

# Social-psychological and socio-structural correlates of negative attitudes toward asexuals' parenting rights

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## Research Article

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# Abstract

This study examined relations between political ideology, religiosity, individual characteristics, belief in a just world, and attitudes toward asexuals' parenting rights aiming to gain a better understanding of the complex roots of sexual prejudice. An exploratory cross-sectional study was conducted between May 2 and July 30, 2021, via an online survey. Two hundred and four participants were recruited for this study. A between-subject, correlational design was employed. Bivariate correlation was generated to explore the associations between variables of interest. Next, a bootstrapping analysis for simple mediation models was conducted. Also, a multiple regression model was employed to predict attitudes towards asexuals' parenting rights from the study measures. This study suggests that religious opposition to asexuals' parenting rights is attributable, at least in part, to political ideology. In addition, gender is also a significant factor influencing the formation of attitudes toward asexuals' parenting rights. In light of the current debates regarding the expansion of sexual and gender minority rights in several countries, this study presents a timely investigation into the underpinnings of opposition to asexuals' parenting rights. Research data in this scarcely researched field may support the efforts of advocacy groups to promote social justice.

## Introduction

Asexuals, as a social category, are a sexual minority that does not conform to the heteronormative social ideals of sexual and romantic relationships (Aicken et al., 2013). Consequently, they are often discriminated against in several significant domains of their social life, ranging from employment to healthcare (DeSouza et al., 2017; Elliot et al., 2015). According to Chasin (2015) since asexuals are making themselves more visible in a largely sexualized society new and mostly scarcely examined intergroup dynamics between sexual and asexual individuals come forward (Hoffarth, 2015). As Przybylo (2013) argues anti-asexual prejudice has received little public and academic attention.

Different definitions have been used to describe asexuality. Specifically, one definition emphasizes the lack of sexual behavior/activity, one on lack of sexual desire/ sexual attraction, one on self-identification, and one on a combination of these (Bogaert, 2004, 2006; Bulmer & Izuma, 2017; Brotto & Yule, 2011; Brotto et al., 2015; Gupta, 2017; Van Houdenhove et al., 2013).

Johnson (1977) was the first who used the term asexual and defined it as "men and women who, despite their physical or emotional condition, sexual history and relational status or ideological orientation, chose not to engage in sexual activity" (p.99). The Asexual Visibility and Education Network defines asexuality as a lack of sexual attraction (Brotto et al., 2010), whereas Chasin (2015) notes that the sexual/romantic distinction is crucial in considering asexuality since asexual individuals can have romantic attraction, seek romantic relationships, and have romantic orientations (gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight) or they may be aromantic.

Past research data characterize asexuals as a highly heterogeneous group (Brotto et al., 2010) presenting significant fluctuation as regards relational status, sexual experiences, sexual identity, and masturbation (Brotto et al., 2010; Brotto & Yule, 2011). In addition, sexual inactivity for some asexuals constitutes an important aspect of their asexuality while for others sexual inactivity may not be essential to their asexuality as they may engage in sex for several reasons (e.g. to please their partner; Brotto et al., 2015; Bulmer & Izuma, 2017; Cryle & Moore 2012; Gupta, 2015). The pathologization of the lack of interest in sex by Western societal beliefs and medical and health professionals and the absence of overt norm-challenging behaviors have complicated the study of asexuality (Bogaert 2004; Bulmer & Izuma, 2017; Gupta, 2015). Scholars in this field argue that anti-asexual prejudice stems from the fact that asexuals are disliked because they do not conform to the dominant heteronormative model (Hoffarth et al., 2015). Anti-asexual prejudice probably originates from considering asexuality as a weakness and/or a flaw (a deficiency) since it constitutes a non-normative and non-heterosexual sexual orientation (Herek, 2010). Thus, asexuals may be disliked not for doing something but disapproved of for not complying with the prevalent norms. Previous studies report that asexuals are the targets of nonheteronormative discrimination (Chasin, 2011; MacInnis & Hodson, 2012). Specifically, asexuals may face denial or disbelief of their asexual self-identification (MacNeela & Murphy, 2014), difficulties in relationships (Carrigan, 2011), and pathologization (Gupta, 2017). Since there is no social space for asexuality as an alternative to heterosexuality belonging to a sexual minority community is the only possible choice for asexual individuals (Chasin, 2015). This may predispose asexual people to be subject to sexual prejudice and heterosexism as sexual minority individuals because of their asexuality (Hoffarth et al., 2015).

