

## Anticipation of the sexual and gender development of children adopted by same-sex couples

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The present study aimed to characterize beliefs surrounding the sexual and gender development of children adopted by lesbian and gay couples. Participants were 768 Portuguese university students. Using a quasiexperimental design, participants were presented with identical descriptions of a couple interested in adopting a child, manipulating couple sexual orientation and child gender. Participants were then asked to anticipate three aspects of the sexual and gender development of the adopted child: sexual orientation, gender role behavior, and gender identity. MANOVAs and follow-up ANOVAs were conducted in order to analyze the data. Results indicated that participants, particularly males, considered children adopted by either lesbian or gay couples to have a lower probability of developing a normative sexual and gender identity than children adopted by heterosexual couples. Both men and women considered that children would emulate the sexual orientation of their same-sex parents, and that a boy's gender role behavior was more at risk if he was adopted by a lesbian couple. Moreover, men were apprehensive about the gender role behavior of a boy adopted by a gay male couple. Overall, these results indicate persistence of biased evaluations of the sexual and gender development of children adopted by lesbian and gay parents. Furthermore, both gender of the participant and gender of the child play an important role in these evaluations. Results are discussed and interpreted as a way of "doing gender" in the context of hegemonic masculinity.

**Keywords:** Lesbian and gay parenting; Attitudes; Gender.

La présente étude visait à identifier les croyances entourant le développement lié au genre et au sexe chez les enfants adoptés par des couples homosexuels (lesbiennes et gais). Les participants étaient 768 étudiants universitaires portugais. Suivant un devis quasi-expérimental, les participants ont reçu des descriptions identiques d'un couple intéressé à adopter un enfant, en manipulant l'orientation sexuelle du couple et le genre de l'enfant. Les participants ont ensuite été interrogés à propos de leurs anticipations concernant trois aspects du développement de l'enfant adopté: son orientation sexuelle, ses comportements associés au rôle de genre et son identité de genre. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide de MANOVA, puis des analyses de suivi ont été effectuées avec des ANOVAs. Les résultats ont indiqué que les participants, particulièrement les hommes, considéraient les enfants adoptés soit par des couples de lesbiennes ou de gais comme présentant une plus faible probabilité de développer une sexualité normative et une identité de genre comparativement aux enfants adoptés par des couples hétérosexuels. Les résultats ont aussi indiqué qu'à la fois les hommes et les femmes considéraient que les enfants seraient tentés d'imiter l'orientation sexuelle de leurs parents de même sexe et que chez le garçon le comportement associé au rôle de genre était plus à risque s'il était adopté par un couple de lesbiennes. De plus, les hommes étaient appréhensifs à propos du comportement associé au rôle de genre pour les garçons adoptés par un couple d'hommes gais. Dans l'ensemble, ces résultats indiquent la persistance d'évaluations biaisées en ce qui a trait au développement lié au genre et au sexe chez les enfants adoptés par des parents lesbiennes ou gais. En outre, à la fois le genre du participant et le genre de l'enfant jouent un rôle important dans ces évaluations. Les résultats sont discutés et interprétés en fonction d'une vision de masculinité hégémonique.

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*E*l presente estudio tuvo como objetivo caracterizar las creencias relacionadas con el desarrollo sexual y de género de los niños adoptados por parejas de homosexuales y lesbianas. Los participantes fueron 768 estudiantes universitarios portugueses. Mediante el uso de un diseño cuasi-experimental, se les presentaron a los participantes descripciones idénticas de una pareja interesada en adoptar un niño, manipulando la orientación sexual de la pareja y el sexo del niño. Se les pidió a los participantes que anticiparan tres aspectos del desarrollo sexual y de género del niño adoptado: orientación sexual, comportamientos de rol de género e identidad de género. Se realizaron MANOVAs y análisis univariados de seguimiento con el fin de analizar los datos. Los resultados indicaron que los participantes, especialmente los hombres, consideraban que los niños adoptados por parte de parejas homosexuales o lesbianas tendrían una menor probabilidad de desarrollar una identidad de género y sexual normativa que los niños adoptados por parejas heterosexuales. Los resultados también indicaron que tanto hombres como mujeres consideraron que los niños emularían la orientación sexual del padre de su mismo sexo, y que el comportamiento de rol de género de los varones estaba en mayor riesgo si eran adoptados por una pareja de lesbianas. Por otra parte, los hombres se mostraron aprehensivos acerca de la conducta del rol de género de un niño adoptado por una pareja de hombres homosexuales. En general, estos resultados indican la persistencia de evaluaciones parciales del desarrollo sexual y de género de los niños adoptados por parejas homosexuales y lesbianas. Además, tanto el género de los participantes como el sexo del niño juegan un papel importante en estas evaluaciones. Los resultados se discuten y se interpretan en función del género en un contexto hegemónico de masculinidad.

