

BRIEF REPORT

Deciding to Parent or Remain Childfree: Comparing Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Childless Adults From Israel, Portugal, and the United Kingdom

Geva Shenkman¹, Jorge Gato², Fiona Tasker³, Chen Erez¹, and Daniela Leal²

¹ School of Psychology, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya

² Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto

³ Department of Psychological Sciences, Birkbeck, University of London

This study compared Israeli, Portuguese, and British childless lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) and heterosexual adults on parenthood aspirations as indicated by their desire and intent to become a parent and their concern about childlessness. For this purpose, 168 childless adults (57 self-reported as LGB) in Portugal were matched on sociodemographic variables with 168 participants from the United Kingdom and 168 participants from Israel, resulting in a sample of $n = 504$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 28.26$, $SD = 6.17$). Participants were recruited through convenience sampling and completed online questionnaires assessing parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness. Results indicated that participants from Israel and Portugal reported higher levels of parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness than participants from the United Kingdom. Parallel patterns also appeared separately for LGB and heterosexual participants between the countries. Heterosexual participants from Israel scored higher than counterparts from Portugal on parenthood intention and concern about childlessness. In addition, LGB participants in general reported lower levels of parenthood desire, intentions, and concern about childlessness than did heterosexual participants. The findings are interpreted in light of the different sociocultural contexts of the countries, that is, the individualistic values characterizing the U.K. versus the familistic values characterizing the Israeli and Portuguese contexts, alongside a strongly pronatalist stance evident in Israel and economic context in Portugal. The study contributes to the scant comparative literature on parenthood aspirations among LGB individuals as a function of cultural context by providing a multicontextual viewpoint on parenthood aspirations, sexual orientation, and diverse sociocultural contexts. Implications for clinicians are discussed.

Keywords: parenthood desire, parenthood intent, concern about childlessness, cross-cultural comparisons, parenthood aspirations

Lesbian women, gay men, and bisexual individuals (LGB) are becoming parents nowadays more than ever before due to advances in fertility technologies and legislation (e.g., Carone et al., 2020; Shenkman et al., 2020). Guzzo and Hayford's (2020) review of the factors that influence pathways to parenthood has indicated the importance of investigating differing demographic patterns of aspiration and entry into parenthood within life course processes and social context, as it is central to the study of families. We contend that appreciating not only the different contexts surrounding parenthood aspirations, but also those around remaining childfree, within different heterosexual and lesbian, gay,

bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities are together important for framing both policies and health and subjective well-being provision. Among LGB individuals, aspirations for parenthood have been differentiated by parenthood desire (i.e., expressed wishes), parenthood intent (i.e., explicit planning to become a parent), and concern about childlessness (i.e., anticipated psychosocial issues arising from childlessness; Riskind & Patterson, 2010; Tate & Patterson, 2019). Notwithstanding this attention from researchers in different countries such as Italy (e.g., Baiocco & Laghi, 2013), Portugal (Costa & Bidell, 2017), Mexico (e.g., Salinas-Quiroz et al., 2020), and Israel (e.g., Shenkman & Abramovitch, 2020), direct and purposeful comparisons between the parenthood aspirations of LGB individuals living in different sociocultural contexts have remained scarce (Leal et al., 2019). Addressing this deficit in cross-cultural comparison research, we compared the parenthood aspirations of LGB and heterosexual adults without children from three distinct sociocultural contexts (Israel, Portugal, and the United Kingdom) while matching individuals on other potentially confounding sociodemographic variables (e.g., gender, age, education level, and relational status).

Israel is known as a family-oriented and strongly pronatalist society (Birenbaum-Carmeli & Dirnfeld, 2008) leading to the lives

This article was published Online First March 11, 2021.
Geva Shenkman  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5263-8888>
Jorge Gato  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6402-3680>
Fiona Tasker  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4205-5408>
Chen Erez  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7645-4808>
Daniela Leal  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9340-0983>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Geva Shenkman, School of Psychology, Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya, Herzliya 4610101, Israel. Email: geva.shenkman@idc.ac.il

of childless people being considered empty by some (Yeshua-Katz, 2018). Biblical commandments to “be fruitful and multiply”, recurrent wars, Jewish religious openness to medically assisted reproduction (MAR), and the traumas of the Holocaust have all been suggested as contributing to a culture of familism and the high birth rate that characterizes Israel (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2016). Successive Israeli governments have produced pronatalist legislation giving support to married couples to access MAR and adoption, with motherhood seen as almost a “national mission” (Donat, 2011).

