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Same-Sex Kissing and Having a Gay or Lesbian Child: A Bridge Too Far? Parent-Child Similarities in Homophobic Attitudes and Observed Parental Discomfort

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ABSTRACT

This study examined parent-child similarities in homophobic attitudes and observed parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes in interactions with their adolescent children (14–18 years old). Based on gender schema theory and the family process model we expected parent-child similarities in homophobic attitudes to be stronger in same-gender dyads. Further, we expected that observed parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes would occur and is stronger when the gender of the parent, child, and character in the vignette match. We used questionnaires and observation data from 199 White Dutch families in the Netherlands. Our results showed that parents' homophobic attitudes were associated with their children's homophobic attitudes. For same-sex kissing and (imagining) having a gay son, these associations were stronger between parents and children of the same gender. Further, parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes occurred and was stronger when parents and children had the same gender, regardless of the gender of the vignette character. In conclusion, policies aiming at gay and lesbian inclusion should not be limited to accepting gay/lesbian identities, but also pay attention to the acceptance of same-sex intimacy expressions, having gay or lesbian family members, and normalizing discussions about gay/lesbian lives.

KEYWORDS

Homophobic attitudes;
same-sex kissing; observed
discomfort; coming-out;
gender; socialization

Introduction

Today, many Western industrialized countries have legalized same-sex marriage and have policies in place to improve the acceptance and inclusion of sexual minorities in society (ILGA Annual Report, 2022). Yet, even today, many gay and lesbian adults and children still face social exclusion and harassment, negatively affecting their well-being (Cosma et al., 2022; de Lange et al., 2022). To avoid negative

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confrontations, many people refrain from exercising their (informal) right to kiss people of the same sex in public (Blair et al., 2022; Lemke, 2022), and many gay and lesbian children experience high levels of stress and anxiety in the process of coming out to their families and friends (Mallory et al., 2021; Owens, 2018). This is also the case in the Netherlands, a country often praised for being the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage (Huijnk, 2022; Kuyper, 2018). These findings highlight that, also in the Dutch national context, much remains to be accomplished to ensure that gay and lesbian individuals are fully accepted in society and treated equally.

Both intended homophobic and affirmative behavior toward gay and lesbian individuals (e.g., the intention of voicing support, engagement in advocacy, and countering homophobia; Huic et al., 2018) can be predicted by (the absence of) negative attitudes about these groups (Huic et al., 2018; Mereish & Poteat, 2015). Especially during adolescence, children internalize negative attitudes toward minority groups, including lesbian and gay individuals (van der Linden et al., 2015; Vollebergh et al., 2001). These attitudes differ considerably across individuals and are related to the children's environment and personal characteristics (Meeusen & Dhont, 2015). Considering environmental factors, parents are important role models and play a key role in the attitude development of children (Jaspers et al., 2008; Vollebergh et al., 2001). Therefore, examining how children are socialized with these attitudes can inform policies aimed at improving the inclusion of gay or lesbian individuals in society. Whereas numerous studies on negative attitudes toward these groups have focused on individual characteristics of adolescents and the influence of peers (e.g., religiosity, educational level, and intergroup contact (Santona & Tognasso, 2018; Sevecke et al., 2015) few studies have examined the similarity between parents and children in homophobic attitudes (van der Linden et al., 2015). Based on gender schema theory (Bem, 1981, 1983) and the family process model (Endendijk et al., 2018) the current study aims to answer the following research questions: 1) To what extent are parental explicit homophobic attitudes about gay or lesbian individuals in their environment (i.e., men kissing men in public, women kissing women in public, having a gay or lesbian child) associated with their children's explicit attitudes about gay or lesbian individuals in their environment? 2), to what extent do parents show discomfort with coming-out vignettes in interactions with their children, and, 3) to what extent does gender (of the parent, child, and target) play a role in a) similarity in homophobic attitudes between parents and children, and b) observed parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes?

