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## Religious Affiliation, Religiosity, and Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Parenting

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### Abstract

The opening up of marriage to same-sex couples and same-sex parenting are controversial subjects in many countries. This study carried out in France amongst 1861 heterosexual students examined the effects of gender, access option to parenting, religious affiliation (Catholic vs. without religious affiliation participants) and religiosity (in Catholic participants) on attitudes to same-sex parenting. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 66 ( $M = 22.27$ ,  $SD = 5.20$ ), 67% were women, 31% described themselves as Catholic and 69% as without religious affiliation. The results based on Generalized Estimating Equation analyses indicate that women were more favorable to same-sex parenting than men, and that participants, whatever their religious affiliation, revealed an attachment to the traditional two-parent families model without medical intervention in reproduction: adoption by same-sex couples was preferred to all other methods of access to parenting, while surrogacy received the lowest support. Moreover, Catholic participants were less favorable to same-sex parenting than participants without religious affiliation, and the reluctance of the former was intensified by a high level of religiosity. Religiosity seems to play a major role in attitudes to same-sex parenting inasmuch as its effect is not moderated by the gender of Catholic participants.

*Keywords:* attitudes toward same-sex parenting, adoption, insemination, surrogacy, religiosity.

Since the beginning of the 21st-century, significant advances in legislation have taken place with regard to same-sex marriage and parenting. Indeed, around twenty countries in the world have made marriage and adoption available to same-sex couples, and even allowed them access to medical reproductive techniques. However, the approval of same-sex marriage and parenting are controversial subjects in many countries, particularly European countries. The countries which fully support same-sex families are in a small minority and, within the countries of the European Union itself, considerable differences exist in terms of access to parenting, and the recognition and protection of same-sex families (Aengus, 2016).

In France, the bill to legalize same-sex marriage and adoption, before it was finally passed on 18 May 2013, and well beyond, met with considerable opposition. This opposition movement probably led the government to withdraw access to MAP (medically assisted procreation) for lesbian couples from their bill, a provision contained in its initial version.

Apart from recognition, the evolution of attitudes to same-sex parenting is an important issue, not only regarding to political decisions and to the drafting of public policies but also for psychologists and sociologists.

### **Position of Religious Institutions on Same-sex Parenting**

Scholars have emphasized the potential influence of religious messages about distinctive family roles for men and women promoted by mainline religions. Findings have suggested that religion and especially attendance promote the formation of traditional family ties, such as marriage rather than cohabitation, and marital rather than non-marital births (Mahoney, 2010). Regardless of religious affiliation, the degree of religiosity clearly influences values in the sense of greater traditionalism (“traditional” family, low liberalism of mores, distinctive role of men and women) (Bréchon, 2013). Practicing Catholics are distinguished by their valorization of "traditional" family: emphasis on heterosexual marriage, fidelity, having children, filial love, divorce and abortion (Lambert, 2003).

In general, religious institutions also condemn homosexuality, or at least oppose the granting of rights which give homosexual couples access to marriage and parenting, and more broadly speaking the social recognition of same-sex parenting. With regard to the use of MAP, the Catholic Church is opposed to any type of medical intervention in reproduction, including when this involves assisting in the fusion of a couple's (heterosexual) gametes in order to conceive a child (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1987). Institutional positions, expressed in France during debates on the opening up of marriage and adoption to same-sex couples, illustrate the quasi-unanimity of the three monotheistic religions (Béraud, 2015).

In the Catholic normative system, homosexuality is a behavior referred to as “intrinsically disordered” and therefore condemned by the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church in fact asserts that sexual orientation cannot be treated in the same way as ethnic origin with regard to non-discrimination (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1992) as the application of this principle may endanger “real families” and society as a whole. Bills aimed at granting recognition to homosexual couples trigger a hardening of attitudes amongst the French episcopacy. The law on civil solidarity pact for same-sex and different-sex couples passed in France in 1999 marked the beginning of a “moral fight” (Buisson-Fenet, 2004) which revolved around the issue of the so-called “marriage for all”.

The positions of the religious institutions were taken up by a strong popular opposition movement to this legislative development, as soon as the announcement of the introduction of the bill to open up marriage, adoption and initially MAP to couples of the same sex was made. This opposition movement was strongly based around religious and political communities, without being limited to the latter (Béraud & Portier, 2015; Brustier, 2014; Fassin, 2014). The official arguments of the opposition movements were less explicitly related to a rejection of homosexuality than to an attachment to a traditional conjugal (a man

and a woman) and familial (a child brought up by a father and a mother) model, thought to ensure the stability and sustainability of society as well as allowing the children concerned to develop satisfactorily (Cervulle, 2013; Rochefort, 2014). A survey carried out in January 2013, when the debates were in full flow, indicated that the opinion of Catholics differed from the general population : 41% of practicing Catholics were in favor of marriage between persons of the same sex (as for 60% of the French population), 30% were in favor of adoption by same-sex couples (as for 46% of the French population), and 31% were in favor of MAP for lesbian couples (as for 47% of the French population) (French Institute of Public Opinion, 2013).

