

Functional Judgment of Young Mexican Heterosexuals' Judgment towards Gay, Lesbian and Heterosexual Adoption

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Abstract

An information integration theory (IIT) study aimed to explore Mexican youngsters' systematic thinking underlying judgment and attitudes toward heterosexuals, gays and lesbian's rights for adoption. Here, 126 heterosexuals were required to take a cognitive algebra study consisting of 36 experimental manipulated social scenarios, each describing different couple adoption situations. The participant's experimental task was to provide an acceptability judgment by using a scale. Results showed, acceptability judgment varying from moderately favorable to not favorable that was regulated by two different cognitive rules. A cluster of participants having the higher index of acceptability showed systematic thinking moderated for a summative cognitive rule whereas judgment from another group of participants with a lower index of acceptability was moderated by a multiplicative cognitive rule. In both cases, the most relevant factor to consider was the couple romantic relationship stability. Theoretical and methodological implications are discussed in this article.

Keywords

Adoption, Attitudes, Cognitive Algebra, Couples, Heterosexual, Gays, Lesbians

1. Introduction

Human development of a society is reflected in the degree of respect, type of attitudes and actions made to achieve maximum well-being of all the people who constitutes

such a society. This is so, regardless of their race, religion or sexual status. Thus, discriminatory behaviors toward minority groups are in turn an indicator of a recoil to development and in many cases this discriminatory behavior leads to denial of human rights of people belonging to minority groups. For example, considering rights for a community “LGBTTIQ” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual, transgender, intersex, queer), the exercise of their rights to form a family has faced legal barriers (see [Downing, Richardson, Kinkler, & Goldberg, 2009](#); [Ollen & Goldberg, 2015](#)), and social constraints ([Taka, Szalma, & Bartus, 2016](#); [Kimberly & Moore, 2015](#)), etc.

Regarding this, several authors (e.g., [Clarke, 2001](#); in [Costa, Almeida, Anselmo, Ferreira, Pereira, & Leal, 2014](#)) have suggested that discriminatory judgment and negative attitudes towards adoption by gay and lesbian couples is based on an immorality perception or parenting inadequacy valuation due to a possible negative impact of parent’s sexuality preference over an adopted child development. This unfounded judgment (see [Schneider & Vecho, 2015](#)) have created negative attitudes and social consequences to this social group ([Rye & Meaney, 2010](#); [Crawford & Solliday, 1996](#)). Take for instance, the adoption process where gay parents report more incisive interviews and inadequate suggestions to adopt specific children groups ([Ross, Epstein, Anderson, & Eady, 2009](#)), or longer periods of waiting for adoption ([Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2007](#)), among other setbacks.

Recently, a remarkable academic effort has emerged to understand the nature of attitudes toward adoption by gay and lesbian couples, as well as to establish its magnitude and direction through different samples (e.g., adoptive parents: [Averett, Strong-Blakeney, Nalavany, & Ryan, 2011](#); college students: [Papadaki, Plotnikof, & Papadaki, 2013](#); public and private adoption agencies: [Brodzinsky, Patterson, & Vaziri, 2002](#); [Spivey, 2006](#); sexologists: [Viozzi, Tripodi, Nimbi, Baiocco, & Simonelli, 2016](#)) and in different countries (e.g., Greece: [Papadaki et al., 2013](#); Portugal: [Gato & Fontaine, 2016](#); USA; [Brodzinsky et al., 2002](#); [Brown, Ryan, & Pushkal, 2007](#)), using various instruments (e.g., scales: [Costa Almeida, Anselmo, Ferreira, Pereira, & Leal, 2014](#); questionnaires: [Spivey, 2006](#)).