Theoretical background

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity refers to the mundane, everyday way in which heterosexuality is privileged, taken for granted, and perceived as normal and natural (Martin, 2009). In feminist and queer theory heteronormativity is posited as the underlying construct and key contributor to homophobic attitudes and negative behavior toward sexual minorities (Habarth, 2015; Mereish & Poteat, 2015). It defines the boundaries of socially acceptable relationships and identities and constructs the underlying pressure for people to conform to socially accepted sexual behavior and gender roles (Habarth, 2015). Heteronormativity is intertwined with gender, as normative ideas about heterosexual behavior and relationships always consist of fixed expectations of the gender binary: man or woman (Habarth, 2015). Consequently, differentiating between attitudes concerning gay men and lesbian women and studying these normative ideas is key (Kite et al., 2021).

Socialization with heteronormative messages

From a very young age, children are socialized with heteronormative messages in multiple ways and by various actors, including parents, teachers, peers, and media (Calzo & Ward, 2009). Illustrative examples of how children believe that being heterosexual is the norm are movies about princesses falling in love with princes (Hefner et al., 2017), bedtime stories with families always consisting of a mom and a dad (Stafford, 2016), and parents and peers assuming all girls fall in love with boys (Baricevic & Kashubeck-West, 2019; Calzo & Ward, 2009). The family context is crucial for the development of attitudes about minority groups (Vollebergh et al., 2001). Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981, 1983) suggests that children internalize the gender messages their parents communicate to them in various ways. As gender and heteronormativity are intertwined, we argue that this theory can also be applied to the underlying process of how parents socialize their children with heteronormativity and homophobic attitudes. This underlying process takes place through various socialization practices. First, parents may display gendered role model behavior. Children observe differences in behavior between mothers and fathers. In doing so, children learn what behavior is appropriate for men and what is for women (Endendijk et al., 2018). Heterosexual parents inherently display a heterosexual relationship, that functions as a role model for their children (Martin, 2009). In addition, parents can display different reactions to gay or lesbian individuals that can be observed by their children (e.g., showing discomfort when seeing a woman discussing bisexuality on TV; Astle et al., 2022). Second, parents

communicate gender and homophobic messages through explicit talk (e.g., “I don’t need to see them kissing each other in front of me;” Ghosh, 2020) and implicit gender talk (e.g., explaining the meaning of intimacy through the example of heterosexual marriage; Martin, 2009). Third, children encounter gender-differentiated parenting behavior in their interaction with their parents (i.e., responding differently to the same behavior of boys and girls; Endendijk et al., 2016; Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018). For example, parents (especially fathers) express more discomfort with their son showing counter-stereotypic behavior (e.g., boys playing with barbies, dancing) compared to their daughter showing counter-stereotypic behavior (e.g., playing with toy cars and trucks, playing football), because for boys this type of gender-flexible behavior could signal their son is gay (Kane, 2006). For girls, however, showing counter-stereotypic behavior is often perceived as something positive and encouraged by parents (Kane, 2006). In addition, fathers actively promote heterosexuality for their sons and sexual passivity for their daughters (Solebello & Elliott, 2011). These messages are internalized by children in their gender schemas and influence children’s perceptions of the world and their attitudes (Bem, 1981, 1983; Kane, 2006).

Homophobic attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women

Indeed, children have more negative attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals and rights when their parents have more negative attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals and rights (Jaspers et al., 2008; Meeusen & Dhont, 2015; O’Bryan et al., 2004; Oksal, 2008; van der Linden et al., 2015).; Whereas some studies on the similarity between parents and children in attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals found that both mothers’ and fathers’ attitudes are associated with their children’s attitudes (Meeusen & Dhont, 2015) others found that only fathers (O’Bryan et al., 2004) or only mothers (Oksal, 2008) transmit these attitudes. This inconsistency might be due to the focus on different dimensions of attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals and rights (e.g., acceptance of homosexuality, gay/lesbian individuals, and gay/lesbian rights) and the differences in national family contexts (Adolfsen et al., 2010; Oksal, 2008). Except for the study by Oksal (2008), these studies do not differentiate between attitudes about gay men and lesbian women. Yet, this is important to take into account, as attitudes toward gay men are generally more negative than toward lesbian women (Bettinsoli et al., 2020; Kite et al., 2021). Further, the literature on parent-child similarity in attitudes about gay or lesbian individuals has been focused on general attitudes, which are known to be more positive than attitudes about personally encountering gay or lesbian intimacy (e.g., public same-sex kissing; Buijs et al., 2011; Doan et al., 2014; Huijnk, 2022) or having gay or lesbian family members (e.g., having a gay son or