### **Religious Affiliation, Religiosity, and Attitudes Toward Same-sex Parenting**

In this context, the role of public opinion in advances to promote the rights of sexual minorities must be emphasized. Indeed, it helps to support, reject or even direct bills related to the recognition of same-sex families. Attitudes towards marriage and same-sex parenting also give us a glimpse of the social context to which same-sex families are exposed. This general context partly determines the most immediate environment in which these families live, which may therefore, in the worst case scenario, be a source of rejection and stress, and in the best case scenario, a source of recognition and support (Meyer, 2003; Meyer & Frost, 2015). Some studies also suggest that access to marriage may be positively associated with the psychological well-being of lesbians, gays and bisexuals (Wight, LeBlanc, & Badgett, 2013; see also the resolution of the *American Psychological Association* on equal access to same-sex marriage, 2011); conversely, the banning of marriage may be associated with greater psychological distress (stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms...) (Giammattei & Green, 2012; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010). Advances in legislation throughout the world are therefore legitimized by their beneficial effects on the individuals concerned and their families.

Psychology and sociology have taken an interest in the factors linked to attitudes towards homosexuals, unions between persons of the same sex and same-sex parenting. They have in particular highlighted links with religiosity, namely a strong individual attachment to a religious affiliation. For example, some studies have shown a negative effect of religiosity on acceptance of same-sex sexuality or homosexual persons (Brown, & Henriquez, 2008; Collier et al., 2013; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002; Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2015). Also, the higher the level of religiosity, the more negative are attitudes to marriage between persons of the same-sex (Barth, Overby, & Huffmon, 2009; Becker, 2012; Brumbaugh et al., 2008; Duncan & Kemmelmeier, 2012; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Hollekim, Slaatten, & Anderssen, 2012; Lee & Hicks, 2013; Lubbers, Jasper, & Ultee, 2009; Merino, 2013; Sherkat, de Vries, & Creek, 2010; Todd & Ong, 2012; Whitehead, 2010).

We have identified 15 studies related to the links between religiosity and attitudes to same-sex parenting. Three important characteristics in their regard can be highlighted. First of all, six of them do not indicate the religious affiliation of the participants, namely the religion to which they claim to belong (Becker, 2012; Hollekim, Slaatten, & Anderssen, 2012; Maney & Cain, 1997; Schwartz, 2010; Vecho & Schneider, 2012, 2015). The others include in their samples participants belonging to different religions, sometimes predominantly Christian or Catholic. Among the latter, although three studies control religious affiliation or treat it as an independent variable (Perry & Whitehead, 2015; Sigillo, Miller, & Weiser, 2012; Whitehead & Perry, 2016), the others do not do so (Averett et al. 2011; Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2015; Crawford et al.; Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Morse, McLaren, & McLachlan, 2007; Ryan, Bedard, & Gertz, 2007).

Then, with regard to access options to parenting, seven of these studies examine attitudes to adoption by couples of the same sex (Averett et al., 2011; Crawford et al., 1999; Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Perry & Whitehead, 2015; Ryan et al., 2007; Schwartz, 2010;

Whitehead & Perry, 2016), one examines attitudes to same-sex stepfamily (Morse et al., 2007), one to the use of in-vitro fertilization (Sigillo et al., 2012) and the other six to same-sex parenting in general (Becker, 2012; Costa et al., 2015; Hollekim et al., 2012; Maney & Cain, 1997; Vecho & Schneider, 2012, 2015). Therefore, there is very little data on attitudes to MAP methods and surrogacy, and several studies treat same-sex parenting as a homogenous collection of situations and do not consider the characteristics specific to the different access options to parenting which are however likely to influence individuals' attitudes (secrecy vs. knowledge of origins, two-parent vs. one parent, natural vs. artificial procreation).

Finally, concerning the gender of homosexual parents, three studies make a distinction between attitudes to gay fathers and those to lesbian mothers (Crawford et al., 1999; Maney & Cain, 1997; Morse et al., 2007), one focuses on gay couples (Crawford & Solliday, 1996), one on lesbian mothers without specifying their conjugal status (Sigillo et al., 2012) and 10 studies do not make a distinction between attitudes to gay fathers and lesbian mothers (Averett et al., 2011; Becker, 2012; Costa et al., 2015; Hollekim et al., 2012; Perry & Whitehead, 2015; Ryan et al., 2007; Schwartz, 2010; Vecho & Schneider, 2012, 2015; Whitehead & Perry, 2016).

The studies which examined attitudes toward same-sex parenting in general produced mixed results, which is not surprising considering that different access options involve different issues. Thus, three studies indicate that the higher the level of religiosity the more negative are attitudes to same-sex parenting (Becker, 2012; Costa et al., 2015; Hollekim et al., 2012); one study indicates an absence of any link between religiosity and ease in interacting with homosexual parents, more negative attitudes to lesbian mothers amongst the more religious participants than amongst the less religious participants, but an absence of difference with regard to attitudes to gay fathers (Maney & Cain, 1997); two studies do not



reveal any significant link between religiosity and attitudes to same-sex parenting (Vecho & Schneider, 2012, 2015); these studies however having the particularity of having been conducted amongst psychologists, a group which has access to scientific knowledge on child development which may counterbalance the effects of religiosity (Vecho & Schneider, 2012, 2015). The results of seven studies on attitudes to adoption by couples of the same sex are however unanimous (whether religious affiliation is controlled or not, and whether a distinction is made between gay and lesbian couples or not): the higher the degree of religiosity, the more unfavorable are attitudes to these situations.