In general, international studies indicate that attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples may vary from a population to another, depending on certain circumstances like the participant’s gender, sexual orientation of the couple, the adopted child gender (see [Gato & Fontaine, 2016](#); [Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999](#)), sexual beliefs ([Spivey, 2006](#)), the emotional stability of parents, the parental competition and responsibility ([Morse, McLaren, & McLachlan, 2007](#)). For instance, [Spivey’s](#) study on adoption (2006) found after comparing samples’ favorable attitudes toward adoption. Such that students’ attitudes were more favorable than workers of adoption agencies. Contrary to this result, [Gato and Fontaine \(2016\)](#) observed that Portuguese University students have a more favorable opinion towards the adoption by heterosexual couples. Here, students considered that the heterosexual parents have more parenting competencies than same sex couples. In addition, [Crawford et al. \(1999\)](#), observed in their study that many psychologists in USA considered more suitable an adoption for a he-

terosexual couple than for the same sex couples if a female child was the target for an adoption.

In summary, even when nowadays there is a tendency to a more positive attitude towards adoption regarding same sex couples, there still is a tremendous negative bias for this to happen (Morse, McLaren, & McLachlan, 2007) and research is in demand to know what are the specific psychological factors and the way these factors interact to sustain this negative bias.

Here it is argued that by considering an information integration theory approach then cognitive algebra studies can be implemented to explore systematic interaction of relevant psychological factors interacting sustaining this appointed negative bias toward adoption regarding same sex couples. Briefly, this theoretical approach proposes that human mind not only dynamically selects environmental variables but it has also the capacity to transform these stimuli into its correspondent psychological values and in turn integrate this psychological data through cognitive operators into meaningful interpretations sustaining our intellect and judgment (Anderson, 1981, 1991, 1996).

From this theoretical point of view, attitudes toward adoption by the same sex couples have not been explored and no integration cognitive rule of relevant psychological factors (like, sexual preference, time of romantic relationship, etc.) has been specified up to now. Specific determination of such a cognitive rule empower researchers to determine the weight of a specific psychological factor to sustain a negative bias (attitude) to misjudgment or discriminatory prejudice. Thus, in order provide insights on the nature of systematic thinking regarding adoption by gay or lesbian couples the following IIT studies were carried on.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, the Mexican society has shown a greater opening to sexuality themes that for long time have been considered as a taboo topic. For instance, the city of Mexico, is the first city of Latin America to allow marriage among same-sex people. This legislative change opened the opportunity for same-sex couples to empower rights as heritage to obtain bank loans, inheritance, social security and the possibility of adopting children (Barría, 2009). In fact, the city of Mexico, was the first place in Mexico to provide legal adoption rights to gay couple (Cancino, 2010).

In despite of this remarkable changes on Mexican population attitudes toward gays and lesbians' rights, there is little research specifying the reasons for attitudinal changes toward adoption in this population (e.g., Papadak et al., 2013; Rye & Meaney, 2010; Brown, Ryan & Pushkal, 2007; Gibbons, Wilson & Rufener, 2006; Averett, Strong-Blakeney, Nalavany & Ryan, 2011; Monto & Supinski, 2014; Carrera-Fernández, Lameiras-Fernández & Rodríguez-Castro, 2014; Fernández & Alarcón, 2015). Most of available documentation on this topic relies on personal reflections over gays and lesbians' rights to have a family (e.g., Bernheim, 2013; Adoption more open for gays and lesbians, 2003; Vélez, 2011) or they constitute reports and law articles (e.g., Barría, 2009; Cancino, 2010; Aranda, 2015; Cruz, 2015, Agencia de Gestión Urbana de la Ciudad de

México, n.d.) or simple general opinions on the topic (e.g., APA, 2005; Conapred, 2010; Buil, García-Rubio, Lapastora, & Rabasot, 2004). There is no formal research on cognitive integration processes regarding attitudes toward adoption by same-sex couples.

Thus, the current study aims to find cognitive algebra rules modulating these attitudinal processes by considering four sources of information to judgment formation describing attributes of a couple desiring to adopt a child, namely, sexual orientation, couple status and stability of couple's romantic relationship. The research method intended for this purpose is described next.

3. Method

The experimental design considers 36 experimental conditions resulting from orthogonal combination of four main factors. A first factor "Sexual orientation" and three other factors listed as relevant predictors in the selection and performance of prospective adoptive parents (e.g., age of the couple: Ward, 1998, levels of marital adjustment: Calvo, Palmieri, Codamo, Scampoli, & Bianco, 2015). Specifically, it is explored the effect of sexual orientation (heterosexual, gay, lesbian), the couple's civil state (married or free union), couple's relationship endurance (6 months to 5 years) and couple's stability (regularly stable, sporadic fights, unstable relationship). Thus, factor combination ($3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$) resulted in 36 experimental conditions which were used to build the instrument.