lesbian daughter; Ghosh, 2020; Huijnk, 2022). Even anti-gay violence offenders insist that they have nothing against gay or lesbian identities. Yet, when faced with expressions of it that conflict with what they perceive to be standard gendered and sexual norms, they do not refrain from all forms of violence (Buijs et al., 2011). Thus, parent-child similarities in these latter types of attitudes are crucial to examine because they provide insights into the way male and female gay or lesbian individuals are still marginalized in our current society (e.g., by denying the informal right to kiss in public).

Nonverbal heteronormative messages of discomfort

In addition to the similarity in explicit homophobic attitudes between parents and children, it is important to study the nonverbal messages parents communicate to their children about coming out stories (Martin, 2009). These messages contain important information to children about how parents perceive gay or lesbian individuals and to what extent they perceive gay or lesbian issues (e.g., coming outs) as normal (Martin, 2009; Shibley Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). In the literature on implicit racial prejudice, studies have shown that observing nonverbal cues of social discomfort (e.g., avoiding eye contact, a backward inclination of the body) during interracial contact between two other people is linked to implicit racial prejudice (Castelli et al., 2012). To our knowledge, no study examined parental nonverbal heteronormative messages of discomfort during conversations with their children about fictive children. Potential (subtle) ways in which parents communicate nonverbal heteronormative messages are silencing the existence of gay or lesbian individuals or showing discomfort when discussing gay or lesbian issues (e.g., coming-outs; van Bergen et al., 2021). Parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes can provide the heteronormative message to children that being physically or romantically attracted to the same gender is not perceived as “normal” by the parent, and therefore uncomfortable to discuss together (Martin, 2009; van Bergen et al., 2021). These messages could potentially affect both gay or lesbian children who are in the process of coming out themselves (van Bergen et al., 2021) and heterosexual children who could develop affirmative or negative behavior toward the coming outs of their friends (Martin, 2009; Shibley Hyde & Jaffee, 2000).

In general, parents identify more strongly with children of the same gender compared to children of the opposite gender (Nikiforidis et al., 2018). Therefore, we expect more observed parental discomfort during the coming-out vignette among same-gender parent-child dyads. Further, we expect more parental discomfort when the gender of the child in the vignette corresponds to the gender of their own child, as those vignettes could mirror a possible situation their own child could encounter.

Further, there are gender differences in the adherence to heteronormativity and gender roles. In general, men hold more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities compared to women (Bettinsoli et al., 2020; Huijnk, 2022). This is especially the case for attitudes toward gay men (Bettinsoli et al., 2020; Bos et al., 2012; Kite et al., 2021). According to the family process model (Endendijk et al., 2018), children observe available role models in their environment, especially role models of the same gender (e.g., sons are more influenced by their fathers, daughters are more influenced by their mothers). Based on previous studies and the family process model, it can be theorized that there is a moderation effect of the gender of the parent and the child on the relation between parental attitudes and children's attitudes: fathers' homophobic attitudes may have a stronger influence on their sons' than on their daughters' attitudes and mothers' homophobic attitudes are expected to have a stronger influence on their daughters' than their sons' attitudes. Previous studies on the similarity between parents and children in general attitudes toward gay men/lesbian women found no support for these moderation effects of the gender of the parent and the child (Jaspers et al., 2008; Meeusen & Dhont, 2015; O'Bryan et al., 2004). To our knowledge, there are no studies that examined this moderation for attitudes about gay or lesbian individuals in people's own environment (e.g., public same-sex kissing and having a gay son or lesbian daughter) or for observed parental discomfort during coming-out vignettes. Examining these types of attitudes and parental messages while taking the gender of the target (gay or lesbian) into account could add to our understanding of the distinct and gendered ways in which the marginalized positions of male and female members of the gay and lesbian community are maintained in society.