### **The Current Study**

Public opinion plays an important role in advances promoting the rights of sexual minorities, on the one hand because it is likely to influence these developments (Barth & Parry, 2009; Becker, 2012; Clements & Fields, 2014) and on the other hand because it provides information on the social climate in which same-sex couples build their families. Owing to the principles expounded by religious institutions on the subject of homosexuality and same-sex parenting, religious affiliation and the level of religiosity are likely to influence the attitudes of individuals in this area, as suggested by the few earlier studies available. However, to our knowledge, no study has examined the links between, on the one hand, religious affiliation and religiosity and, on the other, attitudes to the legal provisions related to the constitution of a same-sex family (adoption by a single gay or lesbian person, adoption by a same-sex couple, insemination for lesbian couples, IVF for lesbian couples and surrogacy for gay couples), while simultaneously fulfilling the three following criteria: taking account of the religious affiliation of the participants (by controlling it or considering it as an independent variable); exploring the different access options to parenting for which the legal framework is sought; considering gays and lesbians separately (with regard to adoption). This study aims to fill this gap in the scientific literature by focusing on the Catholic faith.

The first objective was to test the effects of gender and of access option to parenting on attitudes to same-sex parenting. Studies on attitudes to gays and lesbians would suggest that there is a double gender effect. First of all, studies on attitudes to homosexuals have demonstrated differences between men and women which follow 3 main patterns (Whitley & Kite, 2013): (1) women have more favorable attitudes than men towards gay men, (2) considering men and women's attitudes together, attitudes are more negative towards gay men than towards lesbian women, and (3) the most negative attitudes are those of heterosexual men towards gay men. Next, some studies reveal that women support same-sex parenting more than men (Becker, 2012; Herek, 2002; Hollekim et al., 2012; Sigillo et al., 2012). In this context, we may ask whether there is a possible double gender effect (that of the participants and that of the gay and lesbian parents under consideration) on attitudes toward same-sex parenting, especially as these situations combine both homosexuality and parenting. First of all because there are still prejudices within society which connect male homosexuality with pedophilia, and also because representations of fatherhood and motherhood are currently deficient with regard to fathers, inasmuch as their involvement in child care tasks is greatly lower than that of mothers (Ricroch, 2012) and that their right to raise children, even in partnership with the mother, meets with a resistance which is still strong (Neyrand, 2011). We therefore formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: women will be more in favor of same-sex parenting than men.

H2: participants will be more in favor of adoption by lesbians than adoption by gay men, regardless of the form of adoption (single vs. couple).

With regard to the access options to parenting which have a legal basis (adoption, insemination, surrogacy), they doubtless differ in social representations, from the point of view of their social utility but also of the natural vs. artificial nature of the method of procreation which they involve: the core principle of adoption is based on a social dimension

founded on altruistic values as it aims to give families to children who are deprived of one; insemination is a practice which is becoming increasingly common but which some people may consider as going against nature in order to satisfy the desire to have a child; finally, surrogacy, the most recent method, the most rarely used and less familiar than the other access options to parenting, represents for some people a commercial exchange and an immoral confiscation of a child from its mother. We therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

H3: participants will be more in favor of adoption than insemination and more in favor of adoption and insemination than surrogacy.

The interaction effects of gender and of the access option to parenting are also examined in an exploratory fashion.

The second objective was to test the effect of religious affiliation on attitudes to same-sex parenting. Monotheistic religions, and in particular Catholicism, disapprove of homosexuality and encourage traditional family structures (father + mother + children) which in their eyes is alone able to provide a family environment which is favorable for the well-balanced development of children. Participants without religious affiliation are less likely to be influenced by the institutional positions of the Catholic Church on questions of society. We therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

H4: participants without religious affiliation will be more in favor of same-sex parenting than participants with a Catholic religious affiliation.

The interaction effects of the religious affiliation with, on the one hand, gender and, on the other hand, access options to parenting are also examined in an exploratory fashion.

The third objective was to test the effect of religiosity on attitudes to same-sex parenting. Although earlier studies are not unanimous on this subject, a majority of them, notably those on attitudes to adoption or to same-sex parenting in general, demonstrate that

the higher the participant's level of religiosity is, the more unfavorable are their attitudes. We stated earlier that monotheistic religions such as Catholicism adopt positions which are officially opposed to same-sex parenting. These institutional positions may have a particularly strong influence on individuals if they are very attached to their religion and often attend religious services which expose them directly to the principles dictated by the Church. We therefore formulate the following hypothesis:

H5: Catholic participants with lower levels of religiosity will be more in favor of same-sex parenting than Catholic participants with higher levels of religiosity.

Interaction effects of religiosity with, on the one hand, gender and, on the other hand, access options to parenting, are also examined in an exploratory fashion.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Procedures**

This work focuses on the French participants in the *European Research on Heterosexual Attitudes towards same-sex couples and parented families* program (in Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain). Data was collected between April 2012 and November 2013. In France, the period was marked by tumultuous debates in the Parliament and across the country about the bill opening access to same-sex marriage. Data was collected online (through SurveyMonkey) and ethical approval was granted by the University of Angers' Ethics Committee. A survey link was sent by email to the students at the Universities of Nantes and Le Mans and at the School for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences of Paris, and posted on the website and the Facebook page of the Paris Nanterre University.