3.1. Instruments

Each of the 36 experimental conditions was represented by a social scenario. Thus, each scenario briefly described an adoption case containing information from one level of each factor. At the bottom part of each scenario there was a question about the level of acceptability regarding the adoption case. Here, participants had to answer by using an eleven-point scale (varying from 0 to 10) (A scenario example is presented in **Appendix**).

3.2. Participants

This study considered 125 young Mexicans from different cities of Mexico. The sample age range varied between 18 and 30 years old ($M = 22$, $SD = 2$). In this sample 64% were women and the rest were single males who explicitly manifested as heterosexuals. Regarding religion, the sample consisted of 56% Catholics, 9% Christian, 24% atheist and the rest subscribed to other religious beliefs. All of the participants enrolled voluntarily with no economic incentive.

3.3. Procedure

Verbal consent for participation in the study was obtained for each participant. Then they were presented with the instrument as well as with verbal instruction on how to proceed through the study. Practice scenarios were presented in order for participants get familiar with the study. After practice participants were required to read 36 scena-

rios describing possible adoption cases by couples having different sexual preferences. The experimental task was to provide acceptability judgments for each presented scenario. The time required to complete the task varied between 40 to 50 minutes.

4. Results

A cluster analysis was carried on over participants' raw judgment scores (Euclidean distance, K-means) to determine if judgment regarding adoption by couples with specific sexual preference could be typified inside different groups. After cluster identification, a repeated measures ANOVA was carried on over each group judgment scores considering the $3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 3$ experimental design. The goal was look for evidence suggesting that experimental factor interaction provided data patterns modulated by cognitive algebraic rules.

4.1. Analysis Cluster

Two main significant different response patterns ($\eta^2 = 0.68$) were identified among participants. A first cluster ($N = 95$, 76%) was conformed by participants having a moderately favorable acceptability toward adoption ($M = 6$, $DE = 3$), no matter which couple's sexual preference was under scrutiny: heterosexual ($M = 6$), gay ($M = 6$) or lesbian ($M = 6$). This cluster was recognized as a moderately favorable judgment group. A second cluster ($N = 30$, 24%) was typified by people having the lowest index of acceptability toward adoption ($M = 3$, $DE = 3$). In this last group participants showed a moderately not favorable attitude toward heterosexual parents ($M = 5$) and highly not favorable toward gay parenting ($M = 1$) or lesbian ($M = 1$). Thus, this cluster was entitled as the less favorable or conservative judgment cluster.

4.2. ANOVA

For each cluster a repeated measure ANOVA was carried on considering a 3 (sexual orientation) \times 2 (civil state) \times 2 (time of romantic relationship) \times 3 (romantic relationship stability) experimental design. Statistical significance was set to $p < 0.001$.

At least three aspects can be noticed from the above data. First, in both clusters the most relevant factor relates to couples' relationship stability. Second, couples' sexual orientation was only relevant to low acceptability cluster. Here, adoption by gays ($M = 1.5$) and lesbians ($M = 1.4$) was considered less acceptable than adoption by heterosexual couples ($M = 5$). Third, in the less favorable judgment cluster the civil state of a couple factor seemed more relevant than couples' years of relationship. This is not the case for the first Cluster.

Notice, that no significant interaction was obtained for the moderate acceptability group ($\eta^2 = 0.09$) (Table 1, Figure 1) whereas the low acceptability group shows a significant interaction among sexual preference and couple's relationship stability ($\eta^2 = 0.60$) (Table 1, Figure 1). This suggests that each identified cluster (moderately favorable and low favorable) use a different cognitive rule to judge acceptability regarding adoption by couples with different sexual preferences.

Table 1. ANOVA results for each cluster.