Current study

In this study, we focus on the Netherlands. Whereas the Netherlands is often praised for its high acceptance of gay or lesbian individuals, Dutch gay or lesbian children and adults report discrimination and lower quality of health compared to heterosexual adults and children (Huijnk et al., 2022). Previous studies on anti-gay violence showed that Dutch people are less progressive than the gay-friendly narrative of citizenship and cultural identity suggests (Buijs et al., 2011; Huijnk et al., 2022). It is, therefore, especially in this context, relevant to move beyond examining the general acceptance of gay/lesbian individuals and rights. Instead, we zoom in on homophobic attitudes when encountering public same-sex intimacy, having gay or lesbian children, and parental implicit messages of discomfort with coming-out vignettes. In our research, we focus on children in middle adolescence (aged 14–18), because this is a crucial age for attitude development, particularly when it comes to negative attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals (van der Linden et al., 2015; Vollebergh et al., 2001). This article focuses on homophobic attitudes among

families consisting of a Dutch father and a mother and two adolescent children. Rainbow families (i.e., families with parents, guardians, caregivers, extended family members, and sometimes even offspring who identify as LGBTIQ+; Hedberg et al., 2022) challenge heteronormativity and cisnormativity in their very existence (Hedberg et al., 2022). Consequently, gender socialization processes, including gender attitude development, can differ from non-rainbow families (McGuire et al., 2016). As this study is part of a large-scale longitudinal research, it was not possible to include families with same-sex or trans parents. However, we acknowledge that gender is not binary and that studies specifically focusing on rainbow families could give valuable insights into how heteronormative assumptions can be challenged and inclusivity encouraged (Sobočan & Brzić, 2013). Applying the theory of gender schema's (Bem, 1981, 1983) and the family process model (Endendijk et al., 2018) to heteronormative socialization within the family, we expect that (H1) the homophobic attitudes of parents about men kissing men in public (1a) women kissing women in public (1b) are associated with children's homophobic attitudes about men kissing men in public, and women kissing women in public; H2) The homophobic attitudes of parents about (imagining) having a gay son (2a) or lesbian daughter (2b) are associated with their children's homophobic attitudes about their imagined future children being gay or lesbian; H3) The associations between parents and children's homophobic attitudes about men kissing men in public (3a) and women kissing women in public (3b) and about having a gay son (3c) or lesbian daughter (3d) are stronger for parents and children of the same gender; H4) Parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes occurs; H5) Parents show more discomfort with coming-out vignettes when their gender matches with their child's gender (5a) and the gender of the child in the vignette (5b).

Method

Participants

This work is part of the longitudinal project [MASKED FOR REVIEW] that examines adolescents' gender socialization in the family and school context in three samples with sibling pairs in the age groups 10–12 years, 12–14 years, and 15–17 years at Wave 1 (Wave 2 took place 2 to 3 years later). The current study reports on data from the sample with older sibling pairs that were aged between 14 and 18 at the time of the data collection at wave 1. Families from the Western part of the Netherlands were recruited through municipality records and invited by mail. Families were eligible to participate if they consisted of opposite-sex couples with at least two children with a maximum age difference of 36 months between the two children. Exclusion criteria were

severe physical or mental disabilities of a family member, divorced/separated families, single-parent families, families with two non-biological parents, and parents raised outside the Netherlands, collected between April 2018 and April 2021. First-born children were between 16.3 and 18.8 years old ($M = 17.5$, $SD = 0.53$), and second-born children were between 14.7 and 16.2 years old ($M = 15.4$, $SD = 0.33$). Mothers were born between 1963 and 1979, fathers were born between 1952 and 1978. Almost all parents (99.5%) were married or had a registered partnership or cohabitation agreement. Most parents finished academic or higher vocational schooling (mothers: 79.9%, fathers: 79.8%). In total, 84% of the children were highly educated (i.e., were enrolled at pre-(applied) university tracks, or studied at (applied) universities). Most children (87%) were in high school. Families with missing values on the central predictors as well as dependent variables were excluded from the analyses. Our final dataset consisted of 199 participating families, with 398 children (165 boys, and 233 girls). Parental discomfort was measured in an observation task with the second child. There were 5 missing values on observed parental discomfort. For this part of the analysis, our final dataset consisted of 194 parent-child dyads (second-born children did the observation task twice, once with their mothers, and once with their fathers).

