

This is an Accepted Manuscript version of the following article, accepted for publication in Journal of Homosexuality: González, M., & López-Gaviño, F. (2023). What About the Sexual Orientation of the Offspring of Lesbian and Gay Parents? A Multidimensional, Time and Gender-Based Answer. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 70(13), 3051–3074. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2022.2086750> It is deposited under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

What about the sexual orientation of the offspring of lesbian and gay parents?

A multidimensional, time and gender-based answer

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Acknowledgments

We are really grateful to all the young adults, children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers, who shared their experiences and have made this research possible. We thank the invaluable comments of Andrea Angulo, Marta Díez and Jose-Ignacio Pichardo, during the conception of this report. We also thank the statistical support provided by Carlos Camacho.

Declarations

This work was partially supported by a grant obtained by Francisca López-Gaviño from Andalusian Regional Government (General Secretariat for Universities, Research and Technology, resolution) for the realization of her doctoral dissertation.

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Abstract

This study examined the sexual orientation of 30 young adult children of lesbian and gay parents, analyzing three dimensions (sexual behavior, sexual attraction and sexual self-identification), their evolution over time and the possible influence of gender (19 women and 11 men). Sexual orientation was measured using KSOG. The results revealed that most participants defined themselves as heterosexual only, although percentages varied between 87% for sexual behavior to 67% for sexual attraction and 60% for sexual self-identification. Gender differences were found for sexual attraction and self-identification, with men having a polarized profile (responses at both ends of the scale) and women reporting a less exclusive and more fluid sexuality. These findings are discussed in light of the complex nature of sexual orientation, the freedom of these young adults for defining their sexual orientation, and the role played by gender and family experiences.

Key Words

Sexual orientation, adult children, lesbian mothers, gay fathers, same-sex parents, gender differences, sexual behavior, sexual attraction, sexual self-definition, sexual fluidity,

Running head:

Sexual orientation of the offspring of lesbian and gay parents

What about the sexual orientation of the offspring of lesbian and gay parents?

A multidimensional, time and gender-based answer

Families formed by lesbian mothers or gay fathers have been at the center of heated social debates since they became visible and their rights became legally recognized in different societies (Herek, 2006; Patterson, 2009). One of the most controversial issues in these debates is the sexual orientation of the adult children brought up in these families (Patterson & Far, 2016). This is reflected in the arguments put forward in the US media (Clarke, 2001), as well as in analyses of the prejudices held by heterosexuals against same-sex parenting (Pennington & Knight, 2011). The controversy revolves around 'concerns' about whether these children may themselves be homosexual, a circumstance that has been viewed as a risk by certain social and academic groups (see, for discussion, Golombok, 2015; González, 2004; Stacey & Biblartz, 2001). Indeed, in the first studies carried out with children of lesbian and gay parents, published at the end of the 1970s (Green, 1978; Miller, 1979), particular attention was paid to their sexual orientation. However, despite the many studies that have been conducted with LGBT families since that time (see the recent compilation by Goldberg & Allen, 2020), relatively few have focused on the young adults who have grown up in them (Garwood & Lewis, 2018), and still fewer have sought to analyze their sexual orientation. There are therefore many questions yet to be answered.

Sexual orientation has often been defined in the following (or similar) terms: 'an enduring pattern or disposition to experience sexual or romantic desires for, and relationships with, people of one's same sex, the other sex, or both sexes' (Institute of Medicine, 2011; p.27). This definition suggests that sexual orientation should be viewed as a categorical variable: heterosexual, homosexual or (more recently) bisexual. However, scientific evidence has shown that it is, in fact, a continuous variable (Savin-Williams, 2016), ranging from exclusive orientation towards people of one's same sex to exclusive orientation towards

people of the other sex, with a wealth of intermediate variables in between, as indeed was postulated in the pioneering study by Kinsey et al. (1948). There is a certain level of agreement also in relation to the multidimensional nature of sexual orientation (Baldwin et al, 2017; Klein et al., 1985), and the general term is understood to encompass diverse aspects, such as (at the very least) sexual self-identification, sexual behavior and sexual attraction. Moreover, while there may be a certain level of concordance between these dimensions, there may also be variations and inconsistencies (Bailey et al., 2016; Fu et al., 2019). Moreover, several studies have found that although the sexual orientation of many people remains more or less stable over time, it is not unusual to find evidence of short and long-term changes. This suggests a certain degree of sexual fluidity, which is more likely to exist among those who do not consider themselves exclusively heterosexual (Diamond, 2016; Savin-Williams et al., 2012).

The distribution of sexual orientation across the general population varies in accordance with the specific dimension being analyzed, the measure used and whether we are talking about men or women. The latest data published by the US National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS, n.d.) clearly reveal these differences. For example, 4.9% of men identified themselves as gay or bisexual, 5.1% reported that they had engaged in same-sex sexual behavior at some point in their lives and 8.8% acknowledged at least some same-sex sexual attraction. For their part, 8.3% of women identified themselves as lesbians or bisexuals, 17.6% had engaged in sexual behavior with another woman at some point in their lives, and 19.9% acknowledged at least some same-sex sexual attraction. Similar disparities between dimensions, as well as between men and women, have been found also in studies carried out in different countries, as indeed highlighted by several recent reviews (Bailey et al., 2016; Diamond, 2016; Gates, 2013). In Spain, a recent study found that 6.1% of the general population identified as non-heterosexual, with little variation in accordance with gender

(Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2021). However, another study with adolescents revealed that, between the ages of 17 and 18, 6.8% of boys acknowledged feeling attracted to people of the same sex, as opposed to 14.5% of girls (Moreno et al., 2019).