Research has consistently demonstrated that lesbian and gay parenting is very similar to heterosexual parenting (for a review, see Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). However, various fears cause people to question lesbians' and gay men's capacity to perform in a parenting role, whether as adoptive parents or in custody disputes. One fear is that children will show "disturbances" in their own sexual and gender identity (Patterson, 1992).<sup>1</sup> Research has nonetheless indicated that parental homosexuality does not foster gender identity confusion or homosexual orientation in children and adolescents. Although some studies have pointed to less gender-stereotyped behavior (e.g., Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, & Golombok, 1997), pervasive cross-gender role behavior is not an expected outcome (Golombok et al., 2003). Nevertheless, beliefs about disruptions in the development of children's sexual and gender identity may underlie negative attitudes to lesbian and gay parenting. In fact, rationales frequently made by courts to disqualify lesbians and gay men as fit parents include concerns regarding the assumed influence that they may have on their child's sexual and gender identity (e.g., Santos, Santos, Duarte, & Lima, 2009).

In this work, we aim to answer the following questions. What does a particularly young and educated population think about the sexual and

gender development of children raised by lesbian and gay parents? Do gender differences evidenced in attitudes to lesbians and gay men extend to the anticipation of the gender development of their children? Finally, do these evaluations vary as a function of the gender of the child? Four bodies of literature and research provide foundations for thinking about these issues. We first review sociological data and psychological research about attitudes to lesbians and gay men and their parenting roles. We then draw on an approach that views gender as a situated accomplishment and on scholarship about hegemonic masculinity. Finally, we take account of research about parental behaviors and attitudes in relation to the gender socialization of children.

### ATTITUDES TO LESBIANS AND GAY MEN AND THEIR PARENTING ROLES

Even though recent changes in the Portuguese legal system sought to reduce discrimination based on sexual orientation (e.g., access to civil marriage for same-sex couples in 2010), homosexuality is still considered highly undesirable in Portugal. For instance, when compared to their counterparts in the rest of Europe, the Portuguese claim to feel more discomfort with the possibility of having a homosexual person as a neighbor (European

<sup>1</sup> A distinction is usually made between gender identity, gender role behavior, and sexual orientation. Gender identity refers to a person's self-identification as male or female. Gender role comprises behaviors and attitudes that are regarded by a particular culture as appropriately male or female. Sexual orientation concerns a person's attraction to sexual partners as homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual (Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

Commission, 2009) and are less likely to have friends or acquaintances who are not heterosexual (European Commission, 2008). When children are involved, antihomosexual prejudice seems particularly salient. Only 19% of the population agrees with adoption by lesbian and gay couples (European Commission, 2007). This apprehension is evident in Portuguese law: the recent recognition of same-sex marriage explicitly ruled out the right of lesbian and gay couples to be assessed as suitable for adopting children—a right available to married heterosexual couples.