Procedure

For the research project [MASKED FOR REVIEW] we visited families at home. Families were told that they would participate in a study on adolescents' future career preparation and the role parents and schools play in this process. The assessments were conducted by trained (under) graduate students. All four family members (father, mother, firstborn, and second-born child) were present during the visit. During the assessment, dyadic parent-child and family-wide interaction tasks were conducted and videotaped. All family members completed computer tasks, and second-born children were interviewed during the assessment. In addition, all four family members completed several questionnaires before and at the time of the assessment. Each family member received a gift voucher for their participation. After the study was completed, families received further information about the goals and outcomes of the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participating family members. Ethical approval was provided by the Research Ethics Committee of [MASKED FOR REVIEW].

Instruments

Homophobic attitudes about same-sex kissing in public

We measured children's and parents' homophobic attitudes about same-sex kissing in public with two statement questions (identical for parent and child) inspired by the survey items of The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Huijnk, 2022): *I find it less of a problem to see a man and a woman kissing in public than to see two men kissing in public* and *I find it less of a problem to see a man and a woman kissing in public than seeing two women kissing in public*. Parents and children could answer on a five-point scale to what extent they agreed with these statements (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A higher score on this scale reflected a more homophobic attitude.

Homophobic attitudes toward having a (future) gay or lesbian child

We measured children's and parents' homophobic attitudes toward having a gay or lesbian child with two statement questions inspired by the survey items of The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Huijnk, 2022). The statements for parents and children were, *I would have problems with my son being gay*, and, *I would have problems with my daughter being lesbian*. In case parents did not have a son (q1) or daughter (q2), we asked them to imagine they had a son/daughter. To children, we asked them to imagine they would have a gay son or lesbian daughter in the future. Parents and children could answer on a five-point scale to what extent they agreed with this statement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A higher score on this scale reflected a more homophobic attitude.

Parental observed discomfort with coming out vignettes

We observed parental discomfort with coming out vignettes in an observation task that was videotaped. The adolescent was given a booklet containing 19 short vignettes followed by a question. Each vignette described a fictional individual in a situation that adolescents are likely to encounter, like social rejection, failing a class, participating in sports, and dating. The adolescent was instructed to read out the vignettes and accompanying questions to their parent in the presented order and to not reply to the questions themselves, nor to react to their parents' answers. Parents were instructed to give one-sentence answers. It was explained to the parent-adolescent dyads that the vignettes concerned adolescents of the same age as the adolescent participating in the task. In this study we focused on one vignette that concerned a coming-out¹:

John wants to tell his friends that he is into boys. What advice would you give him?
(version A)

Ann wants to tell her friends that she is into girls. What advice would you give her?
(version B)

The names and gender markers were counter-balanced, meaning that half of the families received the vignettes and questions with the names and gender markers switched. Parents in a family received the same vignettes.

Based on previous studies on signs of social discomfort in face-to-face interactions with other people (Hartley & Karinch, 2007; Phutela, 2015), three coders (first author, fourth author, and a research assistant) coded nonverbal parental discomfort (e.g., stuttering, change in speed of talking, flinching, breaking eye contact). The level of discomfort of parents was coded into four categories: 0) no signs of discomfort, 1) very subtle signs of discomfort (e.g., light stuttering), 2) multiple signs of little discomfort (e.g., breaking eye contact for a short moment physically moving away from the table and the child), 3) multiple signs of (more severe) discomfort (e.g., blushing, breaking eye-contact from the start till the end of the answer, not being able to provide an answer to the question). Dyads within the same family were coded by different coders to guarantee independency among ratings. Because we were specifically interested in signs of parental discomfort during the coming-out vignette and not general discomfort during the task, we compared the observed non-verbal behavior of parents in response to this vignette with their non-verbal responses to the other vignettes. In three

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of homophobic attitudes among children and parents.