Portugal is also considered a familistic society with a strong “we” consciousness (Steinbach et al., 2016). However, Portugal currently has a low birth rate, attributed to economic factors such as a downturn in the labor market, a traditionally high youth unemployment rate, and low social expenditure targeted at young adults (e.g., housing; Oliveira et al., 2014). Economic factors such as these have been identified as a key factor affecting fertility patterns among young women (Guzzo & Hayford, 2020). Compared with Israel and Portugal, the United Kingdom is more characterized by individualistic values and an “I” consciousness (Hofstede, 2011). Correspondingly, a recent report by the [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD, 2019\)](#) showed Israel to have the highest fertility rates (3.1 children per family) of all OECD countries, with the United Kingdom and Portugal showing fertility rates of 1.7 and 1.4, respectively. Similarly, the OECD report showed that the proportion of childless women above the age of 40 was lower in Israel (10.82 %) and Portugal (8.10%) in comparison to the United Kingdom (20%).

Regarding LGB legal rights in the three countries, Portugal and the United Kingdom have progressive policies that defend LGB rights and allow same-sex marriage and adoption, although more favorable social attitudes toward LGB people have been recorded in the United Kingdom than in Portugal (e.g., [Eurobarometer, 2015](#)). In Israel, same-sex marriage is not yet legal within the country and adoption as well as surrogacy prospects are extremely curtailed (Costa & Shenkman, 2020). Prior studies have suggested that facing such legal hurdles alongside other financial, bureaucratic, and biological challenges, when trying to become a parent, may explain reports of medium size effects, indicating lowered aspirations for parenthood among LGB individuals than among heterosexual men and women (Gato et al., 2020; Shenkman et al., 2019). Interestingly, a recent study comparing LGB people from Portugal and the United Kingdom showed that despite the more progressive legislation in the United Kingdom, LGB individuals in Portugal showed greater aspiration to parenthood than did LGB peers in the United Kingdom, indicating that broader cultural processes rather than legislation alone may better explain these national differences (Leal et al., 2019). Predicated on these findings in the current study we predicted that in familistic cultural contexts (namely, Israel and Portugal) both heterosexual and LGB individuals will record a higher level of aspiration for parenthood in comparison to an individualistic context such as the United Kingdom.

In line with prior studies, we also expected to find lower aspirations to parenthood among LGB than heterosexual participants across all three countries sampled. The rationale for this derives from LGB awareness of facing legal, social, and reproductive hurdles each of which could daunt aspirations for parenthood (Gato et al., 2020; Shenkman & Abramovitch, 2020; Tate et al., 2019). Lower aspirations to parenthood among LGB also could

relate to service refusal from reproductive health centers (Stenfelt et al., 2018) or the possible internalization of homonegativity (Salinas-Quiroz et al., 2020; Simon et al., 2018). Traditionally, heterosexual couples also tend to face more pressure to have children and conform to traditional gender roles than has been experienced by LGB individuals (Allen & Mendez, 2018), although this has perhaps been changing in some contexts (Clarke et al., 2018).

The current study was designed to examine differences in aspirations to parenthood as a function of different sociocultural contexts and sexual orientation in an era when LGB individuals are planning parenthood more than ever before. In doing so, the study contributes to the scant comparative literature by providing a multicontextual consideration of parenthood aspirations and sexual orientation in diverse sociocultural contexts, namely, Israel (familistic and pronatalist), Portugal (familistic but with a low birth rate attributable to the economic prospects faced by young people), and the United Kingdom (individualistic).

Research Hypotheses

H1 states that both LGB and heterosexual participants from Israel and Portugal will report higher levels of parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness than participants from the United Kingdom.

H2 states that LGB individuals will report lower levels of parenthood desire intent, and concern about childlessness than heterosexual counterparts.

H3 states that LGB participants from Israel and Portugal will report higher levels of parenthood desires, intent, and concern about childlessness than LGB participants from the United Kingdom.

H4 states that heterosexual participants from Israel and Portugal will report higher levels of parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness than heterosexual participants from the United Kingdom.