Sexual orientation among the children of lesbian and gay parents.

The sexual orientation of children from same-sex families has been studied from a number of different approaches, following the pattern described by Johnson (2012) in relation to the study of LGBT families in general, in which initial, highly defensive studies intent on demonstrating that these children are not homosexual, gradually give way to others which seek to compare them with those brought up in heterosexual families and, more recently, attempt to explore the singularity of their experience in more detail. Studies have also used a wide range of different methodologies, age ranges, informants and sexual orientation measures. In the following sections we attempt to sum up their findings in accordance with the specific dimension of sexual orientation on which they focus.

Sexual self-identification

The first studies on the adult children of lesbian and gay parents reported that the vast majority identified themselves as heterosexuals, both when informants were the parents themselves (Miller, 1979), and when adolescent (Huggins, 1989) and adult children (Gottman, 1990; Paul, 1986) were interviewed directly about their sexual orientation. However, these studies were frequently carried out with very small samples that were heterogeneous in terms of the age of the children or the origin of the families, a circumstance that may, on occasions, have resulted in the introduction of extraneous variables that were not controlled for.

From the 1990s onwards, studies began recruiting slightly larger and more homogeneous samples, and became more systematic in their analyses. The study carried out by Bailey et al. (1995) in the United States on the sexual orientation of young adults raised by

divorced gay fathers dates from this period, as does the longitudinal study conducted by Tasker and Golombok (1997; Golombok & Tasker, 1996) in the United Kingdom, which focused on the adult children of divorced lesbians. More recently, longitudinal data have been published by two studies carried out with lesbian couples who conceived using assisted reproduction techniques: The United States National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS) (Gartrell et al., 2011, 2012; 2019), and a study conducted in the United Kingdom by Golombok and Badger (2010). The data are fairly conclusive and reveal that the vast majority of young adults brought up in gay and lesbian families identify themselves as heterosexual, although the percentages vary between 70% and 90% across samples.

Some studies have analyzed these young adults alongside comparable samples of children of heterosexual couples, finding no significant differences in the way in which the children of lesbian and heterosexual mothers identify themselves (Gartrell et al., 2012; Golombok & Tasker 1996; Huggins, 1989; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). However, in the latest report published by the NLLFS study (Gartrell et al., 2019), a significantly higher proportion of men and women who identified themselves as homosexual or bisexual was found among participants who had been raised by lesbian mothers than among a representative nationwide sample. The authors conclude that the children of sexual minority parents seem to be more in touch with their own same-sex sexual feelings and are therefore more likely to adopt a non-heterosexual identity.

Sexual Behavior

In relation to the sexual behavior of the children of lesbian and gay parents, findings published to date suggest that the vast majority engage in relations with people of the other sex, although some differences have been observed in comparison with those raised by heterosexual parents.

Three studies carried out with adolescents and young adults from same-sex families have found that the vast majority engaged in heterosexual relationships, with no significant differences in comparison with counterparts raised by heterosexual parents. Firstly, a specific comparison carried out within a nationwide study in the United States found that most adolescent children of same-sex parents had had sexual experiences with people of the other sex (Wainright et al., 2004). Secondly, in the United Kingdom, Golombok and Badger (2010) also found no differences in the dating history of young 19-year-olds from three different family groups (solo mothers, lesbian mothers and heterosexual families). And finally, the follow-up data of the NLLFS study in the United States (Gartrell et al., 2012) indicate that the vast majority of 17-year-old children of lesbian mothers had engaged in relations with people of the other sex, with no significant differences being found in comparison with the representative nationwide sample of adolescents.

For its part, however, the longitudinal study by Tasker and Golombok (1997) found that although the majority of young adult children of lesbian mothers had engaged in sexual behavior with people of the other sex, a greater percentage had also had relations with people of the same sex in comparison with those raised by heterosexual mothers. Similarly, when data were collected from participants in the NLLFS study at age 25 years (Gartrell et al., 2019), the results indicated that the percentage of children of lesbian mothers who had had same-sex experiences was significantly higher than in the representative nationwide sample. Perhaps the greater age and experience of the participants in these last two studies may explain the discrepancies observed in the results in comparison with the three studies cited previously, especially since young adults were asked if they had ever had a relationship with someone of the same sex.

Sexual Attraction

In relation to *sexual attraction*, in the pioneering study by Paul (1986), one out of every three men and two out of every three women admitted to having felt attracted to someone of the same sex at some point in their lives, despite the fact that the majority defined themselves as heterosexual. Similarly, in the longitudinal study carried out by Tasker and Golombok (1997), even though 20 out of the 22 children of lesbian mothers identified themselves as heterosexual, fewer (16) claimed only to feel attracted to people of the other sex and only 13 claimed never to have felt attracted to someone of the same sex at any point in their lives. It is interesting to note that no significant differences were observed here in comparison with those raised by heterosexual mothers. Such differences were observed, however, in the study by Gartrell et al. (2019), which found that although the majority of children of lesbian mothers identified themselves as heterosexual, a considerable percentage acknowledged feeling attracted to people of the same sex, with this percentage being significantly higher than in the representative nationwide sample.

Gender and Sexual Orientation

Research into sexual orientation in the general population has revealed clear gender differences. Not only do more women than men acknowledge feeling attracted to or having had sexual experiences with people of the same sex (NCHS, n.d.), men also seem to have a more polarized pattern in terms of their sexual orientation than women, who are more likely to locate themselves in intermediate points on the scale (Diamond, 2016; Gates, 2013; Lippa, 2017). Women have also been found to be more fluid in their sexual orientation, which appears to change more over time (Diamond, 2016; 2017; Katz-Wise, 2015).