This study promotes research on attitudes-based discrimination towards asexuals' parenting rights and also examines the impact of context-related social psychological and sociocultural factors in stigma formation. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, asexuality has received no scientific attention in the Greek context.

### **Prejudice towards sexual and gender minorities**

There is a common social impression that sexual and gender minority individuals are inconsistent with reproduction, childbirth, and parenting (Farr & Vazquez, 2020; Spivey, 2006). This may be because sexual and gender minority (SGM) individuals and families oppose the traditional highly gendered conceptualization of parenting. For example, SGM families challenge the heteronormative social beliefs about the traditional nuclear family, including the values of heterosexual marriage and biological parenthood (Lasio et al., 2020; Spivey, 2006). Thus, even though adoption by same-sex couples has been legalized in several European countries, this family formation is not largely accepted by the public and therefore remains a debated and a sensitive issue (Sani & Quaranta, 2020). As Waters et al. (2016) argue negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay individuals still persist in North America whereas same-sex marriage continues to be a topic of considerable debate. In addition, recent research data show that same-sex couples and their children still cope with discrimination and prejudice daily with a significant impact on their emotional, relational and economic well-being (Grigoropoulos, 2022a; Iraklis 2021a; Levitt et al., 2020; Messina & D'Amore, 2018).

Furthermore, the opposition to equal adoption and parenting rights for sexual and gender minority individuals seems to be associated with a broader gender belief system constituted by heteronormative ideas about family formation practices and socially proper gender roles (Takacs et al., 2016). The aforementioned findings underline that much remains to be accomplished to ensure equal parenting rights for sexual and gender minority individuals. In addition, in several cases, the double stigma of non-biological kinship and sexual orientation may burden SGM families' desire to adopt (Farr & Vazquez, 2020). Specifically, heteronormativity illustrates that heterosexual reproduction and kinship seem like the apparent choice, leaving SGM families separate from kinship (Lasio et al., 2020). Past research has highlighted the negative attitudes of directors from adoption agencies toward potential same-sex applicants (Gates et al., 2007). This means that prospective adoptive sexual and gender minority individuals and/or couples may have to face considerable challenges. In all, negative attitudes toward marriage equality and sexual and gender minority individuals' parenting rights remain very common (e.g., Baiocco et al., 2013; Gato & Fontaine, 2016), although multiple research data report no relationship between parents' sexual orientation and the well-being of their children (Fedewa et al., 2015; Tasker, 2010).

Hegemonic heteronormative norms perpetuate homonegativity, stigmatization, and discrimination against sexual minority individuals and SGM families (Lingiardi et al., 2016). In particular, past research data report that same-sex parents may be considered emotionally unstable, less responsible, less competent, and less nurturing (Morse et al., 2008). Societal beliefs about children adopted by same-sex parents entail the fear of the children being discriminated against by peers, developing a minority sexual orientation, and lacking opposite-sex role models (Clarke, 2001). Thus, sexual prejudice denies sexual and gender minority individuals' adoption and parenting rights due to deviating from the rigid heteronormative societal norms.

To decrease discrimination, it is most significant to examine correlates to opposition towards equal parenting rights for sexual and gender minority individuals. Furthermore, while the significant issues of marriage equality and same-sex parenting rights are now widely examined research on the topic of asexuals' parenting rights is still scarce. Therefore, this study aimed to examine if specific social-psychological and socio-structural characteristics affect participants' attitudes toward asexuals' parenting rights in the cultural context of Greece.

### **Political conservatism, religiosity, and opposition to sexual and gender minority individuals**

Previous research data show that political conservatism and higher levels of religiosity are associated with negative attitudes toward marriage equality and sexual and gender minority parenting (Baiocco et al., 2018; Costa et al., 2014). In addition, left-wing political leaning correlated with positive beliefs about sexual and gender minority parenthood (De Simone et al., 2020).