Method

Participants

The sample was initially composed of 612 Israeli participants, 472 participants from Portugal, and 168 participants from the United Kingdom. Participants from Portugal were first matched with participants from the United Kingdom for the purpose of another study (Leal et al., 2019) using the “nearest neighbor matching” technique (Stuart, 2010), systematically selecting from the Portuguese sample participants who were most similar to the U.K. participants on binary gender (women vs. men), age, sexual orientation, education level (university level vs. <12 years of school), relational status (in a relationship vs. not in a relationship), employment status (working vs. not working), and place of residence (rural area vs. urban area). Then, participants from the Israeli sample were matched to the Portuguese sample in the same manner, resulting in a unified sample of 504 participants (168 from each country). In terms of sexual orientation across the three samples, 111 participants in each country defined themselves as heterosexual, while 57 defined themselves as LGB (26 bisexual women, 2 bisexual men, 17 gay men, and 12 lesbian women in Israel and Portugal, and 26 bisexual women, 2 bisexual men, 16 gay men, and 13 lesbian women in the

United Kingdom). Descriptive characteristics of the groups are presented in Table 1, showing that Israeli participants were significantly older and less likely to be living in a city than participants from Portugal and the United Kingdom. Participants from the United Kingdom were less likely than counterparts in Portugal and Israel to have a university-level education. Participants from Portugal were less likely to be working than participants from Israel and the United Kingdom.

Measures

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation was assessed through self-reports as follows: 1 = lesbian woman, 2 = gay man, 3 = heterosexual man/woman, 4 = bisexual, 5 = other. This assessment is common in sexual minority survey research (e.g., Leal et al., 2019).

Parenthood Desire and Parenthood Intent

To assess the level of desire for parenthood and intent to parent, Riskind and Patterson's (2010) single item adapted from the 2002 U.S. National Survey of Family Growth was used, alongside two additional items that were previously added to supplement the original item (Gato et al., 2020; Leal et al., 2019). The following three items evaluated parenthood desire: "Looking to the future, if it were possible, I would like to have a child"; "Looking to the future I see myself as a parent"; and "Looking to the future to be a parent is something I desire." These items were translated back and forth from English to Portuguese and English to Hebrew.

To measure participants' level of intention to become a parent, participants initially read the instruction, "Sometimes what people want and what they intend are different because they are not able to do what they want." Participants were then presented with the following items to measure parenthood intent: "Looking to the future I intend to have a child at some point"; "Looking to the future I have already decided that I'm going to be a parent"; and "Looking to the future having a child is part of my future plans." Ratings ranged from 1 (*Definitely no*) to 5 (*Definitely yes*).

The respondent's score on each scale was the mean rating of all items, with higher scores indicating greater parenthood desire or a greater parenthood intent. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three parenthood desire items were .96, .94, and .96 in the U.K., Portugal, and the Israeli groups, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three parenthood intent items were .97, .95, and .96 in the U.K., Portugal, and the Israeli groups, respectively.

Concern About Childlessness

In order to assess concerns about childlessness, participants were asked: "If it turns out that you do not have any children, to what extent would that bother you?" Responses were made on a scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*A great deal*) with higher scores reflecting more concern. This measure has been used to assess concern about childlessness in previous studies (e.g., Leal et al., 2019; Riskind & Patterson, 2010).

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered between November 2019 and February 2020 in Israel, between April 2014 and June 2015 in

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Study Groups

Variable	Israel (N = 168)	Portugal (N = 168)	United Kingdom (N = 168)	Difference test t/χ^2
Gender (%)				$\chi^2(2) = .02$
1. Women	71.4	71.4	72.0	
2. Men	28.6	28.6	28.0	
Age				$F(2, 501) = 17.66^{***}$
<i>M</i>	30.49	27.25	27.03	
<i>SD</i>	4.04	6.53	6.93	
Education level (%)				$\chi^2(2) = 6.38^*$
1. University level	66.1	64.3	53.6	
2. <12 years of school	33.9	35.7	46.4	
Relationship status (%)				$\chi^2(2) = 3.17$
1. In a relationship	59.5	59.5	51.2	
2. Not in a relationship	40.5	40.5	48.8	
Duration of relationship (months)				$F(1, 270) = .39$
<i>M</i>	41.73	48.69	42.04	
<i>SD</i>	31.76	44.44	40.75	
Place of residence (%)				$\chi^2(2) = 25.74^{***}$
1. Urban	63.7	84.9	82.6	
2. Rural	36.3	15.1	17.4	
Employment status (%)				$\chi^2(2) = 14.66^{**}$
1. Working	61.5	44.2	63.1	
2. Not working	38.5	55.8	36.9	