Despite this scientific evidence, the possible influence of gender has hardly been explored at all in studies focusing on the sexual orientation of those raised by same-sex parents. The study by Paul (1986) found that women were significantly more likely than men to acknowledge having been attracted to people of the same sex, having had homosexual

experiences and having thought about their own sexuality and accepted that it may change substantially in the future. However, no differences were observed in the percentage of men and women who identified themselves as heterosexual and homosexual. The results reported by Tasker and Golombok (1997; Golombok & Tasker, 1996) are similar. Although both most men and women identify themselves as heterosexual (with no gender differences being observed in this sense), two out of every three women acknowledge having considered the possibility of being lesbians at some point in their lives, whereas this figure is less than half among men. This is consistent with the results of the latest data published by the NLLFS, which indicate that significantly more women than men identified themselves as being in the intermediate levels of the Kinsey scale at age 17 (Gartrell et al., 2011), and did not identify themselves as heterosexual at age 25 (Gartrell et al., 2019). Moreover, the update published in 2019 also found a clear and significant difference between the percentage of men who claimed only to be attracted to people of the other sex (73%) and the percentage of women who claimed the same (31.4%). There were also more women than men who acknowledged having had homosexual experiences, although in this case the difference was not significant.

The present study

The present study aims to respond to some of the questions that, to our mind, have yet to be answered in relation to the sexual orientation of the adult children of gay and lesbian parents. What is lacking is a systematic analysis of the different dimensions of sexual orientation, using similar and comparable measures. As we have seen, sexual self-identification has frequently been assessed by asking participants to define their current sexuality by choosing one of two or three discrete categories (heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual), whereas sexual behavior has been assessed in terms of the presence/absence of homosexual experiences over the course of the participant's lifetime. For its part, sexual attraction has been assessed sometimes with discrete measures, and sometimes with scalar ones, with the

focus sometimes on the present moment and sometimes on the participant's entire lifetime. It is important to overcome these methodological disparities and begin to analyze similarities and differences in a systematic manner.

Moreover, to the best of our knowledge, no study to date has systematically explored the influence of gender on the sexual orientation of the adult children of lesbian and gay parents, despite the fact that evidence exists regarding the importance of this variable. Finally, we believe it would also be interesting to systematically include the time variable in these analyses, in order to assess the possible evolution of the different dimensions of sexual orientation, adopting a life span perspective (Patterson, 2008). Thus, the focus is on young adulthood, a crucial stage in the consolidation of adult sexual identity, but it is also analyzed the experience in adolescence, usually conceived as a time of greater experimentation and exploration (see Olmstead, 2020; Tolman & McClelland, 2011, for reviews).

The present study therefore has the following aims:

1. To explore, in a systematic manner and from a multi-dimensional perspective, the sexual orientation of young adult children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers.
2. To analyze the evolution of sexual orientation over time, from adolescence to young adulthood, in relation to the different dimensions studied: sexual behavior, sexual attraction and sexual self-identification.
3. To determine the possible influence of gender on the sexual orientation of adult children raised by lesbian and gay parents.

In accordance with the scientific literature, we expect to find a certain disparity in the self-rating in the different dimensions (attraction, behavior and self-identification) of sexual orientation (Bailey, 2016; Fu et al. 2018). Likewise, we expect to find evolution in sexual orientation over time, especially among those who are located in the most intermediate levels in the scale (Diamond et al. 2017; Savin-Williams et al., 2012). Finally, we expect to find

gender differences consistent with those found in the general population, with less exclusive and more fluid sexuality in women than in men (Diamond, 2016; Lippa, 2017).

The study was carried out in Spain, a country characterized by sharp contrasts. On the one hand, it is a familyist country with a strong Catholic tradition in which homosexuality was considered a criminal offense until 1978, particularly during the days of General Franco's dictatorship (Ugarte, 2008). On the other, however, once democracy was restored, it was the third country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage, in the midst of a heated social, political and academic controversy (Senado de España, 2005; González, 2004). Consequently, it is interesting to explore the experience of men and women raised by lesbian and gay parents in a society that is very different from English-speaking contexts and which is currently undergoing a deep-rooted transformation.

Method

Participants

Participants were 30 young adults who had been raised in Spain by an openly lesbian mother or gay father. The sample comprised 19 young women and 11 young men aged between 18 and 36 years ($M = 24.7$; $SD = 5.5$). Most participants (26 out of 30) were born into a previous heterosexual union, whereas three of the women were adopted as children and one man had been in permanent foster care for ten years at the time of the interview. Of the young adults in the sample, 24 had lived with lesbian mothers and only six had grown up with gay fathers. Moreover, 22 had started living in an openly lesbian or gay-led family prior to their twelfth birthday, whereas eight did so at some point between the ages of 12 and 16 ($M = 8.5$; $SD = 4.3$). At the time of the interview, half of the participants had a romantic partner and the other half did not. In terms of living arrangements, 12 lived with their fathers or mothers, 12 with their romantic partner, 4 shared a flat with other people and 2 lived alone.

Gaining access to participants was a complex task requiring the use of various different strategies. We disseminated a description of the study at meetings of LGBT families and contacted potential participants through LGBT groups, the specialist press, bookshops and other similar establishments, as well as through families who had participated in previous studies carried out by our team and through those participants already recruited to the study, using the snowball sampling procedure. Most young adults were contacted through their mothers or fathers, who invited them to participate in the study and, if they agreed, informed our team. Only one participant contacted the team of her own accord, after having seen publicity about the study.