Research data demonstrate that religiosity is related to sexual prejudice (Herek & McLemore, 2013) and opposition to marriage equality (Herek, 2011). Thus, religiosity (the degree to which one is engaged with religion) is an important predictor of negative attitudes towards sexual and gender minority individuals. Specifically, those who are more involved with religion and have more frequent worship attendance have

more negative attitudes about marriage equality (Twente & Blake, 2021) and more sexual and gender minority prejudices (Worthen et al., 2017). Political conservatism is also a significant predictor of sexual and gender minority rights as political conservatives have been slower to support sexual and gender minority rights (Sherkat et al., 2011; Woodford et al., 2013). In particular, people with more conservative views tend to oppose marriage equality and hold stronger negative views of sexual and gender minority individuals (Armenia & Troia, 2017; Perez-Arche & Miller, 2021). According to Cicognani et al. (2012), political attitudes are often shaped before adulthood and do not rely on direct experience. Instead, they rely more on broader worldviews, parental influence, and socialization. In all, political ideology is linked with sexual prejudice, with conservatives being more sexually prejudiced than liberals (Pacilli et al., 2011).

### **Individual characteristics**

Concerning individual characteristics, women hold more positive attitudes towards sexual and gender minority individuals and their rights (Jones et al., 2018; Riggs & Sion, 2017). Likewise, women are less likely to exhibit homophobia, transphobia, or non-binary stigma (Konopka et al., 2020; Worthen, 2021). Women also are more supportive of marriage equality (Dessel & Rodenborg, 2017; Grigoropoulos, 2018) and adoption for sexual and gender minority individuals (Costa et al., 2018). In particular, women consistently report more positive attitudes toward sexual minorities both in the United States (Poteat & Anderson, 2012; Whitley, 2009) and in Europe (Ciocca et al., 2017; van den Akker et al., 2013) and are more likely to accept equal adoption rights for same-sex couples (Bettinsoli et al., 2020; Webb et al., 2017).

At the same time, young adults are more likely to support the adoption of same-sex couples compared to older individuals, but only in countries that recognize legal rights to sexual and gender minorities whereas older people are more likely to reject adoption by same-sex couples (Sani & Quaranta, 2020). In addition, there are differences in support of those who identify as sexual and gender minority individuals and their rights (Bettinsoli et al., 2020). For example, even though public opinion is supportive of marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples there may be less support for sexual and gender minority adoption rights (Hollekim et al., 2012).

### **Belief in a just world (BJW)**

The belief in a just world is a popular concept for research toward marginalized groups (McKechnie & Harper, 2011) and has been shown to correlate with religiosity and personality factors such as conservatism and attitudes to authority (Furnham, 2003). The Belief in a just world (BJW) is the belief that people get what they deserve in life, meaning that bad things happen to bad people and good things happen to good people (Furnham, 2003). People need to believe in a just world to cope with witnessed or experienced injustice (Lerner, 1980). Furthermore, as Wenzel et al. (2017) argue a high personal BJW can be considered as a socially and normatively expected trait linked to normative and desirable behavior. Individuals with a high personal BJW are more sensitive toward injustices (e.g., Dalbert, 1999), strive for justice themselves (e.g., Dalbert, 2009, Schindler & Reinhard, 2015), and are more committed to just means (e.g. Sutton & Winnard, 2007). In addition, personal BJW is linked to prosocial behavior (Beque,

2014). In light of the above, the present study introduces the socio-psychological construct of the belief in a just world in the examination of attitudes towards sexual and gender minority rights. Specifically, this study examines the influence of participants' personal beliefs in a just world on their attitudes toward asexuals' parenting rights. In this way, we examined the consequences of a strong personal BJW on participants' consideration of injustice towards sexual minority individuals. Assuming asexual parenting rights to be also a matter of justice, a positive link toward this issue seemed likely. To our knowledge, this relationship is scarcely ever studied.

## **The current study**

Heteronormativity- the belief that heterosexuality is natural- devalues those who are not heterosexual and/or are asexual and this also extends to rights such as marriage equality and adoption (Bartolomay, 2018). The lack of non-discrimination laws until recently as regards sexual and gender minority individuals' rights reinforces power differentials through the existence of sexual stigma in social institutions (Herek, 2009). This study examined relations between political conservatism, religiosity, individual characteristics (gender), belief in a just world, and attitudes toward asexuals' parenting rights. Furthermore, we examined if religiosity is associated with opposition to asexuals' parenting rights through conservative ideology. Previous research has shown that highly religious, and politically conservative men oppose same-sex marriage and parenting, however, there is limited research on attitudes toward asexuals' parenting rights. Thus, in the present study, we examined the potential factors influencing opposition to asexuals' parenting rights.