Note. Coding of the countries were 0 for the United Kingdom, 1 for Portugal, and 2 for Israel. The *F* tests regarding age and duration of relationship compared the respective mean ratings of the groups.

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

Portugal, and between May and November 2016 in the United Kingdom. Participants were recruited in all countries via announcements on internet forums and social media, asking both sexual minorities and heterosexual individuals to participate, voluntarily and anonymously, in a survey on prospective parenthood. The announcement included a link to an online web survey. The current study only included childless individuals above the age of 18. All participants marked their consent to participate in the study. Participants were informed that they could contact the researchers, if they wished, to enable a more thorough debriefing. This study was reviewed and approved by the institutional review boards at the respective authors' institutions for compliance with standards for the ethical treatment of human participants prior to data collection.

Analytic Plan

Preliminary analyses were conducted to identify potential covariates by examining country differences in the demographic variables using chi-square tests (for gender, education level, being in a romantic relationship, place of residence, and employment status) and analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests (for age and duration of romantic relationship). To test the first two hypotheses, three 3×2 univariate analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted. In these ANCOVAs, country (the United Kingdom, Portugal, and Israel) and sexual orientation (heterosexual vs. LGB) served as the independent variables and parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness each served separately as the dependent variables. The four sociodemographic variables (age, education level, place of residence, and employment status) that differed between countries served as covariates in each analysis. To test the last two hypotheses ANCOVAs were conducted with country as the independent variable, with level of parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness each analyzed separately as the dependent variables, and the four sociodemographic covariates mentioned before. These analyses were run separately for LGB and heterosexual individuals. A power analysis using the G* Power 3.1.9.4 software indicated that a minimum total sample size of 158 people would be needed to detect a medium effect size of $\text{partial } \eta^2 = .06$ with a conventional power of .80 at .05 significance level, using ANCOVA with four covariates.

Results

In accordance with our first hypothesis, the results indicated a significant difference between the three countries regarding parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness, $F(2, 473) = 35.852, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .132; F(2, 476) = 37.671, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .137; F(2, 472) = 23.057, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .089$, respectively. Pairwise comparisons, using Bonferroni-corrected post hoc tests, indicated that in line with our hypothesis on level of parenthood desire, Israeli and Portuguese participants ($M = 4.41, SD = .10; M = 4.16, SD = .09$, respectively) scored significantly higher than did participants from the United Kingdom ($M = 3.33, SD = .09; p < .001$). Israeli and Portuguese participants did not significantly differ on level of parenthood desire ($p = .184$).

Similarly, when examining intent to parent Israeli and Portuguese participants ($M = 4.32, SD = .10; M = 3.79, SD = .09$, respectively) scored significantly higher on this variable than did

participants from the United Kingdom ($M = 3.13, SD = .10; p < .001$). Furthermore, Israeli participants also recorded significantly higher scores than did Portuguese participants on parenthood intent ($p < .001$).

Correspondingly, when considering concern about childlessness, Israeli and Portuguese participants ($M = 4.19, SD = .11; M = 3.67, SD = .11$, respectively) expressed significantly higher levels of concern than did participants from the United Kingdom ($M = 3.15, SD = .11; p < .001$ and $p = .002$, respectively). Israeli participants also registered significantly higher levels of concern than did Portuguese participants ($p = .002$).

In accordance with our second hypothesis, ANCOVAs also indicated that LGB participants in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts reported lower levels of parenthood desire ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.43; M = 4.32, SD = 1.01$, respectively), $F(1, 473) = 42.299, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .082$; parenthood intent ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.47; M = 4.22, SD = 1.06$, respectively), $F(1, 476) = 67.676, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .124$; and concern about childlessness ($M = 3.32, SD = 1.48; M = 4.01, SD = 1.22$, respectively), $F(1, 472) = 27.133, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .054$.