Requirements for participation were: being at least 18 years of age, having an openly lesbian mother or gay father, having lived with their parent/s for at least two years while being aware of their sexual orientation; and having lived in an openly lesbian or gay family prior to the age of 16. Consequently, although we initially contacted 63 young adults, only 30 were interviewed as 21 failed to meet the criteria and 12 decided not to participate. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. The protocol and informed consent procedures were reviewed and approved by Research Ethics Committee of the University of Seville.

Measures and Procedure

The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG) by Klein et al. (1985) was used to assess sexual orientation. This measure requires participants to rate themselves in various sexual orientation dimensions on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (heterosexual only) to 7 (homosexual only), in the past, at present and in an ideal future. In this study, we used only participants' self-ratings for sexual attraction, sexual behavior and sexual self-identification at present and in the past. Questions about the present referred to the moment at which the interviews were held, whereas questions about the past referred to participants' experiences during their entire

history of previous relationships, with a less precise definition than that used in the original KSOG.

This grid was originally designed to be filled out by participants, but in the present study it was used in an interview format, within the framework of an in-person in-depth interview that aimed to explore the subject's experience as the son or daughter of lesbian mothers or gay fathers. The complete description of the methodology can be found in López-Gaviño (2014).

Data Analysis

Since the KSOG was administered in interview format, there was no missing data.

Correlation analyses were carried out between responses in the three dimensions of sexual orientation explored (sexual attraction, sexual behavior and sexual self-identification) for both moments studied (past and present). Gender differences were also analyzed in the responses provided in all three subscales. To this end, due to sample size limitations, responses were dichotomized between those who identified themselves as 'heterosexual only' (response option 1) and those who positioned themselves elsewhere on the scale, and chi-square tests were carried out to compare men and women. We also analyzed the possible influence of gender on the evolution from past to present in all three dimensions, carrying out chi-square tests comparing men and women whose sexual orientation changed and those for whom it remained stable over time. The SPSS V.26 statistical software package was used for all the statistical analyses.

Results

Self-identification, behavior and attraction as indexes of sexual orientation

Table 1 shows the distribution of the responses given by the young adults interviewed on the sexual attraction, sexual behavior and sexual self-identification subscales, in relation to both the present and the past. The principal tendency was towards heterosexuality in all three

dimensions, although with a slightly different distribution.

-----Table 1-----

In relation to the present time (i.e., the moment of the interview), the most polarized distribution was obtained in the sexual behavior subscale, since 26 of the participants (87%) had had sexual experiences only with the other sex; three had had experiences only with same sex people, and one acknowledged having had sexual relations with people of both sexes. The percentage of those who said they were attracted only to people of the other sex was lower (67%), and that of those who identified themselves as heterosexual only was lower still (60%), with the rest positioning themselves at different points along the scale, ranging from mostly heterosexual to homosexual only.

As regards evolution from the past to the present, Figure 1 shows how, although for the majority of participants sexual orientation remained stable, a notable percentage did undergo some kind of evolution, mainly between neighboring categories. Seven out of the 30 young adults in our study (23.3%) experienced some change in their sexual behavior, moving from intermediate points on the scale towards one of the two extremes (heterosexual only or homosexual only). Changes were also observed in terms of sexual attraction and sexual self-identification, although in fewer participants (5 in each case, 16.6%) and generally between intermediate categories.

-----Figure 1-----

The results of the correlation analyses indicated differences between the three different dimensions of sexual orientation in relation to the time point analyzed (past or present). The correlation values between the three dimensions in reference to the past were $r=.87$ between sexual attraction and sexual behavior, $r=.83$ between sexual attraction and sexual self-identification, and $r=.89$ between sexual behavior and sexual self-identification. In reference to the time of the interview, the correlation values were higher: $r=.97$ between sexual

attraction and sexual behavior, $r=.97$ between sexual attraction and sexual self-identification, and $r=.93$ between sexual behavior and sexual self-identification.

Sexual Orientation by gender

The analysis in terms of gender revealed significant differences in how women and men rated themselves in each of the three dimensions of sexual orientation. As shown in Figure 2, at the time of the interview, men's responses followed a clearly bimodal pattern, with 10 out of the 11 men interviewed (91%) describing themselves as heterosexual only in all three dimensions, while the remaining man rated himself as homosexual only in sexual behavior and sexual self-identification, and mostly homosexual in terms of sexual attraction.

-----Figure 2-----

Women's responses, on the other hand, followed a more dispersed pattern in both sexual attraction and sexual self-identification, and were located in a more distributed manner all along the proposed scale (Figure 2). For example, in the sexual self-identification dimension, although the category chosen most often was 'heterosexual only', only 8 out of the 19 women participating in the study defined themselves in this manner (42%), a figure which is less than half of that corresponding to men. The rest of the women in the study were distributed across the other intermediary categories (which were not chosen by any of the men), with the second most frequently chosen one being 'mostly heterosexual' (chosen by 6 out of the 19 female participants, 31.5%). None of the women in the study defined themselves as exclusively homosexual. However, in terms of sexual behavior, the responses given by women were, like those given by men, more polarized and were concentrated in the two extreme categories (16 'heterosexual only', 2 'homosexual only' and only 1 'both equally').

-----Table 2-----

The correlation analyses between the three dimensions of sexual orientation clearly revealed a greater level of inter-dimensional concordance among men than among women, as shown in Table 2.