	Boys		Girls		Fathers		Mothers	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Men kissing men								
• Strongly disagree	40	24.2	105	45.3	48	24.2	67	33.8
• Disagree	37	22.4	64	27.6	63	31.8	74	37.4
• Neither agree nor disagree	29	17.6	34	14.7	27	13.6	32	16.2
• Agree	42	25.5	24	10.3	49	24.7	22	11.1
• Strongly agree	17	10.3	5	2.2	11	5.6	3	1.5
Women kissing women								
• Strongly disagree	49	29.7	105	45.3	61	30.8	69	34.8
• Disagree	51	30.9	65	28.0	74	37.4	74	37.4
• Neither agree nor disagree	37	22.4	33	14.2	26	13.1	31	15.7
• Agree	24	14.5	25	10.8	35	17.7	21	10.6
• Strongly agree	4	2.4	4	1.7	2	1.0	3	1.5
Having a gay son								
• Strongly disagree	75	45.5	148	63.8	101	51.3	107	54.0
• Disagree	41	24.8	46	19.8	57	28.9	73	36.9
• Neither agree nor disagree	30	18.2	26	11.2	26	13.2	10	5.1
• Agree	16	9.7	10	4.3	10	5.1	8	4.0
• Strongly agree	3	1.8	2	.9	3	1.5	0	0
Having a lesbian daughter								
• Strongly disagree	82	49.7	169	72.8	103	52.0	109	55.1
• Disagree	48	29.1	39	16.8	63	31.8	71	35.9
• Neither agree nor disagree	23	13.9	16	6.9	18	9.1	11	5.6
• Agree	9	5.5	7	3.0	13	6.6	7	3.5
• Strongly agree	3	1.8	1	.4	1	.5	0	0

N = 398. Items: I find it less of a problem to see a man and a woman kissing in public than to see two men/two women kissing in public. Items for having a gay/lesbian child; I would have problems with my son being gay/my daughter being lesbian.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and T-tests of homophobic attitudes of children and parents.

	Son		Daughter		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)			
Homophobic attitudes - Parents							
Men kissing men	2.75	(1.35)	1.97	(1.10)	6.18	<.001	0.63
Women kissing women	2.29	(1.12)	1.96	(1.09)	2.97	<.001	0.30
Having a gay son	1.98	(1.09)	1.59	(0.91)	3.74	<.001	0.39
Having a lesbian daughter	1.80	(0.97)	1.41	(0.78)	4.24	<.001	0.44
	Fathers		Mothers		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)			
Homophobic attitudes - Children							
Men kissing men	2.56	(1.25)	2.09	(1.04)	4.93	<.001	0.40
Women kissing women	2.21	(1.10)	2.07	(1.03)	1.55	.122	0.20
Having a gay son	1.77	(0.96)	1.59	(0.77)	2.58	.011	0.17
Having a lesbian daughter	1.72	(0.92)	1.58	(0.76)	2.16	.035	0.13

N = 398 Items: I find it less of a problem to see a man and a woman kissing in public than to see two men/two women kissing in public; I would have problems with my son being gay/my daughter being lesbian. The *df* for each *t*-test for sons and daughters was 397, and 394 for fathers and mothers.

sessions, scores of 25 videotapes were discussed until a consensus was reached. A reliability set of 30 videotapes was used to determine intercoder reliability. The mean intraclass correlation coefficient (single coder, absolute agreement) for discomfort between each pair of coders was 0.80 (range = 0.75–0.85). To prevent coder drift, an interim reliability test with 11 videos was conducted. All three coders had remained reliable.

In Tables 1 and 2, descriptive statistics are presented for the central variables of this study.