Source	df	MS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Cluster 1 “Moderately favorable judgment”							
Sexual orientation (So)	2	1.067	190	1.814	0.588	<i>ns</i>	0.006
Civil state (Cs) ^a	1	121.711	95	5.502	22.119	0.001	0.188
Years of relationship (Yr) ^a	1	198.208	95	5.516	35.927	0.001	0.274
Couple stability (Cst) ^a	2	14,663.93	190	23.385	627.065	0.001	0.868
So * Cs	2	4.639	190	1.438	3.225	<i>ns</i>	0.032
So * Yr	2	7.033	190	1.772	3.968	<i>ns</i>	0.040
So * Cst	4	1.409	380	2.016	0.699	<i>ns</i>	0.007
Cs * Yr	1	0.002	95	2.173	0.0009	<i>ns</i>	0.000
Cs * Cst	2	5.749	190	2.470	2.327	<i>ns</i>	0.023
Yr * Ep ^a	2	20.537	190	2.076	9.889	0.001	0.094
Cluster 2 “Conservative judgment or less favorable”							
Sexual orientation (So) ^a	2	1460.92	58	22.864	63.894	0.001	0.687
Civil state (Cs) ^a	1	103.292	29	6.355	16.251	0.001	0.359
Years of relationship (Yr) ^a	1	83.333	29	7.572	11.004	<i>ns</i>	0.275
Couple stability (Cst) ^a	2	576.519	58	6.513	88.508	0.001	0.753
So * Cs	2	36.2731	58	2.730	13.286	0.001	0.314
So * Yr	2	11.786	58	3.085	3.819	<i>ns</i>	0.116
So * Cst ^a	4	219.919	116	4.897	44.900	0.001	0.607
Cs * Yr	1	0.0148	29	2.802	0.005	<i>ns</i>	0.000
Cs * Cst	2	16.312	58	3.139	5.195	<i>ns</i>	0.151
Yr * Cst	2	8.302	58	2.927	2.836	<i>ns</i>	0.089

a. Significance $p < 0.001$.

Moreover, notice from **Figure 1** that the group with higher acceptability towards adoption and sexual diversity (cluster 1) uses a summative cognitive to moderate judgment of acceptability whereas the second group (low acceptability) produces judgment of acceptability using a multiplicative cognitive algebraic rule.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to measure in a sample of young heterosexual acceptability judgments toward infant adoption by heterosexual, lesbian and gay couples. Here, a cluster analysis identified two different visions—moderate acceptance and not acceptable—underlying study participants’ acceptance judgment. This oscillation in the sample’s level of acceptance toward adoption is congruent with some sources of academic research (see introduction) where evidence suggested that even when there are some groups of people having a gradual increasing acceptance and motivation supporting adoption and

the right to form by same sex preference minority groups there are people who clearly opposes this initiative. This last group represented in this study as the low acceptance group, significantly weighted more acceptable adoption by heterosexuals than by gays or lesbians (see **Table 1** and **Figure 1**). This is interesting since it represents a ruled

