviour is a normal consequence of the child's age?'). Participants rated each item according to a 7-point Likert-type scale and the answer anchors varied according to the item.

Procedure

Students were recruited during their regular classes; they were given a brief presentation about the research, and then were given an information sheet about the study along with a consent form. They were advised that the study was concerned with psychology students' attitudes towards different family configurations, and that some personal questions such as their age or sexual orientation would be asked. Students who wished to participate were asked to sign the consent form and to provide their email address to receive a link to the online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and did not include any financial remuneration; however, students were offered a chocolate bar during the presentation, and a possibility of getting a course credit for participation obtained during the feedback session at the end of the study. Data collection was initiated after approval from a University Review Board. Data were collected between December 2017 and the end of January 2018. Participants were sent an email with the questionnaire and had six weeks to complete it. A reminder email was sent during the second and the fourth week. Altogether 206 students received the email followed by two reminders and, in total, 164 students filled in the online questionnaire (80% participation rate).

Sample

The sample was composed of 164 psychology students from a university in Prague, 135 identified their gender as female (82.3%), 28 (17.1%) as male, and 1 (0.6%) preferred not to disclose. The age ranged between 19 and 31 years ($M = 22.13$, $SD = 2.37$), most participants identified their gender as heterosexual or mostly heterosexual (93.3%), were single (95.7%), and not religious (76.2%).

Design

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight versions of the vignette: (i) positive parenting, heterosexual couple, acting man ($n = 21$); (ii) positive parenting, heterosexual couple, acting woman ($n = 18$); (iii) positive parenting, gay couple ($n = 26$); (iv) positive parenting, lesbian couple ($n = 25$); (v) negative parenting, heterosexual couple, acting man ($n = 16$); (vi) negative parenting, heterosexual couple, acting woman ($n = 15$); (vii) negative parenting, gay couple ($n = 21$); and (viii) negative parenting, lesbian couple ($n = 22$).

Analysis

Two $2 \times 2 \times 2$ multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were performed to investigate the main effect and possible interactions of the parenting situation (positive/negative), parental sexual orientation (lesbian/gay vs. heterosexual), and the gender of the acting parent (male/female) on participants' evaluation of (i) the parental competence, and (ii) the child psychological development. In both analyses, *Box's M* test did not reveal significant differences in the homogeneity of the cells; hence, *Wilks' λ* was used for the interpretation. Further ANOVA univariate tests were performed whenever significant effects were detected.

Results

Parent outcomes

As shown in Table 1, the parenting situation and parental sexual orientation had a significant effect on participants' evaluation of the parental competence items. Further univariate analysis (see Table 2) show that parental reactions to the child's behaviour (positive/negative) significantly influenced how participants evaluated parenting skills and the parental handling of the situation. Overall, the parenting skills of the couples were rated significantly higher in the positive parenting situation ($M = 5.30$; $SD = 1.09$) than in the negative parenting situation ($M = 3.86$; $SD = 1.32$). Also, participants evaluated the way how the couples handled the situation significantly more favourably in the positive parenting situation ($M = 5.50$; $SD = 1.24$) than in the negative situation ($M = 4.00$; $SD = 1.29$), and these results support Hypothesis 1.

As further shown in Table 2, parental sexual orientation did not have a significant effect on participants' evaluation of the parenting skills of the couples; however, it did have a significant effect on participants' evaluation of the way the parent's handled the situation and on participants' attribution of the child's behaviour to the family situation. In the negative parenting situation, participants evaluated the handling of the situation more favourably in same-sex couples ($M = 4.42$; $SD = 1.14$) than in heterosexual couples ($M = 3.42$; $SD = 1.28$). Also, in both the negative and positive situations, participants were significantly less likely to see the child's behaviour as a consequence of the family situation in same-sex couples (positive: $M = 2.59$; $SD = 1.33$; negative: $M = 2.28$; $SD = 1.37$) than in heterosexual couples (positive: $M = 3.56$; $SD = 1.45$; negative: $M = 3.77$; $SD = 1.56$). Thus, participants evaluated same-sex couples more favourably than heterosexual couples on both parental skills and family situation, which is in contrast with what was predicted in Hypotheses 2 and 4.

Table 1. Multivariate analysis of the main dependant variables and their interactions.