A total of 2263 students participated. In order to avoid a language bias, participants were included in the final sample only if they were born in France and/or had French nationality. Moreover, in order to allow comparisons with previous international studies,

participants were over 18 years old, enrolled in an undergraduate program as a minimum and a self-declared heterosexual. Among the 2122 remaining participants, and based on a religious affiliation item, we then excluded all participants who did not claim to be Catholic, agnostic, atheist or without religion. The final sample included 1861 participants enrolled in more than 100 public or private French universities and schools and ranged in age from 18 to 66 ( $M=22.27$ ,  $SD=5.20$ ). Sixty-seven percent were women (and 3 participants did not indicate their gender), 48 % were single, separated, divorced or widowed, 31% were part of a non-cohabiting couple, 16% part of a cohabiting couple without marriage or civil partnership and 5% part of a cohabiting couple with marriage or civil partnership (4 participants did not indicate their marital status); 89 participants were parents of at least one child (4.8 % of the sample). Based on information provided about their field of study, participants were categorized in 3 main fields (80 participants did not provide this information): Human and Social Sciences (52%), Sciences (19%) and Law (14%). An “Other Fields” category was created for students outside these 3 main fields (15%). Given the difference in the school and university systems in the seven countries covered by the study, standard items were created to measure their educational level (“What is the highest level of education you have completed?”, and “How many years have you been in education since the age of 6?”) but these items were confusing and some of the participants gave inconsistent answers. This information will therefore not be used here. Thirty-one percent described themselves as Catholics and 69% as without religious affiliation.

### Measures

**Demographic information.** Participants reported their age, gender, marital status, parental status, and field of study.

**Religious affiliation and religiosity.** Firstly, participants reported their religious affiliation. Participants were categorized into two groups, Catholic versus non religious

participants, where the latter group was composed of agnostic, atheist or without religion participants<sup>1</sup>. Then, religiosity of Catholic participants was assessed with 2 items: “How often do you attend religious services?” (response options ranged from 1 (never) to 6 (once a week or more), and “How important is religion for you?” (response options ranged from 1 (not important at all) to 6 (extremely important). Due to the high correlation between these items (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .80$ ), we combined them into a single variable by computing the mean. Higher average scores represented greater religiosity.

**Attitudes toward same-sex adoption, IVF, and surrogacy.** Participants were asked how they intended to vote (“If you intend to vote in favor, please tick which kinds of lesbian/gay parenting you would be in favor of below (tick as many as apply)” by choosing from the following 7 options: (1) adoption by single lesbians; (2) adoption by single gay men; (3) adoption by gay couples; (4) adoption by lesbian couples; (5) alternative insemination with sperm donor for lesbians; (6) IVF and embryo implantation for lesbians; (7) egg donation and surrogacy for gay men. For each item, a tick assigned a value of 1, and no tick a value of 0.

## Results

### Basic Information and Group Differences

Descriptive analyses revealed the following percentage of participants in favor of the different access options to parenting for lesbians and gay men: single adoption by lesbians = 50.7%, single adoption by gay men = 50%, couple adoption by lesbians = 75.2%, couple adoption by gay men = 75%, insemination without IVF = 63.2%, insemination with IVF = 60.4% and surrogacy = 39.5%.

Group difference analysis on demographics indicated age difference between Catholic participants and without religion participants was not significant,  $t(847) = -0.921$ ,  $p = .36$ . As specified in Table 1, no significant association was found between religious affiliation and

marital status or parental status. The association between religious affiliation and parental status was significant ( $\chi^2(1, N = 1861) = 8.49, p < .01$ ) and non-parents reported less Catholic affiliation (55%) than parents (70%). The association between religious affiliation and field of study was also significant ( $\chi^2(3, N = 1781) = 28.36, p < .001$ ), and the proportion of Catholics was lower amongst HSS and Science participants (respectively 26% and 30%) than amongst Law and Other Field participants (respectively 41% and 37%).

As the dependent variables measuring attitudes toward same-sex parenting were based on binary within-subjects repeated measurements, two Generalized Estimating Equation (GEE) analyses (Zeger & Liang, 1986) were performed with a logistic link and an exchangeable correlation structure<sup>2</sup>. The first GEE analysis examined the effects of gender, religious affiliation<sup>3</sup> and access option to parenting on attitudes toward same-sex parenting, including two-way interaction terms. In order to focus on religiosity, the sample was then reduced to Catholic participants ( $N = 493$ ) and the second GEE analysis examined the effects of gender, religiosity<sup>4</sup> and access option to parenting on attitudes toward same-sex parenting, including two-way interaction terms. In both GEE analysis, age, marital status, parental status, and field of study<sup>5</sup> of participants were controlled.