Based on past research data, we hypothesized that more religious, more politically conservative, men would show less support for asexuals' parenting rights (Grigoropoulos, 2022, 2021a,b). We also hypothesized that religiosity and opposition to asexuals' parenting rights would be linked to a politically conservative tendency and therefore we examined whether the effect of religiosity on opposition to asexuals' parenting rights is mediated by political conservatism

The Greek cultural and social context supports sexual normativity (Grigoropoulos, 2022b; Iraklis, 2021b). According to the new child adoption law (law 4538/2018), sexual minority individuals in Greece may foster children, however, same-sex couples are banned from adopting jointly (Grigoropoulos, 2022a). In addition, the Orthodox religion in Greece strongly affects societal attitudes and beliefs while Greek cultural values overemphasize the importance of heteronormativity and heterosexual marriage (Grigoropoulos, 2018, Grigoropoulos & Kordoutis, 2015, Iraklis, 2020; Iraklis & Kordoutis, 2015; Voultos et al., 2018). This study focuses on the Greek asexual community that has received no prior scientific attention by shedding light on an issue that is exemplary of the functions of minority pressure upon sexual minorities.

Overall, this study makes two significant contributions to the literature. First is the focus on anti-aexual prejudice addressing a dearth in asexuality-related research. This study also examines different social-psychological and socio-cultural factors as significant predictors of asexuals' parenting rights in a

specific socio-cultural context with no prior research data in this field aiming to gain a better understanding of the complex roots of sexual prejudice.

## Method

### Procedure and Participants

An exploratory cross-sectional study was conducted between May 2 and July 30, 2021, via an online survey. 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 and forums. Participants were asked to email the study link to other possible respondents. The online survey was completely anonymous and participants indicated their agreement to participate by selecting the consent checkbox. The inclusion criteria were a) being at least 18 years old and b) agreeing to participate. The process lasted approximately 8–12 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.

Two hundred and four participants were recruited for this study. The sample was predominantly women (70.6%) reflecting an overrepresentation consistent with previous studies reporting women students having higher survey response rates (Porter & Umbach, 2006). The sample was also predominantly heterosexual (91.2%,  $n = 186$ ; lesbian/gay 2%,  $n = 4$ ; bisexual 6.9%,  $n = 14$ ). Mean age was 20.80 ( $SD = .99$ ). No participants were excluded from the study. For detailed demographic characteristics, see Table 1.

Table 1

	Men, <i>n</i> = 60	Women, <i>n</i> = 144	<i>p</i> -value
<i>Age, years</i>	20.88 ± 1.25	20.76 ± 1.46	.30 <sup>a</sup>
<i>Political positioning</i>	2.88 ± .78	2.68 ± .71	.07 <sup>b</sup>
Left party	1 (1.7)	9 (6.3)	
Center-left party	17 (28.3)	38 (26.4)	
Center party	32 (53.3)	89 (61.8)	
Center-right party	8 (13.3)	6 (4.2)	
Right party	2 (3.3)	2 (1.4)	
<i>Religiosity</i>	2.85 ± 1.36	2.47 ± 1.12	.061 <sup>a</sup>
<i>Sexual orientation</i>			.73 <sup>b</sup>
Heterosexual	54 (90)	132 (91.7)	
Lesbian/gay	2 (3.3)	2 (1.4)	
Bisexual	4 (6.7)	10 (6.9)	
Footnote. Percentages are column percentages. <sup>a</sup> Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> test, <sup>b</sup> Fisher's exact test,			

## Measures

Explanatory variables

## Socio-Demographic and Attitudinal 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-with specification required), sexual orientation (heterosexual, gay/lesbian, bisexual, other-with specification required), level of education (below high school, high school diploma, undergraduate student, university degree, postgraduate student, postgraduate degree), political positioning (left, center-left, center, center-right, right), religiosity (frequency of religious services attendance and frequency of praying; 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*). The two items were averaged).