In accordance with our third hypothesis, ANCOVA results indicated significant differences between the countries in parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness for LGB participants, $F(2, 158) = 14.371, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .154; F(2, 160) = 14.203, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .151; F(2, 158) = 7.954, p = .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .091$, respectively. Pairwise comparisons, using Bonferroni-corrected post hoc tests, indicated that Israeli and Portuguese LGB participants ($M = 4.11, SD = 1.18; M = 3.89, SD = 1.27$, respectively) scored significantly higher on parenthood desire than did LGB participants from the United Kingdom ($M = 2.79, SD = 1.47; p < .001$). Israeli and Portuguese LGB participants did not significantly differ on expressed desire for parenthood ($p = 1.000$).

Similarly, Israeli and Portuguese LGB participants scored significantly higher on parenthood intent ($M = 3.91, SD = 1.27; M = 3.33, SD = 1.36$, respectively) when compared with LGB participants from the United Kingdom ($M = 2.51, SD = 1.46; p < .001$ for the comparison between Israel and the United Kingdom and $p = .003$ for the comparison between Portugal and the United Kingdom). Israeli and Portuguese LGB participants did not significantly differ on parenthood intent ($p = .165$). Also, in their expressed concern about childlessness, Israeli LGB participants ($M = 3.84, SD = 1.44$) recorded significantly higher scores than did LGB participants from the United Kingdom ($M = 2.75, SD = 1.53; p < .001$). On their level of concern about childlessness LGB participants from Portugal ($M = 3.35, SD = 1.13$) did not differ from either Israeli LGB participants ($p = .306$) or LGB U.K. participants ($p = .070$).

In accordance with our fourth hypothesis, the results indicated significant differences between countries when analyzing parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness for heterosexual participants, $F(2, 311) = 18.839, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .108; F(2, 312) = 20.502, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .116; F(2, 310) = 16.251, p = .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .095$, respectively. Pairwise comparisons, using Bonferroni-corrected post hoc tests, revealed that in line with our hypothesis, Israeli and Portuguese heterosexual participants ($M = 4.66, SD = .75; M = 4.40, SD = .96$, respectively) scored significantly higher on parenthood desire than did heterosexual participants from the United Kingdom ($M = 3.92,$

$SD = 1.14; p < .001$). Israeli and Portuguese heterosexual participants did not significantly differ on desire for parenthood ($p = .080$).

Similarly, Israeli and Portuguese heterosexual participants ($M = 4.58, SD = .81; M = 4.24, SD = .98$, respectively) expressed greater intent to parent than did heterosexual participants from the United Kingdom ($M = 3.83, SD = 1.21; p < .001$ for the comparison between Israel and the United Kingdom and $p = .002$ for the comparison between Portugal and the United Kingdom). Israeli heterosexual participants also scored significantly higher than did Portuguese participants on parenthood intent ($p = .005$).

In addition, on level of concern about childlessness, Israeli heterosexual participants ($M = 4.43, SD = 1.44$) scored significantly higher than either heterosexual participants from the United Kingdom ($M = 3.65, SD = 1.42; p < .001$) or Portugal ($M = 3.95, SD = 1.02; p = .002$). Although a trend in the data was apparent, heterosexual participants from Portugal did not significantly differ from U.K. heterosexual participants on level of concern expressed ($p = .062$).

Discussion

Our cross-cultural design is the first to explore aspirations for parenthood in three countries as a function of sexual orientation. Consistent with our first hypothesis, participants from Israel and Portugal reported higher levels of desire, intent to parent, and concern about childlessness than did participants from the United Kingdom. In line with our second hypothesis, LGB participants in general reported lower levels of desire, intent to parent, and concern about childlessness than did heterosexual participants. In line with our third and fourth hypotheses, higher levels of parenthood desire, intent, and concern about childlessness were reported for both LGB and heterosexual participants from Israel and Portugal when compared with their counterparts from the United Kingdom. In addition, heterosexual participants from Israel scored higher than participants from Portugal on parenthood intent and concern about childlessness, whereas these specific differences were not apparent in the respective LGB samples.

