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Gay and Lesbian Parented Families: The Role of Sexuality in Travel Motivations and Destination Choice

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Title: Gay and Lesbian Parented Families: The Role of Sexuality in Travel Motivations and Destination Choice

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Abstract:

A very significant instance of social transformation in Western countries is the enhanced visibility of families parented by gays and lesbians (Lucena et al. 2015). Indeed, while anti-gay sentiments continue to exist, decreased cultural homophobia towards lesbians and gays has fostered a rise in same-sex parented families (Few-Demo et al. 2016). Although not new, this phenomenon has gained force thanks to recent legal recognition by several Western societies (Carroll and Ramon Mendos, 2017).

Like their heterosexual counterparts, lesbian and gay parented families go on holiday together. Yet, their holiday choices have been largely overlooked in tourism research. This paper leads to a critical understanding of gay and lesbian parented families' travel motivations and destination choices, thereby helping fill this gap in knowledge. It also challenges the heteronormativity that dominates tourism research (Blichfeldt et al. 2013) and sheds new light into the interplay between sexuality and holiday decisions.

The literature on family tourism highlights the importance of holidays, viewed as critical to the maintenance of the family unit (Shaw et al. 2008). However, tourism research still focuses on the heteronormative nuclear family composed of mother-father-children and overlooks the social changes that have affected the family as an 'institution,' particularly over the last decade (Few-Demo et al. 2016). On the other hand, research about LGBT tourism has traditionally placed emphasis on single individuals, particularly gay men (Hughes 2006), thereby neglecting the trips that take place with the family. Yet, the travel motivations and choices of lesbians and gays may conflate, intersect, juxtapose or even conflict with those of families. More scholarly attention should thus be given to whether and how gay and lesbian parents' sexualities impact on these families' holiday choices and motivations.

To fill this gap, qualitative interviews were utilised as data collection methods. Twenty-two interviews involving sixteen mothers, thirteen fathers and six children, were conducted in total. Results reveal that, on family holidays, gay and lesbian parents minimise the role of sexuality, which is 'left to the background' of other identities. Yet, sexuality impacts on destination avoidance, with parents shunning destinations perceived as homophobic. Additionally, sexuality-related shame can cause lesbian and gay parents to avoid social interaction on holiday, and even prioritise accommodation choices where they do not have to share facilities. Likewise, they may avoid gay-centred spaces due to a concern of exposing children to demonstrations of 'gayness.'

This paper offers unique contributions to knowledge. It reveals how gay and lesbian parents' somewhat paradoxical relationship with their sexualities informs their families' travel choices. It further adds to knowledge about the influence of pride / shame in tourism studies and highlights how, despite the impact of sexuality in holiday choices, same-sex parented families' often reinforce their 'averageness,' rather than difference, in relation to heteronormative families.

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