With studies failing to confirm concerns regarding the parenting abilities of lesbian and gay parents and the development of their children, some researchers have shifted their attention to the social climate and the attitudes to this family configuration.<sup>2</sup> These studies were conducted in English-speaking countries (USA and Canada) where student samples were mostly used. They mainly dealt with prospective evaluations of parental competence and found that although lesbian and gay persons' parenting abilities were not repudiated, heterosexual parents were usually considered more competent (e.g., Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999; Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Fraser, Fish, & Mackenzie, 1995; King & Black, 1999; McLeod, Crawford, & Zechmeister, 1999). However, as stated above, apprehension about lesbian and gay parenting resides not only in the ability of homosexual persons to parent, but also in their children's psychological development (Patterson, 1992). King and Black (1999) found that respondents attributed more problematic behavior, in a variety of domains, to a child of a lesbian mother than to a child of a heterosexual mother. McLeod and colleagues (1999) investigated how participants anticipated children's gender development and verified that a boy raised by two gay fathers was perceived as experiencing greater confusion regarding his sexual orientation and gender identity than a boy raised in a heterosexual home.

Gender, age and educational level are not independent of the former evaluations. In particular, men report less accepting attitudes to homosexuals than women, especially toward gay men (for a meta-analysis, see Kite & Whitley, 1996). As far as lesbian and gay parenting is concerned, men were found to be less accepting

than women (Fraser et al., 1995; King & Black, 1999). Less negative attitudes to lesbians and gay men have been noted in younger and more educated samples (e.g. Costa, Pereira, Oliveira, & Nogueira, 2010; Schellenberg, Hirt, & Sears, 1999), and the same can be expected concerning lesbian and gay parenting.

### "DOING" ONE'S OWN AND CHILDREN'S GENDER

West and Zimmerman (1987) argued that gender is not something we are, but something we do. They defined *doing gender* as "to engage in behavior at the risk of gender assessment" (2002, p. 13). That is, to do gender is to act with the possibility that one will be judged according to one's sex category—to be accountable to that sex category. Thus, gender is socially constructed and achieved in everyday interactions in light of "normative conceptions" of masculinity and femininity. In general, these conceptions or stereotypes describe women as more communal and men as more agentic and instrumental (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). In addition to this horizontal dimension of difference, there is a hierarchical dimension of status inequality, with greater power being ascribed to men (Pratto & Walker, 2004). Williams and Best (1990) showed that, while granting each sex specialized skills, gender stereotypes associate greater overall status and competence with men, particularly in the socially valued arena of instrumental rationality. In the same way, Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu (2002) demonstrated that women are viewed as less competent in general, but "nicer" and achieving better results at communal tasks (which are valued less).

To understand why masculinity is more valued than femininity it is crucial to go beyond the "micro-interactional account of gender" (Ridgeway, 2009, p. 146) offered by the "doing gender" perspective, and explore social structures and relations in which gender is enacted. Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995) is a crossculturally and historically variable conception of masculinity in relation to which subordinated masculinities, as well as femininities, are defined. This hegemony consists in a social ascendancy that is embedded in social instances such as religion or the media (Connell, 1987). Connell (1987, 1995) also

<sup>2</sup> Many of these works have relied on a quasiexperimental methodology. For instance, Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, and Jordan (1999) presented vignettes to participants containing the description of a couple seeking the adoption of a child. After reading the text, participants were asked to rate the parental competence of the depicted couple. Because the sexual orientation of the couple and the sex of the child were manipulated, it was possible to compare respondents' evaluations of parental competence in the different configurations.

emphasizes that masculinity and femininity are relational concepts. For this reason, throughout their lives, males will have to assert their masculinity by proving that they are not women and by distinguishing themselves, and the things they do, from the feminine universe. In Kimmel's words, the "notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical constructions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than who one is" (1994, p. 119).

As stereotypes of lesbians and gay men postulate they have the traits of the opposite sex (Kite & Deaux, 1987), homosexuality is associated with crossgender behavior. Moreover, because hegemonic masculinity is defined as exclusively heterosexual (Connell, 1987, 1995; Kimmel, 1994), male homosexuality is seen as a contradiction and an expression of femininity. Consistently, male homosexuality is repudiated more than female homosexuality, particularly by heterosexual men (Kite & Whitley, 1996). Homophobia is thus essential to the rejection of femininity and affirmation of heterosexual masculinity (Badinter, 1997; Connell, 1987, 1995; Herek, 1993). As Connell (1987, p. 186) noted, "contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men... is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity."