A main effect of country indicated higher levels of desire for parenthood, intent to become a parent, and concern about childlessness among participants from Israel and Portugal than among participants from the United Kingdom. These differences could be explained by the emphasis on familistic values in Israel and Portugal in comparison to the more individualistic values emphasized in the United Kingdom (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 2016; Leal et al., 2019). Furthermore, our results indicated higher levels of parenthood intent and concern about childlessness among participants from Israel than among those from Portugal. This might be explained by the unfavorable economic context in Portugal and the extremely pronatalist environment characterizing Israel (Yeshua-Katz, 2018). Thus, the internalization of these messages may explain the high levels of parent intent and corresponding increased concern if this was not realized that were recorded among participants from Israel in comparison to those from Portugal or the United Kingdom.

Also, our findings indicated lower levels of desire for parenthood, intent to parent, and concern about childlessness among LGB participants in comparison with their heterosexual counterparts. Here, our results reflect parallel reports of similar disparities in several countries (Baiocco & Laghi, 2013; Gato et al., 2019;

Riskind & Tornello, 2017; Salinas-Quiroz et al., 2020; Shenkman et al., 2019). Differences in parenthood aspirations are usually attributed to the greater pressure on heterosexual couples than LGB couples to have children alongside the additional daunting legal, financial, and reproductive hurdles more often encountered by LGB people than heterosexuals when contemplating parenthood (e.g., Blake et al., 2017; Goldberg et al., 2007; Patterson & Riskind, 2010).

Israel has less favorable legislation and lower levels of reported social support for same-sex marriage and adoption in comparison with Portugal and the United Kingdom, which could hinder parenthood aspirations for Israeli LGB participants (Shenkman et al., 2019). This may explain the absence of difference on parenthood intent between Israeli and Portuguese LGB adults, although both groups still indicated greater intent than did the U.K. LGB sample. Yet, Israeli legislation strongly favors heterosexual parenthood within marriage which plausibly explains the higher levels of parenting intent among Israeli heterosexual participants compared with either those in the United Kingdom or Portugal, where either individualistic values or the economic prospects of young adulthood might attenuate parenthood intent. This result demands further replication as the absence of difference within the LGB groups could, of course, be a facet of the relatively small size creating a type II error. Nevertheless, it could plausibly be a reflection of the greater pronatalist pressures on Israeli heterosexual participants to become parents compared with the lack of support for LGB partnership and parenthood in Israel. In line with prior findings, it could be suggested that broader cultural processes, such as socialization to familistic values, pronatalist values, and economic prospects, may help to explain the differences observed between the countries on parenthood aspirations among LGB participants (Leal et al., 2019).

Strengths and Limitations

The chief strength of the current study was to have compared participants from three countries on aspirations to parenthood and to examine planned comparisons on parenthood desire, parenthood intent, and concern about childlessness separately for heterosexual and LGB participants. This cross-cultural approach allowed a multicontextual viewpoint regarding parenthood aspirations, sexual orientation, and diverse sociocultural and legal contexts, thus pinpointing LGB prospective parenting within diverse contextual spheres (Allen & Mendez, 2018). Also, matching the samples on background variables created a rigorous comparability between the countries to ensure a comparative design that was relatively free of otherwise prevalent sociodemographic confounds.

Nevertheless, certain limitations of our study should be noted. The study relied solely on self-reports, and was thus susceptible to self-presentation biases. The groups were not based on a random or otherwise representative sample and a 5-year gap existed between Portuguese and Israeli data collection. The correlational design of the study did not allow for causal inferences. Gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual individuals were grouped together because preliminary analyses did not detect significant differences between them on any of the three dependent variables measuring parenthood aspirations. Although this pooled sample maximized the potential for key cross-cultural comparisons, it nonetheless curtailed a more refined understanding of the distinctive positions of each sexual minority group. Furthermore, there was a preponderance of women

in the sample and this may have limited the potential relevance of our findings when seeking to understand men's parenthood aspirations. Also, due to missing data and differences in legislation between the countries in same-sex marriage, important variables such as marital status, cohabitation, and ethnicity were not taken into account, neither was the gender of current partner noted for bisexual individuals. Finally, attitudes toward familism, individualism, and pronatalism were not directly assessed. Future studies should further refine how all these variables specifically interact with aspirations for parenthood, or the goal to remain childfree, in diverse sociocultural contexts when taking into account sexual orientation. Future work should also explore whether the pattern of results remains for younger or older individuals, and should include effects separately in larger groups of LGBT individuals.