### **Differences in Attitudes Depending on Gender, Religious Affiliation, and Access Options to Parenting Among all Participants**

As specified in Table 2, the results of the GEE analysis for attitudes toward same-sex parenting including all participants revealed a significant effect for gender (Wald  $\chi^2, 1 \text{ df} = 51.04, p < .001$ ) with women ( $M = .61, SE = .01$ ) being more in favor of same-sex parenting than men ( $M = .45, SE = .02$ ). The effect of religious affiliation was significant too (Wald  $\chi^2, 1 \text{ df} = 89.54, p < .001$ ) with participants without religious affiliation ( $M = .64, SE = .01$ ) being more in favor of same-sex parenting than Catholic participants ( $M = .43, SE = .02$ ). Finally, the main effect for access options to parenting for gay men and lesbians was

significant (Wald  $\chi^2$ , 6 df = 676.72,  $p < .001$ ). Below the diagonal, Table 3 presents the pairwise comparisons of means of attitudes toward same-sex parenting (with Bonferroni correction) between access options to parenting for Catholic participants and without religion participants. Results revealed no significant differences for lesbian vs. gay single adoption and for lesbian vs. gay couple adoption comparisons ( $M_{diffs} = .01$ ,  $SE$  from .003 to .004,  $.177 < p_s < 1$ ). Apart from these two non-significant results, all pairwise comparisons were significant, revealing a hierarchy of attitudes: indeed, participants were firstly in favor of couple adoption (regardless of the gender of parents), then insemination without use of IVF, then insemination with IVF, then single adoption (regardless of the gender of parents), and lastly surrogacy ( $M_{diffs}$  from .03 to .37,  $SE$  from .007 to .017,  $p_s < .001$ ). Results indicated no significant effect for the Gender X Religious affiliation interaction (Wald  $\chi^2$ , 1 df = 0.749,  $p = .387$ ) and significant effects were found for the Gender X Access option to parenting (Wald  $\chi^2$ , 6 df = 22.338,  $p < .01$ ) and the Religious affiliation X Access option to parenting interactions (Wald  $\chi^2$ , 6 df = 17.588,  $p < .01$ ). However, pairwise comparisons revealed that for each access option to parenting, women were more in favor of same-sex parenting than men ( $M_{diffs}$  from .12 to .20,  $SE$  from .027 to .029,  $.01 < p_s < .001$ ), and participants without religious affiliation were more in favour of same-sex parenting than Catholic participants ( $M_{diffs}$  from .17 to .25,  $SE$  from .027 to .029,  $p_s < .001$ ).

### **Differences in Attitudes Depending on Gender, Religiosity, and Access Options to Parenting among Catholic Participants**

In order to examine the effect of gender, religiosity, and access options to parenting on attitudes toward same-sex parenting among Catholic participants, a GEE analysis was performed. As specified in Table 4, the analysis revealed a significant effect for gender (Wald  $\chi^2$ , 1 df = 25.27,  $p < .001$ ) with women ( $M = .44$ ,  $SE = .03$ ) being more in favor of same-sex parenting than men ( $M = .26$ ,  $SE = .03$ ). The effect of religiosity was also



significant (Wald  $\chi^2$ , 1 df = 77.96,  $p < .001$ ) with Catholic participants with lower religiosity ( $M = .52$ ,  $SE = .02$ ) being more in favor of same-sex parenting than Catholic participants with higher religiosity ( $M = .21$ ,  $SE = .03$ ). Finally, the main effect for access options to parenting for gay men and lesbians was significant (Wald  $\chi^2$ , 6 df = 239.38,  $p < .001$ ). Above the diagonal, Table 3 presents the pairwise comparisons of means of attitudes toward same-sex parenting (with Bonferroni correction) between access options to parenting for Catholic participants. Results revealed that participants were more in favor of couple adoption than of other modes of access to parenting ( $M_{diffs}$  from .14 to .31,  $SE$  from .021 to .028,  $p_s < .001$ ). They showed no significant difference between attitudes toward single adoption (regardless of the gender of parents) and attitudes toward insemination (with or without IVF) ( $M_{diffs}$  from .02 to .06,  $SE$  from .027 to .028,  $.01 < p_s < .001$ ), but they were more in favor of insemination without IVF than of insemination with IVF ( $M_{diffs} = .03$ ,  $SE = .010$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Participants were also less in favor of surrogacy than of the other access options to parenting ( $M_{diffs}$  from .11 to .31,  $SE$  from .019 to .027,  $.59 < p_s < 1$ ). Gender X Religiosity interaction effect, and Access option to parenting X Religiosity interaction effect were not significant (respectively Wald  $\chi^2$ , 1 df = 0.977,  $p = .323$ , and Wald  $\chi^2$ , 6 df = 6.685,  $p = .351$ ). Gender X Access option to parenting was significant (Wald  $\chi^2$ , 1 df = 14.246,  $p < .05$ ) and results of pairwise comparisons revealed that, compared with men, women were more in favor of couple adoption by gay men ( $M_{diff} = .28$ ,  $SE = .053$ ,  $p < .001$ ), couple adoption by lesbians ( $M_{diff} = .25$ ,  $SE = .054$ ,  $p < .001$ ), insemination without IVF ( $M_{diff} = .23$ ,  $SE = .049$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and insemination with IVF ( $M_{diff} = .23$ ,  $SE = .048$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The difference between women and men was not significant for lesbian single adoption ( $M_{diff} = .11$ ,  $SE = .048$ ,  $p = 1$ ), gay single adoption ( $M_{diff} = .12$ ,  $SE = .047$ ,  $p = 1$ ), or surrogacy ( $M_{diff} = .13$ ,  $SE = .040$ ,  $p = .112$ ).

## Discussion

The main aim of this study was to examine the links between religious affiliation and religiosity and attitudes to same-sex parenting. In order to do this, an initial analysis compared the attitudes of Catholic students and students without religious affiliation, and a second analysis examined the effects of the level of religiosity on the attitudes of Catholic students. On each occasion, the effects of gender and of the access option to same-sex parenting on these attitudes were tested as were the 2 by 2 interaction effects.