As we have said, gender is continually reconstructed in light of normative conceptions of men and women, and the raising of children constitutes a field in which these roles are enacted by fathers and mothers, as far as the gender and sexual development of their own children is concerned. Moreover, because of hegemonic masculinity, boys are unique targets of these processes. Research has indeed shown a parental gender effect in the socialization of male children. For instance, parents are more prone to offer more stereotyped toys to boys than to girls (e.g., Fisher-Thompson, Sausa, & Wright, 1995). Furthermore, because rejection of femininity and hostility to male homosexuality are nuclear to the construction of hegemonic masculinity, fathers are especially likely to be motivated in accomplishing gender with and for their sons. Research has shown that men exert more gender-conforming pressure on boys than do women (e.g., Jacklin, DiPietro, & Maccoby, 1984; Kane, 2006; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Martin, Wood, & Little, 1990; Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999; Siegal, 1987).

In brief, people do gender when they act and think about the sexual and gender development of children. This can, in West and Zimmerman's words, "afford clarification of the interactional scaffolding of social structure and the social

control processes that sustain it" (1987, p. 147). Moreover, because people do gender in the context of hegemonic masculinity, different attitudes are expected from the two genders, and in relation to boys versus girls. Thus, we predict that:

*H1:* Participants will anticipate a less normative sexual and gender development when children are adopted by homosexual (lesbian or gay) couples than when children are adopted by heterosexual couples.

We also predict that, when children are adopted by lesbian or gay couples:

*H2a:* Men will anticipate a less normative sexual and gender development than women.

*H2b:* Participants will anticipate a less normative sexual and gender development in the case of boys than in the case of girls.

*H2c:* Men more than women will anticipate a less normative sexual and gender development in the case of boys than in the case of girls.

## METHOD

### Participants

Data were collected from 789 undergraduate students of the University and Polytechnic Institute of Porto, attending degrees from two main domains: social sciences/education/health (psychology, educational sciences, physical therapy, occupational therapy, nursing, speech therapy) and engineering (mechanical engineering and civil engineering), 66.8% and 33.2%, respectively. Twenty-one participants with an age above three standard deviations of the mean were removed. The final sample was constituted by 768 participants, with ages ranging from 18 to 36 years and a modal value of 18 years ( $M = 20.94$ ;  $SD = 3.10$ ). Most of the participants were women (64.7%), which is in accordance with the overrepresentation of female students in higher education in Portugal, particularly in the health, education and social sciences fields of study (GPEAR/MCTES, 2011).

### Instruments

Participants answered a demographics questionnaire, read a case vignette, and completed a 12-item questionnaire created specifically for this study.

### Case vignette

An adoption situation (Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Crawford & Solliday, 1996) was adapted to the Portuguese context. The vignette depicted a couple, Marco and Raquel, as being two loving individuals involved in a 15-year relationship, who didn't have children of their own and had recently decided to adopt a child. Both were described as being college educated, well liked by their friends and neighbors, successful in their professional careers, and owners of a three-bedroom home in Porto. Neither had a history of psychiatric illness, substance abuse, or legal or financial difficulties. Both were described as feeling financially and emotionally prepared to be parents. In addition, both of the candidates' parents were excited about the idea of becoming grandparents and, hence, lending as much support to them as possible.

The vignette detailed how Marco and Raquel met Joana, a six-year-old orphan girl who was a ward of the state. All three got along well, and Joana stated that she would like to live with them. After carefully considering all the ramifications of making that decision, Marco and Raquel felt that they could provide Joana with a loving home and began seeking formal adoption of this child.

The vignettes distributed to participants were identical except that: (a) the names of the couple described in the vignette indicated either a heterosexual (Marco and Raquel), gay male (João and António), or lesbian (Clara and Margarida) couple; and (b) the gender of the child was female (Joana) or male (Rui).