Conclusion

This study found differences in the degree to which participants wanted to become parents as a function of country, thus showed higher levels of aspiration to parenthood among LGB and heterosexual participants from Israel and Portugal in comparison with participants from the United Kingdom. In addition, lower levels of parenthood aspiration were reported among LGB, in comparison with heterosexual participants. Results were mainly explained by a complex mix of between-country differences on familism, individualism, pronatalist legislation, and economic opportunities. The lower levels of aspirations to parenthood among LGB adults in comparison with their heterosexual peers may have implications for mental health professionals working with LGB people, as the mental health of LGB individuals may be vulnerable to psychosocial pressure or stress associated with not aspiring to parent (Shenkman, 2012). Clinicians should familiarize themselves with such literature to promote more culturally and minority sensitive interventions. Policymakers should be conscious of the possible links between discriminatory local policies regarding LGB rights and adverse mental health (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010). Researchers should further examine differences on parenthood aspirations among LGB and heterosexual individuals in a comparative international design, thus enabling a broader understanding of the intersection between legal and cultural context, sexual orientation, and deciding to become a parent or remain childfree.

References

- Allen, S. H., & Mendez, S. N. (2018). Hegemonic heteronormativity: Toward a new era of queer family theory. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 10(1), 70–86. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12241>
- Baiocco, R., & Laghi, F. (2013). Sexual orientation and the desires and intentions to become parents. *Journal of Family Studies*, 19(1), 90–98. <https://doi.org/10.5172/jfs.2013.19.1.90>
- Birenbaum-Carmeli, D. (2016). Thirty-five years of assisted reproductive technologies in Israel. *Reproductive Biomedicine & Society Online*, 2, 16–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rbms.2016.05.004>
- Birenbaum-Carmeli, D., & Dirnfeld, M. (2008). In vitro fertilization policy in Israel and women's perspectives: The more the better? *Reproductive Health Matters*, 16(31), 182–191. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080\(08\)31352-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0968-8080(08)31352-4)
- Blake, L., Carone, N., Raffanello, E., Slutsky, J., Ehrhardt, A. A., & Golombok, S. (2017). Gay fathers' motivations for and feelings about surrogacy as a path to parenthood. *Human Reproduction*, 32(4), 860–867. <https://doi.org/10.1093/humrep/dex026>
- Carone, N., Baiocco, R., Lingiardi, V., & Kerns, K. (2020). Child attachment security in gay father surrogacy families: Parents as safe havens and secure bases during middle childhood. *Attachment & Human Development*, 22(3), 269–289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2019.1588906>
- Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., Ellis, S. J., & Terry, G. (2018). Lived experiences of childfree lesbians in the United Kingdom: A qualitative exploration. *Journal of Family Issues*, 39(18), 4133–4155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18810931>
- Costa, P. A., & Bidell, M. (2017). Modern families: Parenthood desire, intention, and experience among Portuguese lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. *Journal of Family Issues*, 38(4), 500–521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X16683985>
- Costa, P. A., & Shenkman, G. (2020). LGBT parent families in non-west contexts. In A. E. Goldberg & K. R. Allen (Eds.), *LGBT-parent families: Innovation in research & implications for practice* (2nd ed., pp. 319–336). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-35610-1_20
- Donat, O. (2011). *Making a choice: Being childfree in Israel*. Miskal.
- Eurobarometer. (2015). *Social acceptance and perceptions on discrimination on the grounds of sexual identity and gender identity*. Retrieved July 20, 2020, from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/eurobarometer_lgbti_graphs_factsheet_national.pdf
- Gato, J., Leal, D., Coimbra, S., & Tasker, F. (2020). Anticipating parenthood among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual young adults without children in Portugal: Predictors and profiles. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1058. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01058>
- Gato, J., Leal, D., & Tasker, F. (2019). Parenting desires, parenting intentions, and anticipation of stigma upon parenthood among lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual women in Portugal. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 23(4), 451–463. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2019.1621733>
- Goldberg, A. E., Downing, J. B., & Sauck, C. C. (2007). Choices, challenges, and tensions: Perspectives of lesbian prospective adoptive parents. *Adoption Quarterly*, 10(2), 33–64. https://doi.org/10.1300/J145v10n02_02
- Guzzo, K. B., & Hayford, S. R. (2020). Pathways to parenthood in social and family contexts: Decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 82(1), 117–144. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12618>
- Hatzenbuehler, M. L., McLaughlin, K., Keyes, K., & Hasin, D. (2010). The impact of institutional discrimination on psychiatric disorders in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: A prospective study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(3), 452–459. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2009.168815>
- Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2, 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014>
- Leal, D., Gato, J., & Tasker, F. (2019). Prospective parenting: Sexual identity and intercultural trajectories. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 21(7), 757–773. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2018.1515987>
- Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2019). *Society at a glance 2019: OECD social indicators*. https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_glance-2019_89d03b34-en
- Oliveira, J. E., Mendonça, M., Coimbra, S., & Fontaine, A. M. (2014). Family support in the transition to adulthood in Portugal—Its effects on identity capital development, uncertainty management and psychological well-being. *Journal of Adolescence*, 37(8), 1449–1462. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2014.07.004>
- Patterson, C. J., & Riskind, R. G. (2010). To be a parent: Issues in family formation among gay and lesbian adults. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 6(3), 326–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2010.490902>
- Riskind, R. G., & Patterson, C. J. (2010). Parenting intentions and desires among childless lesbian, gay, and heterosexual individuals. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(1), 78–81. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017941>
- Riskind, R. G., & Tornello, S. L. (2017). Sexual orientation and future parenthood in a 2011–2013 nationally representative United States