First, it should be stressed that the percentages of participants in favor of adoption by same sex couples (75%), in favor of MAP for lesbian couples (60%), in favor of surrogacy for gay couples (40%) were quite high in comparison with the French population as quoted above (French Institute of Public Opinion, 2013).

The first objective was to test the effects of gender and of the access option to parenting on attitudes to same-sex parenting. Regarding the effect of the gender of the participants on attitudes to same-sex parenting, hypothesis H1 was confirmed. Analyses conducted on the sample as a whole and on Catholic participants highlighted the fact that women were more favorable to same-sex parenting than men, which confirms earlier studies (Costa et al., 2015; Finlay & Walther, 2003; Gato & Fontaine, 2016; Herek, 2002). We can reiterate in this regard that women have more positive attitudes to homosexuality than men (Collier et al., 2013), and we can add that they may also feel more concerned by familial and reproductive issues and express more empathy than men towards the desire for a child of gays and lesbians who wish to start a family (Costa et al., 2014). Concerning the effect of the gender of homosexual parents, hypothesis H2 was not confirmed: whether in relation to the sample as a whole or solely to the Catholic participants, the results did not reveal any significant difference in attitudes on the one hand between adoption by a single lesbian and adoption by a single gay man, and on the other hand between adoption by a lesbian couple and adoption by a gay couple. The existence of a selection process for adoption candidates

aiming to protect children from more problematic environments may reduce the effect of prejudices associating male homosexuality with pedophilia (De Laroque, 2006), and those linked to the parental skills of men which are assumed to be inferior to those of women (Neyrand, 2000), thus making gay fathers just as desirable for children as lesbian mothers. But it is the question of the family structure above all which influences attitudes to adoption, rather than the gender of the adopting parents. This interpretation is supported by the analysis of differences between access options to parenting which indicated that participants were more favorable to adoption by couples than by single people. Single parenthood appears to be disapproved of in the case of adoption by a sole parent, while dual parenthood appears to be valued in the case of adoption by a couple. In view of this attachment to the two-parent “bio-conjugal model” (Gratton, 2008), it therefore seems that the gender of parents carries little weight.

The analysis of the effect of access options to parenting also revealed differences in attitudes, depending on the analyses. Analyses of the sample as a whole and of the Catholic participants confirmed the H3 hypothesis: attitudes to adoption by couples (gays or lesbians) were more favorable than those to all other access options to parenting, attitudes to insemination without IVF were more favorable than those towards insemination with IVF, and attitudes to surrogacy were less favorable than to all other access options to parenting. First, these results can be explained by the perception of the social value of adoption which provides a family for a child who is deprived of one, and in that it reflects the values of empathy shared both by Catholics (Mahoney, 2010) and by persons without religious affiliation (see for example Moore, 2015). Moreover, by giving a family to a child who has already been born, adoption avoids both the artificiality of a medical intervention in the reproduction process and at the same time recourse to a third party (gamete donor, surrogate) which some people fear may be considered no more as a person but reduced to a means to an

end. The significant but small difference between attitudes toward insemination with IVF and insemination without IVF may support the interpretation that participants hierarchize the modes of reproduction according to their naturalness, as participants are more favorable to insemination when IVF is not used. IVF may appear less “natural” since the meeting between the male and female gametes is constrained and occurs outside of the human body. Finally, regarding surrogacy, its methods are overall rather unfamiliar to the general public and it provokes strong ethical and opposing arguments as it is thought to lead to the exploitation of economically vulnerable women and the planned abandonment of a child (Markens, 2007). In fact, the conditions of this practice vary greatly depending on the legislative framework of the country where it takes place. It is not therefore surprising that attitudes to surrogacy are less favorable.

Amongst the sample as a whole, results also indicated that the participants were more favorable to insemination (with or without IVF) than to adoption by a single parent (gay or lesbian), which may also be indicative of an attachment to the two-parent norm. Adoption by single parents, whatever their gender, clashes with this traditional model by creating a single-parent family, while insemination by a lesbian couple preserves the two-parent model. However, this hierarchy no longer existed when this sample was reduced to the Catholic participants alone, as the latter did not display any difference of attitude to insemination (with or without IVF) and adoption by a single-parent (gay or lesbian). It should be emphasized in this regard that Catholics are particularly attached to the most natural form of procreation possible within a two-parent family notably because the Catholic Church is opposed to any type of medical intervention in reproduction (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1987). It is probable that Catholic participants thus express greater opposition to the most “artificial” access options to same-sex parenting, and therefore the use of insemination by a lesbian couple is perhaps not preferable to an adoption by a single gay or lesbian parent.

In an exploratory step, we examined the interaction effect between gender and access option to parenting. The analysis conducted on the sample as a whole indicated that women had more favorable attitudes than men for each access option to parenting. The analysis restricted to Catholic participants indicated that the difference between men and women was non-significant for adoption by a single lesbian, adoption by a single gay man and for surrogacy, and that for the other access options, women were more favorable than men, as shown in previous studies (Gato & Fontaine 2016). This remains the case for Catholic women regarding adoption by a couple (gay or lesbian) and insemination (with or without IVF). Single parenthood in the case of adoption by a sole parent and the use of surrogacy probably clashes with the convictions of Catholic women due to the institutional positions of the Catholic Church, shared values concerning the necessity for a two-parent model and, in the case of surrogacy, the presumed exploitation of women and the problem of the separation of the child from its genetic mother. This may have the effect of bringing their attitudes closer to those of men.