### Personal belief in a just world (PBJM)

Using Dalbert's scale (1999), PBJM was measured with seven items ( $\alpha = .87$  [.84, .89]; e.g., "I believe that, by and large, I deserve what happens to me"). Participants responded to all items on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) with higher scores indicating a stronger PBJM

## Attitudes towards asexuals' parenting rights

Two indicators were used to measure asexuals' parenting rights. First, participants were asked about asexuals' equal rights to become parents through adoption (e.g., "*Asexual individuals should have the legal right to apply for adoption*"). As this statement was previously used regarding beliefs about same-sex parenthood it was reworded in the current study to reflect beliefs about equal parenting for asexuals (see Hollekim et al., 2011). Second, participants were asked to indicate their beliefs about the welfare of children with asexual parents. These were assessed by one item regarding the welfare of children with asexual parents (e.g., "*Children's needs and interests can be fully met by asexual parents*"). As this statement was previously used regarding beliefs about same-sex parenthood (see Hollekim et al., 2011) it was reworded in the current study to reflect beliefs about the welfare of children with asexual parents. Participants' responses to both statements were assessed on a 9-point Likert scale from 1 (Disagree strongly) to 9 (Agree strongly) with higher scores indicating positive attitudes toward asexuals' parenting rights. The two items were averaged.

### Design and Statistical analysis

A between-subject, correlational design was employed. For the attitudes towards asexuals' parenting rights, a single value was computed based on the average of the two indicators. IBM SPSS Statistics version 19 and Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS were used to analyze the data. Data screening techniques were used before the main statistical analysis. The normality of data distribution was determined using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Data were non-normally distributed. Bivariate correlation (Kendall's Tau correlation analysis) was generated to explore the associations between variables of interest. Next, a bootstrapping analysis for simple mediation models (Hayes, 2013, Model 4) was conducted. Also, a multiple regression model was employed to predict attitudes towards asexuals' parenting rights from the other study measures, based on the significance of the associations. Alpha level was set at 0.05.

## Results

### Descriptive results

To investigate the relationship between the variables of the research, Kendall's Tau correlation analysis was performed between all variables of interest. The results are presented in Table 2.

Political positioning was negatively associated with sexual orientation ( $r_T = .001, p < .01$ ). Religiosity was negatively associated with sexual orientation ( $r_T = .021, p < .05$ ), and positively correlated with political positioning ( $r_T = .000, p < .01$ ). The attitudes toward asexuals' parenting rights were negatively associated with gender ( $r_T = .000, p < .01$ ), political positioning ( $r_T = .000, p < .01$ ), and religiosity ( $r_T = .000, p < .01$ ).

Overall, it seems that higher levels of religiosity and support for right political parties along with participants' male gender are associated with greater opposition to asexuals' parenting rights.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Variables</i>								
1. Gender								
2. Sexual orientation			.024					
3. Political positioning	2.74	.05	.096	-.212**				
4. Religiosity	2.58	.08	.114	-.140*	.328**			
5. PBJW	3.78	.06	.004	.012	-.042	.098		
6. APR	7.25	.13	-.271**	.057	-.228**	-.196**	-.072	

Note. PBJW = Personal belief in a Just World, APR = Asexuals' Parenting Rights

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

### Mediation Analysis

A bootstrapping method was performed using SPSS Process Macro to examine if political positioning mediated the relationship between religiosity and asexuals' parenting rights. First, the results of the regression analysis show that religiosity (IV) was a significant predictor of political positioning ( $b = .23$ ,  $t = 5.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Next, while controlling for political positioning (mediator), the results of the second regression analysis show that religiosity was a significant predictor of asexuals' parenting rights (dependent variable;  $b = -.27$ ,  $t = -2.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The results of the indirect effect based on 5,000 bootstrap samples show a significant indirect negative relationship between religiosity and asexuals' parenting rights mediated by political positioning ( $a*b = -.09$ , Bootstrap  $CI_{95} = -.17$  and  $-.01$ ). These results show that the relationship between religiosity and asexual parenting rights is partially mediated by political positioning. The mediator, political positioning, accounted for approximately 25% of the total effect on asexuals' parenting rights [ $P_M = (-.09) / (-.36)$ ]. Table 3 displays the results of the mediation analysis

Table 3  
Mediation Analysis

Variable/ Effect	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
Religiosity $\diamond$ Asexuals parenting rights	-.27	.11	-2.39	.02	-.50	-.05
Religiosity $\diamond$ Political positioning	.23	.04	5.85	.00	.15	.31
Religiosity $\diamond$ Political positioning $\diamond$ Asexuals' parenting rights	-.39	.19	-2.08	.04	-.76	-.02
Effects						
Direct	-.27	.11	-2.239	.02	-.50	-.05
Indirect	-.09	.04			-.17	-.01
Total	-.36	.11	-3.41	.00	-.57	-.15

### Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine the association between predictor variables and the attitudes towards asexuals' parenting rights. The assumptions of regression analysis were tested and were not violated (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Specifically, tests to see if the data met the assumption of collinearity indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (gender = 1.05, VIF = 1.00; PBJW = 1.08, VIF = 1.00).