### Evaluation of the developmental outcomes of the child questionnaire

After reading the vignette, participants were asked to imagine that the child was adopted by the couple and then to evaluate the probability that this child, throughout his/her development, would (a) have a good self-concept, (b) show behaviors, interests and activities typical of a girl, (c) show behaviors, interests and activities typical of a boy, (d) present behavior problems, (e) have good intellectual ability, (f) present emotional problems, (g) be sexually attracted to males, (h) be sexually attracted to females, (i) have good social skills, (j) be verbally or physically abused by his/her peers, (k) feel well as a boy and later as a man/feel well as a girl and later as a woman (items varied according to the gender of the child portrayed in the vignette), and (l) be the victim of discrimination by adults. Items were rated on a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*no probability*) to

6 (*total probability*). For the purpose of this work only items pertaining to the sexual and gender development of the child were used. Item (k) ("probability that the child would feel well as a boy/girl and later as a man/woman") was used to assess normative gender identity. Heterosexual orientation and normative gender role behavior were assessed, respectively, by subtracting the probability that the child, throughout his/her development, would be experiencing a heterosexual orientation/normative gender role behavior from the probability that the child would be experiencing a homosexual orientation/non-normative gender role behavior. Thus, in the case of girls, the score of heterosexual orientation was calculated by subtracting item (l) from item (g); and the score of normative gender role behavior by subtracting item (c) from item (b). In the case of boys, the score of heterosexual orientation was calculated by subtracting item (g) from item (h); and the score of normative gender role behavior by subtracting item (b) from item (c).

### Procedure

Questionnaires were administered in a classroom setting. Respondents were fully aware that this study dealt with university students' attitudes to a variety of social issues (this information was provided on the cover sheet of the questionnaire). The recruitment procedure clearly outlined the voluntary nature of participation in the study, and participants' right to confidentiality and anonymity. After completing the questionnaire, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

### Design

Participants were randomly assigned to one of six vignettes: (1) a lesbian couple attempting to adopt a female child; (2) a lesbian couple attempting to adopt a male child, (3) a gay couple attempting to adopt a female child, (4) a gay couple attempting to adopt a male child, (5) a heterosexual couple attempting to adopt a female child; or (6) a heterosexual couple attempting to adopt a male child.

### Analysis

The quasiexperimental design was a  $3 \times 2 \times 2$  factorial design with the couple's sexual orientation (lesbian vs. gay vs. heterosexual), gender of the child (female vs. male), and gender of the

TABLE 1  
Tests of between-participants effects for child sexual and gender development outcomes

Factor	Outcome measure	Type IV sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F	p
Sexual orientation of the couple (SOC)	HO	100.32	2	50.16	14.38	0.00
	NGRB	103.39	2	51.70	15.33	0.00
	NGI	19.18	2	9.59	11.00	0.00
SOC × Gender of participant (GP)	HO	103.45	3	34.48	9.89	0.00
	NGRB	109.90	3	36.63	10.90	0.00
	NGI	28.41	3	9.47	10.87	0.00
SOC × Child's gender (CG)	HO	146.56	3	48.86	14.01	0.00
	NGRB	140.02	3	46.67	13.88	0.00
	NGI	7.62	3	2.54	2.91	0.03
SOC × GP × GC	HO	26.52	3	8.84	2.53	0.06
	NGRB	43.03	3	14.35	4.27	0.01
	NGI	5.00	3	1.67	1.91	0.13

HO = heterosexual orientation; NGRB = normative gender role behavior; NGI = normative gender identity.

participant (female vs. male) as independent variables. A preliminary analysis revealed that there were no differences across the six experimental conditions related to participant gender. Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were conducted to determine if there was an effect of sexual orientation of the couple on the three dependent variables concerning a child's sexual and gender development. Additionally, two-way (sexual orientation of the couple × gender of the participant) and three-way (sexual orientation of the couple × gender of child × gender of the participant) interaction effects were tested. A significant Box's *M* indicated that the homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrix assumption was violated. However, a minimum cell size of 39 cases and the use of the Pillai's trace criterion to test for significance across groups guaranteed the robustness of the analyses. Due to MANOVA's high sensitivity to the effect of outliers, multivariate outliers were sought separately within the six experimental conditions. Five cases with unusual combinations in the three dependent variables were detected through the calculation of the Mahalanobis distance ( $p < .001$ ), and thus eliminated.