Measures	Wilks' λ	F	df	Error df	p	Eta ²
Parental competence						
Positive/negative (PN)	.626	30.716	3	154	<.001	.374
Parental sexual orientation (PSO)	.818	11.448	3	154	<.001	.182
Acting parent gender (APG)	.992	.424	3	154	.736	.008
PN*PSO	.954	2.454	3	154	.065	.046
PN*APG	.975	1.306	3	154	.274	.025
PSO*APG	.978	1.177	3	154	.321	.022
PN*PSO*APG	.953	2.517	3	154	.060	.047
Child behaviour						
Positive/negative (PN)	.982	.719	4	153	.580	.018
Parental sexual orientation (PSO)	.906	3.991	4	153	.004	.094
Acting parent gender (APG)	.971	1.139	4	153	.340	.029
PSO*PN	.978	.880	4	153	.477	.022
PN*APG	.977	.892	4	153	.470	.023
PSO*APG	.925	3.080	4	153	.018	.075
PN*PSO*APG	.996	.167	4	153	.955	.004

Table 2. Further analysis of dependent variables where significant results were identified.

Factors	Measures	Sum of Sq	df	Mean Sq	F	p		
Parental competence	Positive/negative	Skills	88.395	1	88.39	61.794	<.001	
		Handling	98.134	1	98.13	64.780	<.001	
		Family	.174	1	.174	.088	.767	
	Parental sexual orientation	Skills	.014	1	.014	.010	.921	
		Handling	9.328	1	9.32	6.158	.014	
		Family	60.451	1	60.45	30.540	<.001	
Child behaviour	Parental sexual orientation	Normal	18.029	1	18.02	7.769	.006	
		Develop	13.075	1	13.07	9.296	.003	
		Personality	.659	1	.659	.485	.487	
		Age	.410	1	.410	.273	.602	
		PSO*APG	Normal	1.943	1	1.94	.837	.362
			Develop	.322	1	.322	.229	.633
	Personality		13.540	1	13.54	9.978	.002	
	Age		1.121	1	1.12	.745	.389	

Child outcomes

Parental sexual orientation had a significant effect also on participants' evaluation of the child behaviour items (see Table 1). ANOVAs for each dependent variable revealed that the parental sexual orientation had a significant effect on participants' evaluation of the normalcy of the child's behaviour whether the specific behaviour indicated a deeper developmental problem in the negative parenting situation (see Table 2). Participants were significantly more likely to see the child's behaviour as normal in both of the same-sex couple vignettes ($M = 5.07$; $SD = 1.58$) than in heterosexual couples ($M = 4.32$; $SD = 1.38$); and participants were also less likely to suggest that the child's behaviour indicated a deeper developmental problem in same-sex couples ($M = 2.14$; $SD = 1.01$) than in heterosexual couple vignettes ($M = 3.00$; $SD = 1.32$). Such results are in contrast with what was predicted in Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6.

No significant effects of parental sexual orientation were identified on participants' evaluation of the child's personality and age appropriateness of its behaviour. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 and Hypothesis 8 were not supported.

Finally, a significant interaction between parental sexual orientation and the gender of the acting parent was detected (see Table 1). A follow-up t-test indicated that participants were more likely to consider that the child's behaviour was a consequence of the child's personality when a woman was the acting parent ($M = 4.85$; $SD = .87$), than when a man was the acting parent ($M = 3.92$; $SD = 1.32$) in the heterosexual couple ($t(68) = -3.42$, $p = <.001$). However, no differences were found in the case of same-sex couples. This result is partially in contrast with Hypothesis 3 which predicted that mothers would be evaluated less favourably than fathers, when they were interacting with the child, irrespective of parental sexual orientation.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore Czech psychology students' attitudes towards same-sex parenting. The Czech Republic, like many post-communist countries, has been slower than western Europe and the North America to embrace LGBTI equal rights (Takács & Szalma, 2011). Although the study was conducted with a specific population, it nevertheless allowed a unique opportunity to explore modern sexual prejudice within a predominantly conservative society in the heart of Europe.

In accordance with our expectations and with the results of Massey et al. (2013), the parenting skills of all couples irrespective of sexual orientation were rated significantly higher in the positive parenting condition than in the negative parenting condition indicating that participants favoured parents that solved the child's tantrum with calm and without unnecessary violence. Similarly,

participants evaluated parental handling of the specific situation depicted in the vignette significantly more favourably in the positive parenting condition than in the negative condition.

Contrary to predictions, same-sex couples were evaluated more favourably by participants than were heterosexual couples on most measures. Interestingly, such results were more pronounced in the negative parenting situation where a possible criticism of the parents was more likely to be expressed. Participants evaluated the handling of the situation by same-sex couples more favourably than by heterosexual couples, and they were also significantly less likely to make an external causal attribution and see the child's behaviour as a consequence of the family situation in same-sex couple vignettes than in the heterosexual couple vignettes. Furthermore, participants were significantly more likely to see the child's behaviour as normal within the same-sex couple vignettes than in the heterosexual couple vignettes. Additionally, participants were less likely to report that the child's behaviour indicated a deeper developmental problem in the same-sex couple vignettes than in the heterosexual couple vignettes. Albeit unexpected, these results are in accordance with some previous evidence that has also reported more positive evaluations of same-sex parents than heterosexual parents (e.g. Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Massey, 2007; Riggs, McLaren, & Mayes, 2009). These results may be also indicative of the constant liberalisation in public opinion towards same-sex couples and same-sex parenting in the Czech society (Černá, 2017).