### Predictors of Attitudes Towards Pornography

Standard multiple regression analysis was conducted with the attitudes towards asexuals' parenting rights as the dependent variable. The data met the assumption of independent errors (Durbin-Watson value = 1.45). The results showed (see Table 3) that the model was statistically significant ( $R^2 = .11$ ,  $F_{(2,201)} = 12.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Gender ( $\beta = -.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ) contributed to more negative attitudes towards asexuals' parenting rights.

Table 3  
Regression analysis for variables predicting attitudes toward APR (N = 204)

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>95%CI</i>
Gender	-1.28	.275	-.312***	-4.685	.000	-1.82, -.745
PBJW	-.253	.139	-.122	-1.828	.069	-.52, .020

Note: PBJW = Personal belief in a Just World, APR = Asexuals' Parenting Rights

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

## Discussion

Considering that sexual prejudice is a global human rights issue (Bettinsoli et al., 2020) this study examined attitudes toward an understudied minority population. Thus, this study examined different social-psychological and socio-cultural factors as significant predictors of asexuals' parenting rights in a specific socio-cultural context with no prior research data in this field aiming to gain a better understanding of the complex roots of sexual prejudice. Specifically, we sought to examine the effects of religiosity and political conservatism in accounting for opposition to asexuals' parenting rights. To achieve this we established first that religiosity was positively related to opposition to asexuals' parenting rights and second the extent to which this relationship was explained by political ideology.

This study's results show that religiosity and political ideology are associated with opposition to asexuals' parenting rights coinciding with previous studies indicating that religiosity and conservatism are associated with opposition to same-sex marriage (Herek, 2011) and sexual prejudice (Herek & McLemore, 2013). Similar to previous studies concerning sexual and gender minorities religiosity is a significant factor in anti-asexual prejudice. Taking into account that religions usually have well-defined moral frameworks that prescribe attitudes toward specific social groups participants' attitudes probably echo these religious proscriptions. In addition, highly religious individuals may be significantly influenced by religious media which often convey anti-LGBTQIA+(Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, querr/questioning, intersex, asexual) messages (Perry & Snawder, 2016). Thus, highly religious individuals are less favorable toward asexuals' parenting rights, which is consistent with both anti-sexual and gender minorities' prejudice and more limited views of family formations (Worthen et al., 2017). Hence, people who are intrinsically religious and strongly adopt religious doctrines along with conformity to political ideologies are more likely to oppose asexuals' parenting rights showing anti-asexual prejudice.

Furthermore, the ideological self-placement on a single left-party right-party dimension is also related to opposition to equality rights against groups that violate social conventions (e.g., asexuals). Previous research shows that individuals with conservative political ideology are less favorable of same-sex marriage indicating more opposition to sexual and gender minorities among conservatives (Armenia & Troia; Grigoropoulos, 2018; Worthen et a., 2017). The two basic features of conservatism are resistance to change and opposition to equality (Jost, 2006). In addition, the relationship between religiosity and resistance to change is reflected in the fact that religions usually value traditionalism and maintenance of the status quo (Jost et al., 2014). All in all, this study suggests that religiosity is associated with opposition to asexuals' parenting rights through political ideology reporting that religious opposition to asexuals' parenting rights is attributable, at least in part, to political ideology.