- sample. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *31*(6), 792–798. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000316>
- Salinas-Quiroz, F., Costa, P. A., & Lozano-Verduzco, I. (2020). Parenting aspiration among diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in Mexico, and its association with internalized homo/transnegativity and connectedness to the LGBTQ community. *Journal of Family Issues*, *41*(6), 759–783. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X19881675>
- Shenkman, G. (2012). The gap between fatherhood and couplehood desires among Israeli gay men and estimations of their likelihood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *26*(5), 828–832. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029471>
- Shenkman, G., & Abramovitch, M. (2020). Estimated likelihood of parenthood and its association with psychological well-being among sexual minorities and heterosexual counterparts. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 1–12. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-020-00451-z>
- Shenkman, G., Bos, H., & Kogan, S. (2019). Attachment avoidance and parenthood desires in gay men and lesbians and their heterosexual counterparts. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, *37*(4), 344–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02646838.2019.1578872>
- Shenkman, G., Siboni, O., Tasker, F., & Costa, P. A. (2020). Pathways to fatherhood: Psychological well-being among Israeli gay fathers through surrogacy, gay fathers through previous heterosexual relationships, and heterosexual fathers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, 91. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00091>
- Simon, K. A., Tornello, S. L., Farr, R. H., & Bos, H. M. W. (2018). Envisioning future parenthood among bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual women. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *5*(2), 253–259. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000267>
- Steinbach, A., Kuhnt, A. K., & Knüll, M. (2016). The prevalence of single-parent families and stepfamilies in Europe: Can the Hajnal line help us to describe regional patterns? *The History of the Family*, *21*(4), 578–595. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2016.1224730>
- Stenfelt, C., Armuand, G., Wånggren, K., Skoog Svanberg, A., & Sydsjö, G. (2018). Attitudes toward surrogacy among doctors working in reproductive medicine and obstetric care in Sweden. *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica*, *97*(9), 1114–1121. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aogs.13342>
- Stuart, E. A. (2010). Matching methods for causal inference: A review and a look forward. *Statistical Science: A Review Journal of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics*, *25*(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1214/09-STS313>
- Tate, D. P., & Patterson, C. J. (2019). Desire for parenthood in context of other life aspirations among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual young adults. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 2679. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02679>
- Tate, D. P., Patterson, C. J., & Levy, A. J. (2019). Predictors of parenting intentions among childless lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adults. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *33*(2), 194–202. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000499>
- Yeshua-Katz, D. (2018). Childless in an IVF-nation: online stigma-coping strategies in support groups for childless Israeli women. *Information, Communication & Society*, *21*(10), 1436–1452. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1324504>

Received August 10, 2020

Revision received December 20, 2020

Accepted December 22, 2020 ■