Analysis plan

All analyses were performed with the use of IBM SPSS Statistics 26. For the first three hypotheses on similarities between parents and children in homophobic attitudes about public same-sex intimacy and having a gay or lesbian child, we used data from both children and both parents. By using linear multilevel analysis we take into account that children are nested within families. Random intercept models were applied to take possible family differences into account for the intercepts of attitudes about public same-sex kissing and (imagining) having a gay or lesbian child. Empty models showed that 19% of the variation in attitudes toward men kissing men, and 23% of the variation in attitudes toward women kissing women can be contributed to family characteristics. Further, 13% of the variation in attitudes toward having a gay son and 23% of the variation in attitudes toward having a lesbian daughter can be contributed to family characteristics. The age of the adolescents was not a significant predictor for any of the attitudes of parents and children and was therefore not included as a control variable in the analyses. To test Hypothesis 1, we examined to what extent fathers' and mothers' homophobic attitudes about men kissing men (Model 1a) and women kissing women (Model 2a) are associated with their children's homophobic attitudes about men kissing men and women kissing women. For testing Hypothesis 2,

we examined to what extent fathers' and mothers' homophobic attitudes about (imagining) having a gay son (Model 3a) or a lesbian daughter (Model 4a) can be associated with their children's homophobic attitudes toward having a future gay or lesbian child. We tested Hypothesis 3 by examining to what extent the associations between parents' and children's homophobic attitudes about two men kissing in public (Model 1b) and two women kissing in public (2b) and about having a gay son (3b) or lesbian daughter (4b) are stronger for the parents and the children of the same gender (i.e., father-son and mother-daughter). We paid attention to multicollinearity in all our Models by examining the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor). Multicollinearity was not a problem in any of the models. To test our fourth Hypothesis on parental discomfort, we used a 2 (gender of the second child) $\times$ 2 (gender of the adolescent in the vignette) $\times$ 2 (gender of the parent) split-plot ANOVA.

Results

Data inspection

Preliminary analyses were conducted to check the distribution of the variables. Outliers were winsorized to bring them closer to the rest of the score distribution (Tabachnik & Fidell, 1996). To determine whether the central predictors in our study (homophobic attitudes of parents are linearly related to homophobic attitudes of children), we carried out tests for linearity (ANOVA). Of the eight tested associations, only the association between fathers' and children's attitudes about men kissing men appeared non-linear. For comparability among the analyses, we decided not to transform these variables.

Descriptive statistics

As shown in Table 1, most parents and children disagreed with the statements, but among all items, homophobic attitudes exist. Compared to girls, boys held significantly stronger homophobic attitudes about men kissing men in public, women kissing women in public, their future son being gay and their future daughter being lesbian (see Table 2). Similarly, compared to mothers, fathers held stronger homophobic attitudes about men kissing men in public, their (imagined) son being gay, and their (imagined) daughter being lesbian. There was no significant difference between fathers and mothers in their average attitudes about women kissing women in public (see Table 2). Among fathers, 51% showed no signs of discomfort, 34.2% showed very subtle signs of discomfort, 13.8% showed multiple signs of a little discomfort and 1% showed multiple signs of more severe discomfort. Among mothers, 51% showed no signs of discomfort, 39.3% showed very subtle signs of discomfort, 8.7% showed multiple signs of a little discomfort and 1% showed multiple signs of more severe discomfort. Fathers and mothers did not differ in the degree of observed discomfort with the coming-out vignettes (t (194)

Table 3. Associations between parents' and children's homophobic attitudes about men kissing men (Model 1) and women kissing women (Model 2).

	Model 1A	Model 1B	Model 2A	Model 2B
<i>Parental characteristics</i>				
Homophobic attitudes				
Men kissing men				
• Fathers	.18***(.05)	.06 (.06)		
• Mothers	.18**(.06)	.27***(.08)		
Women kissing women				
• Fathers			.15**(.05)	.06 (.07)
• Mothers			.18**(.06)	.26***(.07)
<i>Childrens' characteristics</i>				
Gender children (ref=girls)				
• Boys	.81***(.12)	.82***(.11)	.33**(.11)	.34**(.10)
<i>Interactions</i>				
Men kissing men				
• Fathers' attitudes × boy		.32**(.10)		
• Mothers' attitudes × boy		-.23*(.12)		
Women kissing women				
• Fathers' attitudes × boy				.25*(.10)
• Mothers' attitudes × boy				-.21 ^a (.11)
Intercept	1.96***(.08)	1.96***(.08)	1.95 (.07)	1.95***(.07)
Variance individual level	1.20 (.11)	1.06 (.11)	.90 (.09)	.87 (.09)
Variance family level	.23 (.10)	.23 (.09)	.21 (.08)	.22 (.08)
-2Loglikelihood	1220.33	1208.59	1149.22	1141.48

N = 199. Values represent unstandardized regression coefficients. Standard error in parentheses. In models, 1A and 2A main effects are presented, and in models, 1B and 2B moderation effects are presented.