To determine whether the differences observed between men and women were significant, chi-square tests were performed by gender, comparing the percentage of those who chose the 'heterosexual only' option with those who chose other options in relation to the variables studied. As shown in Table 3, despite the small size of the two subsamples, significant differences were found between men and women in the two measures of sexual self-identification (past and present), as well as in the measure of sexual attraction in the present, with medium effect sizes. No differences were observed between men and women in terms of sexual behavior, either in the past or in the present.

-----Table 3-----

Figure 2 shows the pattern of men and women's evolution in terms of sexual orientation. Men remained more stable from past to present, with only one experiencing any change in sexual attraction and behavior, although not in self-identification. Women, in contrast, experienced a clearer evolution from past to present in all three dimensions.

A chi-square test was performed to compare, by gender, the percentage of those who acknowledged having experienced changes in their sexual orientation with the percentage of those who claimed not to have evolved in this sense. As shown in Table 3, the differences between men and women were not significant in any of the three dimensions. However, Cramer's V test revealed a medium effect size in the comparison between men and women in terms of changes in sexual self-identification.

Discussion

The results of the present study provide nuanced answers to questions regarding the sexual orientation of the adult children of gay and lesbian parents, with the results changing in

accordance with the specific dimension of sexual orientation analyzed, the moment considered (past or present) and whether the person in question is a man or a woman.

In terms of their sexual behavior, most adult children of lesbian mothers or gay fathers in Spain describe themselves as heterosexual, since the vast majority (87%) claimed to have sexual experiences only with people of the other sex at the present time. These percentages are fairly similar to those reported recently by studies carried out in the United States (NCHS, n.d.; Copen et al., 2016).

However, in relation to sexual attraction, although the majority claimed only to be attracted to people of the other sex in the present, the percentage in this case was lower (67%), and dropped even further when participants were asked how they identified themselves, with only 60% defining themselves as heterosexual only, while the rest ranged between mostly heterosexual to exclusively gay or lesbian. These findings are less similar to those reported for the general population, among which the percentage of those attracted only to people of the other sex is generally around 80%, with over 90% identifying themselves as heterosexual only (Copen et al., 2016; Gates, 2013). In Spain, results similar to these have been reported in both a study carried out with the general population (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 2021) and in one focusing on adolescents (Moreno et al., 2019). However, these population-based studies have generally offered a more limited range of responses comprising only three categories (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual), and it may be that the differences observed between this study and the previous ones cited above are due to the different response scale used here, which, as we explain below, seems to play a key role.

Therefore, while our results refute existing prejudices which hold that the children of lesbian mothers and gay fathers are forced to become homosexual themselves (Clarke, 2001; Pennington & Knight, 2011; Patterson & Far, 2016), they also reflect a heterogeneous

situation and a certain degree of disparity or variance between the different dimensions of sexual orientation, as was expected.

Other studies carried out with the adult children of lesbian and gay parents have also observed differences between the data pertaining to the different dimensions of sexual orientation, although the pattern reported is usually the opposite of what we observed here. For example, other authors (Gartrell et al., 2019; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Paul, 1986) have found higher percentages of those who identify themselves as heterosexual (between 80% and 90%) and lower percentages of those who acknowledge only feeling attracted to or only having had sexual experiences with people of the other sex.

However, in the only study we are aware of in which adult children of gay and lesbian parents were asked to identify themselves on a seven-point sexual orientation scale (Gartrell et al., 2011), the responses were more similar to those obtained here, with the percentage of those who identified themselves as *heterosexual only* dropping (65%) in comparison with those who claimed to have sexual experiences only with people of the other sex (85% among women and 94% among men). It therefore seems that allowing the adolescent or adult children of lesbian and gay parents to identify themselves on a more detailed scale, rather than in terms of two or three discrete categories, helps them take their sexual attraction and sexual behavior into consideration and integrate them in their sexual self-identification in a more nuanced manner.

Indeed, the correlations analyses of the different dimensions of sexual orientation reflect a certain disparity between responses, since although the values were high, no total concordance was observed between the dimensions either in the present or in the past. This is consistent with that reported by Paul (1986). Extant scientific literature about the sexual orientation of the general population also reflects a certain disparity between self-ratings in the different dimensions of sexual orientation (Copen et al., 2016; Fu et al., 2019; NCHS,

n.d.; Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2012), as highlighted by Gates (2013) and Diamond (2016) in their reviews of national surveys carried out in different countries.

The data obtained in the present study seem to confirm that sexual attraction, sexual behavior and sexual self-identification are not interchangeable either among the children of same-sex families, and that sexual orientation must be understood as a multidimensional construct, in which it is not unusual to find a certain degree of discordance between dimensions, as indeed Fu et al. (2019) pointed out in relation to the general population. What does seem to be specific to those raised by lesbian and gay parents is a larger degree of freedom for recognizing their attraction to people of the same sex, along with a greater degree of flexibility for integrating these experiences into their self-identification, as found also by Gartrell et al. (2019).

The data reported here also indicate that participants' sexual orientation did not always remain stable. Rather, a notable percentage of the children of lesbian and gay parents in our study acknowledged a certain degree of fluidity in their sexual orientation between adolescence and early adulthood, a finding reported also by Gartrell et al. (2019), as well as by other studies carried out with the general population (Diamond, 2008; Katz-Wise, 2015; Savin-Williams et al., 2012). The changes do not appear to be radical, and are usually between neighboring categories on the scale (no one changed from 'heterosexual only' to 'homosexual only'). Consistently with that found also in the general population (Diamond et al., 2017; Savin-Williams et al., 2012; Savin-Williams, 2018) and with our expectations, evolution generally tended to occur in the intermediate, non-exclusive levels of the scale, whereas those at either extreme were more likely to remain stable, particularly in terms of sexual attraction and sexual self-identification.