The second objective of this study was to test the effect of religious affiliation on attitudes to same-sex parenting. The results confirmed the H4 hypothesis as participants without religious affiliation were more favorable to same-sex parenting than Catholic participants. The exploratory analysis revealed that this difference existed amongst men and amongst women, and so confirm results from previous studies (Costa et al., 2015; Perry & Whitehead, 2015; Sigillo, Miller, & Weiser, 2012; Whitehead & Perry, 2016) but also extend these studies in revealing that this difference exists each access option to parenting. The Catholic religion describes homosexuality as irregular and immoral behavior, and remains attached to the traditional two-parent and heterosexual-parent family model whose children are born without medical intervention. So Catholics condemn same-sex families more than participants without religious affiliation, whatever the access option to parenting, because it

is not hetero-parental, because some access options lead to single parenthood and because others involve a medical intervention in the procreation process.

Finally, the third objective of this study was to test the effect of religiosity on attitudes to same-sex parenting amongst Catholic participants. In fact, the hypothesis could be made that a certain heterogeneity of attitudes may be expressed amongst Catholic participants, due to the fact that some believers have stronger religious practices than others. Hypothesis H5 was confirmed, as participants with the lowest levels of religiosity were more favorable to same-sex parenting than participants with higher levels of religiosity. This result confirms previous studies (Averett et al., 2011; Webb & Chonody, 2012, 2014). The exploratory analysis revealed that this difference existed amongst men and amongst women, and that it was significant for each access option to parenting. Participants with the lowest levels of religiosity visit places of worship less frequently than others and are therefore less likely to be influenced by the positions of the Catholic Church, expressed and repeated during religious services. It is also possible that Catholics who are less attached to their religion and who attend religious services the least actually feel less pressure to adhere to the precepts of the Church and to the attitudes shared by the members of their religious community. It is important to note that this effect of religiosity is not changed either by the gender of the participants, or by the access option to parenting, variables which however displayed an effect on attitudes.

This study presents some limitations for the understanding of factors linked to attitudes to same-sex parenting. Firstly, the attitudes assessed here are targeted at modes of family construction in the specific context of same-sex parenting, and do not address these same modes of construction in the context of their use by heterosexual persons or couples. However, these same methods also exist for heterosexual couples and it is not known to what extent the participants were favorable or unfavorable to them in this other context. Perhaps

the attitudes measured concern above all the methods themselves (adoption, MAP and above all surrogacy) and invoke principles or positions particularly linked to the manipulation of biology, to the question of the knowledge of origins and to the impersonal use of gamete donors or surrogate mothers, leading us for example to consider that infertile couples, of the same or different sexes, should turn to adoption rather than MAP. Next, each study addresses attitudes to the use of access options which involve the introduction of a legal framework, but they do not tackle the questions of same-sex stepfamilies and co-parenting, where questions about knowledge of origin and medical intervention do not arise and where the question of multiple parenting is central. Finally, Catholic participants appear less favorable to same-sex parenting than participants without religious affiliation. For all that, there are no grounds for saying that the influence is unilateral: it is in fact possible that individuals are attracted by Catholicism because it supports the traditional values which they already hold.

This study deserves to be extended in several ways. It has allowed us to focus on participants without religious affiliation and those affiliated to the Catholic faith, as participants claiming to belong to other religions were too few, but in order to better highlight the association between religiosity and attitudes to same-sex parenting it would be necessary to explore the moderating effect of religious affiliation on this association, by including groups of participants affiliated to other religions with more nuanced positions on these issues. In order to better understand these connections, it would also be necessary to evaluate the level of believers' adherence to the official positions of their Church on societal issues. In fact, being attached to a religion and frequently attending religious services does not necessarily imply an unconditional adherence to these official positions. Finally, as the same protocol has been applied in 6 other countries, it would be interesting to compare attitudes with regard to the various modes of access to parenting in order to evaluate the impact of the legal framework on the general population and amongst persons affiliated to a religion.

Indeed, some countries, such as Belgium and Spain, allow single women and female couples to use insemination with or without IVF, and some allow surrogacy, such as Belgium, the United Kingdom and Greece. To what extent do the legal provisions influence these attitudes?

### **Conclusion**

This study contributes to expand current knowledge attitudes toward lesbian and gay parenting in several manners: firstly, it allows us to focus on the double effect of gender, that of the participants and that of the parents; then, it was carried out on a rather large sample allowing us to standardize religious affiliation by only including Catholic participants, unlike other studies which included in their samples participants affiliated to other religions in an indiscriminate fashion; finally, it allows us to compare attitudes to the main access options to parenting which until then had not been done. This study reveals fairly favorable attitudes towards same-sex parenting but with a classical difference between men and women, where men are less favorable to same-sex parenting than women, and the more negative attitudes of men towards homosexuality probably explain this difference. Beyond this result, our study reveals that attitudes differs according to access options to parenting. Attitudes in favor of adoption by same-sex couples are higher than attitudes toward all other configurations (single adoption, MAP or surrogacy). This suggests a reluctance to parentage patterns that are far distant from the traditionnel model where a child is born naturally and raised by his/her two biological parents. It could mean that to change these attitudes, it is not enough to reduce homophobia, it is also necessary to inform more widely on the becoming and well-being of children raised by a single parent, or conceived through MAP or surrogacy. Especially since the latter access parenting options are poorly known to the public. Psychologists and sociologists could enlight the public debate on same-sex parenting by addressing these specific issues, which is probably not sufficiently done. The results of our study should also