Contrary to the results reported by Massey (2007) and gender role orientation theories (Cuddy et al., 2008; Eagly & Steffen, 1984) the gender of the parent who intervened in the vignette and comforted the child did not make any significant difference to participants' evaluation. However, participants were more likely to make an internal attribution and suggest that the child's behaviour was a consequence of the child's personality when a woman was the acting parent in the heterosexual couple vignette, whereas no such differences were found in lesbian vs. gay couple vignettes. Previous studies of anti-homosexual prejudice have suggested that gay men are evaluated more negatively than lesbians and that this difference is primarily due to the negative attitudes of heterosexual males towards gay men (Herek & MacLemore, 2013). In this study, however, participants did not express such prejudice towards gay men. One of the explanations could be that the sample in this study was mostly composed of female students who generally hold less negative attitudes towards gay men than do their male counterparts (Herek & McLemore, 2013). Also, psychology is a field of study which presumes a more tolerant and helping mindset and therefore, students in this area might be less homophobic. As such, men who choose this profession may not be as affected by gender-prescribed roles as men from other areas where the male role stereotype can be more pervasive (Gato & Fontaine, 2016, 2017).

The main strength of this study lies in its quasi-experimental design which allowed for an indirect evaluation of participants' attitudes towards same-sex parenting. In contrast, a clear limitation relates to the sample size, as the quasi-experimental design of the study and sub-division into eight groups lead to a fragmentation of the sample and resulted in low number of participants in each group. As such, future studies should be conducted with a larger sample to allow for more complex and robust analyses. Nonetheless, the results of the study indicate that same-sex parents are viewed positively, a result that is in accordance with the liberal attitudes that are increasingly observed in the Czech Republic towards LGBT issues in general (Beňová et al., 2007; Štulhofer & Rimac, 2009; Weiss, 2012) and same-sex parenting in particular (Černá, 2017).

The Czech Republic is the last remaining European country to still place children below three years of age in institutional care. This has been a subject of wide national and international criticism as this practice may have a detrimental and life-long adverse consequence on the children's well-being and psychosocial development. Legislation from 2013 aims to prevent institutional care by promoting foster care as an alternative. Since then, the number of children placed in institutional foster care has constantly been decreasing. In 2013, there were about 16,000 children living with foster families and 10,000 children living in institutional foster care, whereas in 2017, there were almost 20,000 children living with foster families and about 8000 children in institutional foster care,

out of which about 1500 were less than three years old (Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic, 2018).

Thus, there will be an increasing need to find adults who are willing and able to be effective foster carers with large numbers of children in need of a home. Same-sex couples represent a pool of promising prospective parents. Research has demonstrated them to be as capable and as beneficial to children's welfare as heterosexual parents (Carone et al., 2018; Farr et al., 2017; Golombok et al., 2014; Green et al., 2019; Lavner et al., 2012; Patterson, 2017; Schneider & Vecho, 2015). The current legislation allows same-sex couples to become foster parents; however, they cannot adopt children. Nonetheless, there have been a lot of discussions about same-sex couples' rights to marry and adopt children. Public opinion appears to be favourable in this regard and the political will has also been increasingly supportive of the legislation (Černá, 2017). This study provides further evidence about the positive views of same-sex parents in the specific population of young Czech psychology students, further indicating a positive shift in the society towards same-sex couples' parenting rights. Unbiased views of professionals such as psychologists who may influence the decision about the future of children are particularly important (Massey et al., 2013). Creating a more equal and inclusive society is a challenge for everyone, but is especially important for professionals such as psychologists.

Note

1. Modernisation theorists have suggested that not only economic development affects people's values, but also the cultural heritage, including religion and the political context. Indeed, post-communist and Eastern Orthodox countries have been found to be more unfavourable to homosexuality than Western European and Roman Catholic countries (Gerhards, 2010; Štulhofer & Rimac, 2009).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Martin Tušl, M.Sc., completed his Master's degree in Psychology at Charles University in Prague in 2017. During his post-graduate internship he worked as a research trainee at the University of Porto studying cross-national differences in undergraduate psychology students' attitudes towards LG parenting. He worked then as a research assistant at the University of Bologna focusing on mental health in the workplace. He is now about to start his Ph.D. in Work and Organisational Psychology.

Jorge Gato, Ph.D., is a Researcher at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto (FPCEUP), Portugal. He is currently interested in the parenting plans of LGBT individuals, as well as in the training of professionals who work with current or prospective LGBT-parented families.

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