Gender is a significant factor influencing the formation of attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities. Thus, women are more favorable of sexual and gender minorities' rights, showing for example greater affirmation of same-sex marriage (Dessel & Rodenborg, 2017; Riggs & Sion, 2017). As Gordon & Meyer (2007) argue the desire to preserve a heteronormative gender system probably supports sexual prejudice at least in Western societies. In antithesis, acceptance of gender nonconformity leads to more positive

attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities (Collier et al., 2013). On the individual level according to the theory of socializing agents various forms of socialization affect the attitudes of people. Religious institutions are an example of such socializing agents that are significantly linked with negative attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities (Sani & Quaranta; Van den Akker et al., 2013). Thus the longer one is under the influence of such socializing agents the more influenced one will be in establishing and materializing similar attitudes and behaviors (Ultee et al., 2003).

Based on this study's results we can also assume that asexuals violate gender norms and therefore are viewed negatively, particularly by men. This result echoes the nonheterosexual gender-norm violation perspective. Viewed through this perspective any violations of gender roles, due to their socialized rigidity, can elicit strong prejudices, particularly by heterosexual men (Whitley & Kite, 2006). Drawing upon the sexual identity threat hypothesis (heterosexuals' anxiety about their own sexual identities could lead to anti-LGBTQIA + prejudice to reinforce one's sense of heterosexuality) to explain this study's results we could also argue that particularly male participants may feel unfavorable toward asexual individuals (Weinstein et al., 2012). The gender schema theory may also be used to explain men's opposition to asexuals' equal rights to parenting. Based on this theory men are socialized within rigid gender messages that communicate socially appropriate gender roles based on cultural norms (Bem, 1983). Opposition to sexual and gender minorities and support of traditional gender roles constitute the more rigid gender schemas of men (Dierckx et al., 2017; O'Connor et al., 2017).

In contrast to our aforementioned assumption, there was no significant relationship between personal BJW and asexuals' parenting rights. Even though individuals with high personal BJW are sensitive toward injustices the present study interestingly could not support this assumption. However, given that there are significant theoretical reasons that link personal BJW with sensitivity to justice and human rights issues the present finding should be considered with caution. In addition, religiosity, political ideology, and gender may more strongly influence the formation of attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities in Greece's specific socio-cultural context. In all, we were not able to show that personal BJW influences participants' attitudes. Although PBJW is a popular conceptual resource for research on attitudes towards marginalized groups (McKechnie & Harper, 2011) its role in attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities remains understudied. Future studies could try to replicate these results while emphasizing that personal BJW can have negative side effects on other peoples' lives.

Overall, this study's results indicate that to reduce anti-asexual prejudice interventions would do well to emphasize the egalitarian aspect of religion and also to increase the public's comfort with sexual and gender minority individuals' counteracting the negative consequences of heteronormativity. More progressive laws on sexual and gender minorities' rights could convey the message that these relationships and rights are socially acknowledged and protected by law leading to less rigid opposing attitudes and beliefs. Thus, religious, political, and gender-norms changes could result in reconceptualizing the dominant heterosexual cisgender paradigm.

In light of the current debates regarding the expansion of sexual and gender minority rights in several countries, this study presents a timely investigation into the underpinnings of opposition to asexuals' parenting rights. Clarifying the context-related social and psychological factors that form prejudicial attitudes towards asexuals' rights is significant for informing theory and practice intending to enhance all people's well-being. Also, research data in this scarcely researched field may support the efforts of advocacy groups to promote social justice.

## **Limitations**

Younger, more educated individuals may be more favorable toward sexual and gender minorities (Patrick et al., 2013). In addition, all participants were undergraduate students, whose attitudes are certainly not representative of the larger Greek population. Future research should focus on more diverse samples. Future research may also examine the causal effects of religiosity and political ideology on anti-asexual attitudes which represents one of the issues of the struggle for asexual equality.

## **Conclusions**

As families with gender or sexual minority members increase emphasizing the importance of SGM families in the broader field of psychological studies and facilitating at the same time a more queer perspective on family formation and parenting issues is most significant (Allen & Mendez, 2018). However, there is a lack of understanding of asexuality among the general public and there is little research focusing on attitudes towards asexuals and their rights (Chasin, 2015; Hoffarth, 2015).

According to Chasin (2015) as asexuals are making themselves more visible in a largely sexualized society new and mostly scarcely examined intergroup dynamics between sexual and asexual individuals come forward (Hoffarth, 2015) demanding more public, institutional and academic attention.

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### **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.

### **Conflicts of Interest:**

The authors declare they have no conflict of interest.

## Informed Consent

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

**Availability of data:** Data openly available in a public repository that issues datasets with DOIs

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