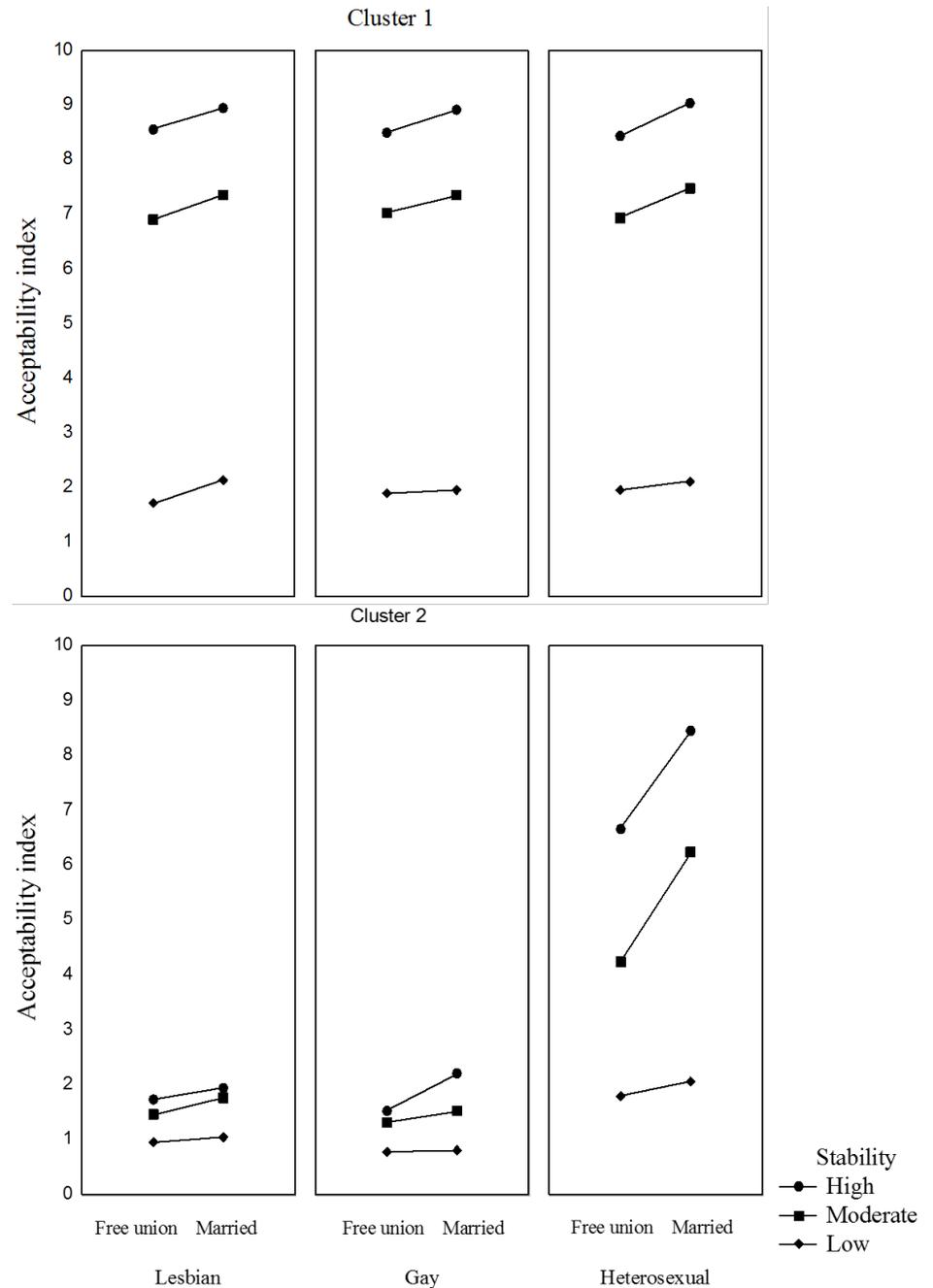


Figure 1. Interaction graph showing cognitive integration of study factors in both groups: Couples' relationship stability x couples' civil state and sexual orientation of a couple. The Top panel shows the data response pattern for the moderate acceptability group towards adoption whereas the bottom panel shows the low acceptability group's performance through experimental conditions.

implicit negative bias towards a sexual preference of a minority group. Probably, this cluster presents judgment related to a conservative vision, since this group's judgments consider that when a couple satisfy a civil canon like marriage, then couples are considered stable enough for adoption even if these couples had a long-term relationship.

A relevant aspect in this study was the different information integration cognitive rule shown by each group. This suggests that there is a possible different way to integrate information toward adoption depending on the level of acceptability under scrutiny. It is clear that more research is on demand to explore if the detected information integration mechanisms regarding acceptability toward adoption do indeed vary depending not only on attitude type (favorable not favorable) but also on sexual preference of participants (gay, lesbian, transgender, etc.).

Finally, it is worthy to emphasize the utility of using an information integration theory approach to continue the exploration of systematic thinking underlying attitudes toward human rights of the LGBTQ community. For instance, IIT academic efforts can be aimed to explore differences between and within heterosexual and LGBTQ communities to determine cognitive systematic thinking variations underlying modulating attitude and judgment formation towards LGBTQ's rights to sex, marriage and family formation.

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