Sexual behavior was found to follow a different pattern from the other two dimensions studied, being distributed across the different categories on the scale in terms of the past, and

being more polarized at the extremes when participants were asked to rate this dimension at the time of the interview (present). This seem to suggest that a group of the women and men interviewed had experimented with different sexual experiences when they were in the adolescence and still defining their sexual orientation, as they explain during the interviews, which were analyzed in more detail elsewhere (López-Gaviño, 2014). So that, we can interpret that the greater polarization in sexual behavior that was observed at the time of the interview would be a reflection of the evolution of the participants towards a more defined sexual identity and a sexual activity more linked to committed romantic relationships, in accordance with the life stage in which they were, young adulthood (Olmstead, 2020). In fact, of the seven participants who moved toward the poles of the sexual behavior scale, five were in monogamous romantic relationships at the time of interview, and perhaps the gender of their partner influenced their responses.

Since sexual attraction was also observed to be more dispersed across the scale in the past and correlated closely with sexual behavior, it is logical to assume that the children of lesbian and gay parents in our study are in touch with their own same-sex sexual feelings and feel sufficiently free to experiment with them. This may be one of the reasons why other studies have found that, despite defining themselves as heterosexual, the percentage of children raised in same-sex families who also acknowledge feeling attracted to or having had sexual experiences with people of the same sex is higher than among the general population or control samples (Gartrell et al., 2011; 2019; Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

The experience of living with lesbian mothers or gay fathers undoubtedly prompted the participants interviewed in our study to develop the more open attitude towards experimenting with sexual relationships during adolescence and early adulthood that is reflected in our data. According to the testimonies of these young adults, which we have presented and analyzed elsewhere (López-Gaviño, 2014), they grew up in an atmosphere

characterized by freedom and open-mindedness, in which sexual experimentation was not judged and they knew they would be accepted no matter what their sexual orientation. This pattern has been identified repeatedly in previous studies on sexuality education in LGBT families (Cohen & Kuvalanka, 2011; Gabb, 2004; Mitchell, 1998) and is an atmosphere that seems to make the process of discovering one's sexuality easier and freer for those who grow up in it and do not view themselves as exclusively heterosexual (Gardner, 2004; Kuvalanka & Goldberg, 2009; Tasker & Golombok, 1997).

As we expected, gender was found to be a key variable in relation to the sexual orientation of the adult offspring of lesbian and gay parents interviewed in our study, with significantly different patterns being observed for men and women. Among men, the pattern observed was clearly bimodal and categorical, polarized between the two ends of the scale (heterosexual only and homosexual only), thereby indicating an exclusive kind of sexuality. Among women, however, self-ratings were more distributed and continuous across the entire scale, particularly in relation to the sexual attraction and sexual self-identification dimensions. Women were therefore found to have a less exclusive sexuality, as evident in the fact that none of them identified themselves as exclusively homosexual and only four out of ten women, as opposed to nine out of ten men, placed themselves in the 'heterosexual only' category. These differences are statistically significant and are mostly consistent with those found by Gartrell et al. (2011) in their study with children of lesbian mothers, as well as with those reported for adolescents in Spain (Moreno et al., 2019) and for the general population in other countries (Diamond, 2016; Katz-Wise, 2015; Lippa, 2017; Savin-Williams et al., 2012; Savin-Williams & Vrangalova, 2013).

However, no differences were found between men and women in terms of sexual behavior, which was mainly heterosexual in both cases. It therefore seems that, consistently with that reported by Gartrell et al. (2019), women find it easier than men to recognize and

accept their same-sex sexual feelings when rating themselves, even though in their behavior they are as mainly heterosexual as men.

Other gender differences were observed in relation to concordance and stability, with men being highly consistent across all three dimensions and changing very little over time, and women being less consistent in their self-ratings across the sexual attraction, sexual behavior and sexual self-identification dimensions and more fluid in their sexual orientation over time. However, these differences were not significant, probably due to the small size of the sample, as indeed suggested by the effect sizes. Further studies with larger samples are required to determine whether the gender differences observed here are indeed significant, as reported by Paul (1986) in relation to the children of lesbian and gay parents, as well as by studies focusing on the general population (e.g. Diamond, 2016; Fu et al., 2019; Lippa, 2016).

There are several ways in which the gender differences observed in this study, which are fairly similar to those reported in relation to the general population, can be explained. One is linked to differences in genital arousal, which is more 'category-specific' in men (meaning that it only occurs in response to the preferred sex) and more open in women, regardless of their true sexual preference (Chivers et al., 2004). Another is connected to the differential socialization of men and women and the fact that homophobia has been a constituent part of hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel, 1994), although not of femininity, which makes it more difficult for men to acknowledge the attraction they may feel to other men or to define their sexuality in a less exclusive manner (Mize & Manago, 2018). Although homosexuality is becoming increasingly accepted in our societies and we are witnessing a gradual decrease in homophobia and what Savin-Williams (2018) calls 'homohysteria', circumstances which have given rise to a relaxation of the codes of masculinity (Anderson & McCormack, 2015), it has yet to be seen whether this will also foster more open attitudes towards same-sex relations among men, as suggested by Twenge et al. (2016) and Diefendorf and Bridge (2020).