encourage exchanges with religious authorities and priests in order to change their stances hostile to same-sex parenting which find a strong audience among persons whose religiosity is high. Another way to change the attitudes of the most religious persons is to encourage gay and lesbian persons and families who are affiliated to a religion, and who are practicing, to be more visible in the places of worship they are attending. In fact, a change in attitudes towards minority groups could be hoped through contact with these groups (Allport, 1954 ; Herek, 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> In order to test the homogeneity in attitudes toward same-sex parenting among agnostic, atheist or without religion participants, chi-square tests for independence were performed which indicated no difference in attitudes toward between the three groups for single lesbian adoption,  $\chi^2(2, N = 1284) = 2.14, p > .05$ , single gay adoption,  $\chi^2(2, N = 1284) = 1.68, p > .05$ , gay couple adoption,  $\chi^2(2, N = 1284) = 1.45, p > .05$ , lesbian couple adoption,  $\chi^2(2, N = 1284) = 1.35, p > .05$ , insemination without in vitro fertilization,  $\chi^2(2, N = 1284) = 1.88, p > .05$ , insemination without in vitro fertilization,  $\chi^2(2, N = 1284) = 2.94, p > .05$ , surrogacy,  $\chi^2(2, N = 1284) = 1.34, p > .05$ .

<sup>2</sup> Reference category for attitudes toward same-sex parenting was “not in favor of same-sex parenting”, reference category for access option to parenting was “surrogacy”.

<sup>3</sup> Reference category for religious affiliation was “Catholic participants”.

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<sup>4</sup> Due to a hessian matrix singularity, the religiosity variable was split into a binary variable by the mean value (2.64), where Catholic participants with lower levels of religiosity were coded 0 and Catholic participants with higher levels of religiosity were coded 1. Catholic participants served as the reference category.

<sup>5</sup> As GEE analysis only allows continuous or binary covariables, the field of study variable was dichotomized: participants in HSS and Science were coded 0 and participants in Law and Other Fields were coded 1. Category 0 served as the reference category.

Table 1

*Cross Tabulation Analysis between Demographic Information and Religious Affiliation*

	Religious affiliation		$\chi^2$ <sup>a</sup>
	No religious affiliation	Catholics	
	%	%	
Gender			0.1
Female	69	31	
Male	69	31	
Marital status			0.1
Single	69	31	
Couple	69	31	
Parental status			8.49**
Non-parent	70	30	
Parent	55	45	
Field of study			28.36***
HSS	74	26	
Sciences	70	30	
Law	59	41	
Other	63	37	

<sup>a</sup> For Gender, Marital status and Parental status, degrees of freedom = 1; for Field of study, degree of freedom = 3.

\*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .00$

Table 2

*Results From the GEE Model with Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Parenting as Dependent Variable for Total Sample*

Variable	Wald	Ddl	<i>p</i>
Gender	51.04	1	< .001
Religious affiliation	89.54	1	< .001
Methods of becoming parent	1111.00	6	< .001

*Note.* For attitudes toward same-sex parenting, reference category is “not in favor of same-sex parenting”; for gender, religious affiliation and methods of becoming parent, category references are respectively male, catholic participants and surrogacy for gay men.

Table 3

*Pairwise Comparisons of Attitudes toward the Methods of Becoming Parent*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	<i>EMM</i>	<i>SE</i>
	Single lesbian adoption	Single gay adoption	Gay couple adoption	Lesbian couple adoption	Insemination without in vitro fertilization (lesbians)	Insemination with in vitro fertilization (lesbians)	Surrogacy (gay men)		
1	—	.01	.19***	.20***	.05	.02	.12***	.33	.026
2	.01	—	.20***	.21***	.06	.03	.11**	.32	.027
3	.26***	.27***	—	.01	.14***	.17***	.30***	.51	.029
4	.26***	.27***	.01	—	.15***	.18***	.31***	.52	.029
5	.13***	.14***	.13***	.13***	—	.03*	.17***	.38	.028
6	.10***	.11***	.16***	.16***	.03***	—	.14***	.35	.028
7	.12***	.11***	.38***	.38***	.25***	.22***	—	.21	.025
<i>EMM</i>	.47	.47	.73	.73	.60	.57	.36	—	—
<i>SE</i>	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	—	—

*Note.* *EMM* = estimate marginal means; *SE* = standard errors; Values are absolute estimate mean differences; Bonferroni correction was applied due to multiple comparisons. Results for all participants are below the diagonal; results for Catholic participants are above the diagonal.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .00$

Table 4

*Results from the GEE Model with Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Parenting as Dependent Variable for Catholic Participants*

Variable	Wald	Ddl	<i>p</i>
Gender	25.27	1	< .001
Religiosity	77.96	1	< .001
Methods of becoming parent	239.38	6	< .001

*Note.* For attitudes toward same-sex parenting, reference category is “not in favor of same-sex parenting”; for gender, religiosity and methods of becoming parent, category references are respectively male, higher level of religiosity and surrogacy for gay men.