## RESULTS

In order to test Hypothesis 1, the main effect of the sexual orientation of the couple was tested. A significant multivariate main effect was detected, Pillai's trace = .06,  $F(6, 1468) = 7.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ , power = 1.00, on all dependent variables (see Table 1). The Games-Howell post-hoc test, which is designed for unequal

variances, was used for pairwise comparisons. Results showed a consistent pattern of significant differences between the heterosexual and homosexual orientations (no differences were found between lesbian and gay couples) in all dependent variables. Participants considered a child adopted by a heterosexual couple as having a greater likelihood of acquiring a heterosexual orientation than a child adopted by either a lesbian or a gay couple. The same was observed for normative gender role behavior and normative gender identity (means, standard deviations and significant differences for the total sample can be observed in Table 2).

To test Hypothesis 2a, a two-way interaction between the sexual orientation of the couple and the gender of the participants was tested. A significant multivariate effect was found, Pillai's trace = .07,  $F(9, 2205) = 5.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .02$ , power = 1.00, on all variables (see Table 1). Follow-up ANOVAs (in order to reduce the chance of a Type I error, a Bonferroni adjusted alpha level was used for all between-participants effects), with sexual orientation of the couple as a between-participants factor, revealed differences only in the male subsample, for heterosexual orientation,  $F(2, 263) = 2.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ; normative gender role behavior,  $F(2, 264) = 13.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and, normative gender identity,  $F(2, 266) = 12.12$ ,  $p < .001$  (means, standard deviations, and significant differences for the female and male subsamples are given in Table 2).

In order to test Hypothesis 2b, a two-way interaction between the sexual orientation of the couple and the gender of the child was tested. A significant multivariate effect was found, Pillai's trace = .16,  $F(9, 2205) = 13.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ ,

TABLE 2

Means, standard deviations, and statistical differences for child sexual and gender development outcomes as a function of the sexual orientation of the couple and the gender of the participant

		Total sample (n = 747)			Females (n = 498)			Males (n = 271)		
		LC (n = 245)	GC (n = 253)	HIC (n = 247)	LC (n = 159)	GC (n = 167)	HIC (n = 156)	LC (n = 86)	GC (n = 88)	HIC (n = 91)
Heterosexual orientation	M	1.46 <sup>b</sup>	1.47 <sup>b</sup>	2.06 <sup>a</sup>	1.79	1.71	1.79	0.83 <sup>b</sup>	1.03 <sup>b</sup>	2.52 <sup>a</sup>
	(SD)	(2.08)	(2.13)	(1.57)	(2.00)	(2.02)	(1.51)	(2.12)	(2.27)	(1.59)
Normative gender role behavior	M	1.83 <sup>b</sup>	2.06 <sup>b</sup>	2.54 <sup>a</sup>	2.14	2.38	2.42	1.27 <sup>b</sup>	1.48 <sup>b</sup>	2.75 <sup>a</sup>
	(SD)	(2.25)	(1.91)	(1.51)	(2.11)	(1.81)	(1.47)	(2.39)	(1.97)	(1.56)
Normative gender identity	M	4.79 <sup>b</sup>	4.68 <sup>b</sup>	4.98 <sup>a</sup>	4.97	4.83	4.92	4.45 <sup>b</sup>	4.41 <sup>b</sup>	5.09 <sup>a</sup>
	(SD)	(1.01)	(1.11)	(0.68)	(0.94)	(1.05)	(0.68)	(1.06)	(1.18)	(0.66)

LC = lesbian couple; GC = gay couple; HIC = heterosexual couple. Statistically significant differences revealed by *post-hoc* comparison tests are represented by superscript a and b.