It is striking that the differential gender pattern observed among the general population is replicated also in LGBT families, in which, a priori, children are freer to define their sexuality and enjoy a greater degree of flexibility in gender construction (Kovalanka & Munroe, 2020; Lev, 2010; Stacey & Biblartz, 2001). It may be that these family experiences are not enough to fully counteract the influence of growing up in a still patriarchal and homophobic society, which puts particular pressure on men to reject any hint of homosexuality.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Perspectives

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to analyze the sexual orientation of young adults brought up by lesbian and gay parents using a methodology that systematically assesses the concordance of their responses across the different dimensions of this construct (sexual attraction, sexual behavior and sexual self-identification) and their fluidity over time, while at the same time exploring possible gender differences in all measures. It is also the first study to assess the sexual orientation of young adult children from LGBT families in a Mediterranean country with a strong Catholic tradition. As such, it contributes cultural diversity to the existing body of knowledge in this field.

Nevertheless, the study does have some limitations, the principal one being linked to the sample, which was very small due to the difficulties involved in locating young adults raised by openly gay or lesbian parents in a society in which, until recently, homosexuality was considered a criminal offense. Moreover, all but one of the participants were contacted via their parents. This may have introduced a selection bias, resulting in only young people who had a close relationship with their parents being included in the study. The sample was also fairly diverse in terms of the gender of the parents and the families' pathway to parenthood, which may have introduced extraneous variables that were not controlled for in our study design. It should also be remembered that participants assessed their past sexual

orientation retrospectively, a process which necessarily entails a reconstruction of that experience.

In relation to future avenues of research, it would be interesting to study the sexual orientation of the children of lesbian or gay parents in larger samples, in order to compare their sexual orientation in accordance with different circumstances (e.g., their or their parents' gender, or whether they were adopted or born as a result of assisted reproduction techniques or a previous heterosexual relationship). It would also be interesting to carry out longitudinal studies designed to analyze in a multidimensional and scalar manner the evolution of the sexual orientation of the children of same-sex parents throughout adolescence and young adulthood. Finally, all the studies that have been carried out to date with the adult offspring of lesbian and gay parents have focused on young people who grew up in societies in which same-sex marriage was still illegal. It would be interesting for future research to explore the experiences of generations raised in societies (such as the Spanish one) which have legalized equal marriage and made clear progress towards accepting homosexuality (European Commission, 2019).

Conclusions

The first conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this study is linked to the importance of the measure used to analyze sexual orientation. The use of a multidimensional scale that enables respondents to locate themselves on a continuum in relation to different dimensions (sexual behavior, sexual attraction and sexual self-identification, at the very least) helps capture the complex reality of sexual orientation and its different expressions, as argued by Baldwin et al. (2017).

Secondly, our data confirm, among the adult offspring of lesbian and gay parents, the gender differences observed in the general population in relation to sexual orientation, with women reporting a less exclusive and more fluid sexuality than men. It has yet to be

ascertained whether these differences have a biological origin or are the result of the homophobic mandates of masculinity imposed on men in our society (Diedendorf & Bridge, 2020).

Our final conclusion is connected to the fluidity observed in the sexual orientation of adult offspring of lesbian and gay parents, both across the different dimensions studied and over time. We believe this should not be interpreted as an indication of inconsistency or insecurity in relation to their sexuality, but rather as evidence of more flexibility in the experience of sexual orientation, which in turn is the result of an upbringing in which sexual exploration is not judged, only understood and accepted. It may be that the adult children of lesbian and gay parents are spearheading a phenomenon that has just begun to emerge among younger generations in our societies, and is characterized by greater social acceptance of homosexual relationships and growing numbers of young adults who acknowledge having had sexual experiences with, or been attracted to, people of the same sex (Twenge et al., 2016). We believe that the children of lesbian and gay parents, and particularly their daughters, may be leading a general movement in society towards experiencing sexual orientation with a greater degree of freedom.

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Table 1. Sexual behavior, sexual attraction and sexual self-identification in the past and in the present, as measured by the KSOG (N=30)

| | Present | | | | | | Past | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|------|-------------------|------|---------------------|-----|-----------------|------|-------------------|------|---------------------|-----|
| | Sexual Behavior | | Sexual Attraction | | Self-Identification | | Sexual Behavior | | Sexual Attraction | | Self-Identification | |
| | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % |
| Heterosexual only | 26 | 86.7 | 20 | 66.7 | 18 | 60 | 21 | 70 | 20 | 66.7 | 18 | 60 |
| Mostly Heterosexual | 0 | 0 | 6 | 20 | 6 | 20 | 4 | 13.3 | 6 | 20 | 6 | 20 |
| A little more Heterosexual | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6.7 | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 |
| Both equally | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 | 2 | 6.7 | 1 | 3.3 | 3 | 10 |
| A little more Homosexual | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mostly Homosexual | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6.7 | 2 | 6.7 | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 |
| Homosexual only | 3 | 10 | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 | 1 | 3.3 |

Table 2. Correlations between self-reported sexual behavior, sexual attraction and sexual self-identification in the past and in the present among women and men

| | Past Sexual Behavior | Present Sexual Behavior | Past Sexual Attraction | Present Sexual Attraction | Past Self-Identification | Present Self-Identification |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Past Sexual Behavior | | .95** | .99** | .95** | .95** | .95** |
| Present Sexual Behavior | .92** | | .92** | 1.00** | 1.00** | 1.00** |
| Past Sexual Attraction | .79** | .81** | | .92** | .92** | .92** |
| Present Sexual Attraction | .94** | .96** | .87** | | 1.00** | 1.00** |
| Past Self-Identification | .86** | .79** | .78** | .87** | | 1.00** |
| Present Self-Identification | .87** | .91** | .80** | .95** | .87** | |

