

39. Attitudes about Gender in Lesbian and Heterosexual Parents and their Children: How the Nature of Children's Environment Matters

Sutfin, E. L., Fulcher, M., Bowles, R. P., & Patterson, C. J. (2008). How lesbian and heterosexual parents convey attitudes about gender to their children: The role of gendered environments. *Sex Roles, 58*, 501-513.

In this study of 57 four- to six-year olds and their 114 parents in the U.S., gender role attitudes of both parents and children are examined. Results show that lesbian mothers and their children had less traditional attitudes than did heterosexual parents and their children. In addition, the children of lesbian mothers had less gender-stereotyped bedroom décor than did children with heterosexual parents. Despite these differences, there was substantial overlap between the attitudes of lesbian and heterosexual mothers. The results suggest that attitudes, behaviors, and family relationships are more influential in child development than family structure.

Regardless of sexual orientation, parents with more liberal attitudes about gender had children with less stereotyped attitudes about gender and less stereotypical bedrooms. Mothers in the study (regardless of sexual orientation) were less conservative in their attitudes about gender than heterosexual fathers in the study. Male children had more stereotypical bedrooms regardless of parents' sexual orientation. However, the majority of children overall in the study had bedrooms decorated in gender-typical ways.

Participants were 29 families with female same-sex parents and 28 families with opposite-sex parents. The majority of parents were Euro-American, in their late 30s and early 40s, relatively affluent, and well-educated. On average, children were 5 years old. Children of lesbian mothers were more likely to be adopted and less likely to be Euro-American. Data was collected through a single visit to participants' homes. Parents completed questionnaires and researchers took photographs of children's bedrooms. Both children and parents were interviewed.