TABLE 3

Means, standard deviations, and statistical differences for child sexual and gender development outcomes as a function of the sexual orientation of the couple and the gender of the child

		Lesbian couple (n = 253)		Gay couple (n = 262)		Heterosexual couple (n = 254)	
		Girls (n = 125)	Boys (n = 128)	Girls (n = 125)	Boys (n = 137)	Girls (n = 130)	Boys (n = 124)
Heterosexual orientation	M	0.95 <sup>b</sup>	1.97 <sup>a</sup>	1.99 <sup>a</sup>	0.99 <sup>b</sup>	1.97	2.16
	(SD)	(2.14)	(1.92)	(1.86)	(2.25)	(1.60)	(1.54)
Normative gender role behavior	M	2.45 <sup>a</sup>	1.22 <sup>b</sup>	2.21	1.93	2.50	2.59
	(SD)	(1.67)	(2.56)	(1.71)	(2.08)	(1.47)	(1.55)

Statistically significant differences revealed by ANOVAs are represented by superscript a and b.

power = 1.00, on all dependent variables (see Table 1). Follow-up ANOVAs, with gender of the child as a between-participants factor, revealed differences only in the homosexual parenting conditions, for all variables except normative gender identity. A parallel pattern of results was found for lesbian versus gay couples with respect to the sexual orientation of the child. Participants considered that a girl adopted by a lesbian couple had a lesser chance of becoming heterosexual than a boy in her situation,  $F(1, 243) = 15.36$ ,  $p < .001$ . In the same way, participants considered that a boy adopted by a gay couple had a lesser chance of becoming heterosexual than a girl in his situation,  $F(1, 259) = 14.75$ ,  $p < .001$ . As far as normative gender role behavior is concerned, participants considered that a boy would fare worse than a girl if he was adopted by a lesbian couple,  $F(1, 244) = 20.30$ ,  $p < .001$  (means, standard deviations, and results of ANOVAs are given in Table 3).

To test Hypothesis 2c, a three-way interaction between the sexual orientation of the couple, the gender of the participant, and the gender of the

child was tested. A significant multivariate effect was found, Pillai's trace = .03,  $F(9, 2205) = 2.52$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ , power = 0.94, only on normative gender role behavior (see Table 1). Follow-up ANOVAs with gender of the child as a between-participants factor were performed separately for men and women. Both sexes agreed that boys would fare worse than girls with lesbian mothers in terms of their normative gender role behavior. However, men also identified differences in the case of gay couples. In this situation, boys ( $M = 0.93$ ,  $SD = 2.15$ ) were considered to be more at risk than girls ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ), as far as their normative gender role behavior was concerned,  $F(1, 87) = 5.35$ ,  $p = .02$ .

In sum, participants, particularly men, considered that the sexual orientation of parents influences children's normative sexual and gender development. Both men and women assumed that children would imitate the sexual orientation of their same-sex, but not opposite-sex, homosexual parents. In terms of normative gender role behavior, participants reported that boys with lesbian mothers would fare worse than girls in the

same situation. Participants did not express the same concern about the gender role behavior of girls being raised by gay men. Finally, men assumed boys would do worse than girls if they were adopted by gay couples.

## DISCUSSION

Results of this study showed that biased evaluations of the sexual and gender development of children adopted by same-sex parents persist and that gender is clearly associated with these appraisals. As predicted by Hypothesis 1, participants were more apprehensive about the normative sexual and gender development of children adopted by homosexual (lesbian or gay) couples than about that of children adopted by heterosexual couples. This finding is consistent with a study (McLeod et al., 1999) that pointed to biased evaluations of the development of children adopted by lesbian and gay persons, in what concerns their sexual and gender identity. Although younger and more educated people (e.g., Costa et al., 2010; Schellenberg et al., 1999) tend to hold more positive attitudes to lesbians and gay men, this study provides evidence that they remain apprehensive about the sexual and gender development of children adopted by same-sex couples. This apprehension can be better understood taking into consideration the gender of the participant.