Scores above the diagonal correspond to men // Scores below the diagonal correspond to women

** $p < .01$

Table 3. Sexual attraction, sexual behavior and sexual self-identification in the past and in the present and changes from past to present by gender.

| | | Women | | | | Men | | | | Women vs Men | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------|--------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|---------------------|------|--------------|-------------|-------|
| | | Heterosexual only | | Not only heterosex | | Heterosexual only | | Not only heterosex. | | X^2 | P^a | V^b |
| | | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | | | |
| Self-reported sexual orientation in the past and in the present | Past sexual attraction | 11 | 57.9 | 8 | 42.1 | 9 | 81.81 | 2 | 18.2 | 1.794 | .246 | .245 |
| | Current sexual attraction | 10 | 52.63 | 9 | 47.37 | 10 | 90.90 | 1 | 9.1 | 4.593 | .049 | .391 |
| | Past sexual behavior | 12 | 63.15 | 7 | 36.84 | 9 | 81.81 | 2 | 18.2 | 1.155 | .419 | .196 |
| | Current sexual behavior | 16 | 84.21 | 3 | 15.79 | 10 | 90.90 | 1 | 9.1 | 0.271 | 1 | .095 |
| | Past self-identification | 8 | 42.1 | 11 | 57.9 | 10 | 90.90 | 1 | 9.1 | 6.914 | .018 | .48 |
| | Current self- identification | 8 | 42.1 | 11 | 57.9 | 10 | 90.90 | 1 | 9.1 | 6.914 | .018 | .48 |
| | | Women | | | | Men | | | | | | |
| | | Change | | No Change | | Change | | No Change | | X^2 | P^a | V^b |
| | | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | <i>f</i> | % | | | |
| Change in sexual orientation from the past to the present | Change Sex. Attrac. Past-Pres | 4 | 21.1 | 15 | 78.9 | 1 | 9.1 | 10 | 90.9 | 0.718 | .626 | .155 |
| | Change Sex. Behav. Past-Pres | 6 | 31.6 | 13 | 68.4 | 1 | 9.1 | 10 | 90.9 | 1.969 | .215 | .256 |
| | Change Self-Identi. Past-Pres | 5 | 26.3 | 14 | 73.7 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 100 | 3.474 | .129 | .34 |

^aFisher's exact test

^bIn Cramer's V values, .10 represents a small effect size, 0.30 a medium effect size and 0.50 a large effect size

Figure 1. Evolution of KSOG scores from past to present

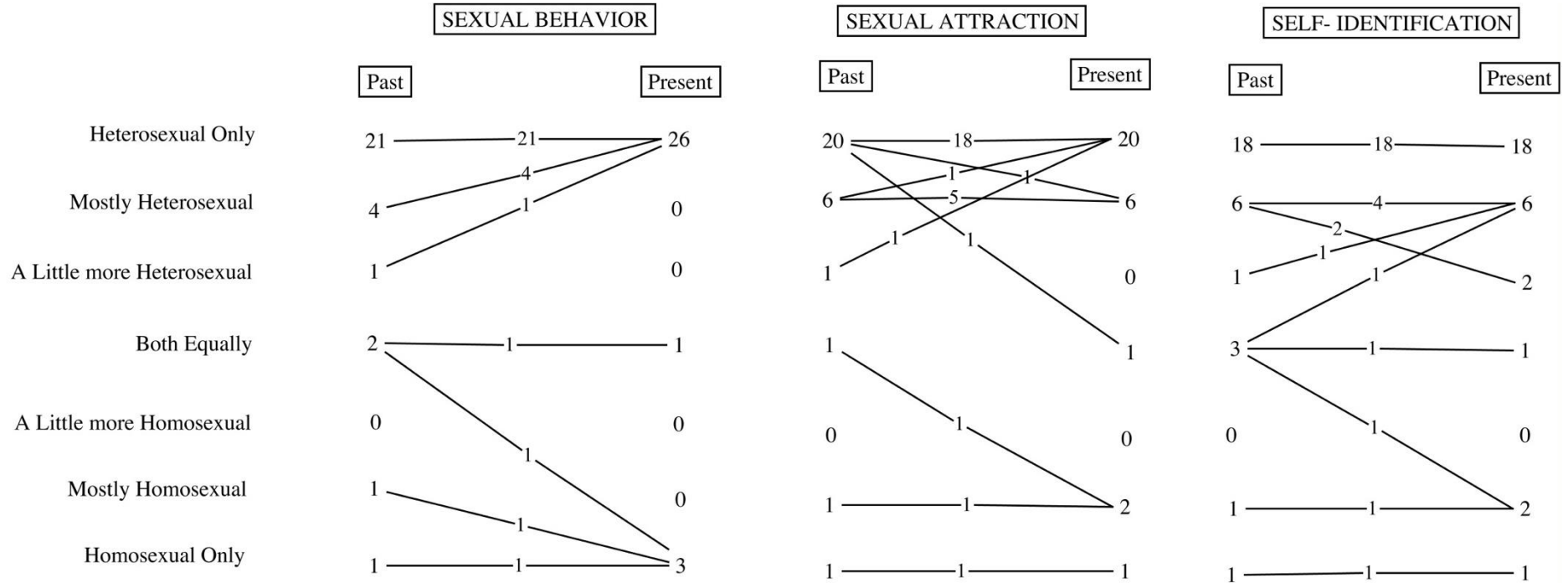


Figure 2. Evolution of KSOG scores from past to present by gender