As foreseen by Hypothesis 2a, men anticipated a negative impact of parental homosexual orientation on the sexual and gender identity of children more intensely than women. Men's more negative attitudes to lesbians and gay men (Kite & Whitley, 1996) seem thus to extend to lesbian and gay parenting (Fraser et al., 1995; King & Black, 1999), namely in relation to their conceptions of the sexual and gender development of children adopted by these couples.

Hypothesis 2b provides partial support that participants are more apprehensive about the sexual and gender development of boys than about that of girls. Firstly, participants considered that the normative gender identity of boys was no more susceptible to being influenced by parental sexual orientation than the normative gender identity of girls. Secondly, participants seemed equally apprehensive about the sexual orientation of boys and girls. Children were assumed to emulate the sexual orientation of their same-sex, but not opposite-sex, homosexual parents. This view is in accordance with early social learning theories (Mischell, 1970) about gender

development according to which boys and girls learn sex-typed behavior by imitating models of their own gender. However, the prediction made by the same theory that the lack of a same-gender parent would be particularly detrimental to a girl raised by gay men and to a boy raised by lesbians found support only in the case of boys. In terms of the development of normative gender role behavior, two female parents were thus seen as a greater threat for a boy than two male parents were for a girl. This result may be explained by the abovementioned views of masculinity as being more socially valued than femininity (Connell, 1987, 1995; Pratto & Walker, 2004; Williams & Best, 1990). The fact that more gender-conforming pressure is exerted on boys than on girls (e.g., Fisher-Thompson et al., 1995) sustains these representations and helps to further explain this result. Finally, participants may have considered male role models as scarcer outside the home than female role models (namely in educational settings), which may be seen as especially problematic for a boy raised by two mothers. Thus, Hypothesis 2b provides some evidence as far as the development of gender role behavior of a boy raised by a lesbian couple is concerned.

Hypothesis 2c, which states that men would be more apprehensive about the sexual and gender development of boys than about that of girls, was partially supported. Firstly, differences were detected only for normative gender role behavior. Secondly, men and women agreed that boys would fare worse than girls with lesbian mothers. Because both men and women do gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) in the context of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995), they are more worried with stereotypical masculinity than with stereotypical femininity. However, men considered that the normative gender role behavior of a boy was also at risk if he was adopted by a gay couple. Because hegemonic masculinity is seen as exclusively heterosexual (Connell, 1987, 1995; Kimmel, 1994) gay men were probably seen by male participants as more feminine (Kite & Deaux, 1987; Kite & Whitley, 1996), with particularly detrimental effects to the gender role behavior of a boy. Men's gender rigidity and homophobia (Herek, 1993) are also evident in the fact that they exert more gender-conforming pressure on boys than do women (Jacklin et al., 1984; Kane, 2006; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Martin et al., 1990; Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999; Siegal, 1987). In brief, men appear to be more concerned with keeping traditional gender roles, as they draw more advantage from them and are thus stricter



when boys' stereotypical masculinity is considered at risk.

Findings of this study should be interpreted taking account of the following methodological limitations. First, the use of a semiexperimental design may not have prevented the effect of social desirability, and so the demand characteristics of the study may have produced "politically correct" responding. Second, the sexual orientation of the participants was not known. However, as less negative and stereotyped attitudes are expected from nonheterosexual persons, the potential presence of lesbian and gay participants may have reduced the amplitude of the observed differences. Third, a nonrepresentative sample of the Portuguese population was used. As less than 10% of the population has completed a higher education degree in Portugal (INE, 2002), the sample clearly differs from general Portuguese society, in which more negative attitudes could be expected. It must be noted that all the above limitations increase the chance of a Type II error; they do not invalidate results. One final concern relates to the small magnitude of the effects, which imposes limits on the generalization of results.

The belief that the sexual orientation of parents influences children's sexual and gender development may be one of the factors that accounts for negative attitudes to lesbian and gay parenting. The fact that this apprehension is apparent even within a young and educated sample may help to explain the low support for lesbian and gay adoption seen in the Portuguese population.

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