****p* < .001. ***p* < .010 **p* < .050 ^a*p* = .054 (borderline significant).

= 0.59, *p* = .557, *d* = 0.06). Further, there were no differences in observed parental discomfort between the coming-out vignettes about a boy or girl (fathers: *t* (194) = 0.48, *p* = .634, *d* = 0.03; mothers: *t* (194) = 0.10, *p* = .918, *d* = 0.02).

Associations between children's and parents' attitudes about same-sex kissing

In Table 3 the results of the multilevel analyses for the associations between children's and parents' attitudes about public same-sex kissing and the moderation effects on the gender of the parent and the child are presented. In line with Hypothesis 1a, Model 1A shows that children had stronger homophobic attitudes about men kissing men in public when their fathers and mothers had stronger homophobic attitudes about men kissing men in public. Model 1B shows that the association between boys' and their fathers' attitudes about men kissing men in public was stronger than the association between the attitudes of boys and their mothers. Similarly, the association between girls' and their mothers' attitudes about men kissing men was stronger than the association between girls' and fathers'. These results were in line with Hypothesis 3a. Following Hypothesis 2a, Model 2A shows that children had stronger homophobic attitudes about women kissing women in public when their fathers and mothers held stronger homophobic attitudes about women kissing women in public. Model 2B shows that the association between boys' and their fathers' attitudes about women kissing women in public was stronger than the

Table 4. Associations between parents' and children's homophobic attitudes about having a gay son (Model 3) and lesbian daughter (Model 4).

	Model 3A	Model 3B	Model 4A	Model 4B
<i>Parental characteristics</i>				
Attitudes about having a gay son				
• Fathers' homophobic attitudes	.16**(.06)	.05 (.07)		
• Mothers' homophobic attitudes	.23**(.07)	.30***(.09)		
Attitudes about having a lesbian daughter				
• Fathers' homophobic attitudes			.15**(.05)	.09 (.06)
• Mothers' homophobic attitudes			.26***(.06)	.30***(.08)
<i>Childrens' characteristics</i>				
Gender children (ref=girls)				
• Boys	.43***(.10)	.42***(.09)	.42 ***(.08)	.42***(.08)
<i>Interactions</i>				
Homophobic attitudes about having a gay son				
• Fathers' attitudes × boy		.26*(.11)		
• Mothers' attitudes × boy		−.16 (.14)		
Homophobic attitudes about having a lesbian daughter				
• Fathers' attitudes × boy				.16 ^b (.10)
• Mothers' attitudes × boy				−.11 (.12)
Intercept	1.56***(.06)	1.57***(.06)	1.40 (.06)	
Variance individual level	.79 (.08)	.79 (.08)	.54 (.05)	.54 (.05)
Variance family level	.09 (.06)	.08 (.06)	.12 (.05)	.12 (.05)
−2Loglikelihood	1057.96	1052.22	945.72	958.84

N = 199. Values represent unstandardized regression coefficients. In models, 3A and 3A main effects are presented, and in models, 3B and 3B moderation effects are presented. Standard error in parentheses. *** = $p < .001$. ** = $p < .01$.

* = $p < .05$. b = borderline significant $p = .097$.

association between the attitudes of boys and their mothers. The interaction effect for girls was in the expected direction (associations between attitudes stronger for girls and their mothers than between girls and their fathers), but borderline significant ($p = .054$). Consequently, Hypothesis 3b was partly confirmed by our data.

Attitudes toward future gay sons and lesbian daughters

In Table 4 the results of the multilevel analyses for the associations between children's and parents' attitudes about having a (future) gay son or daughter and the moderation effects for the gender of the parent and the child are presented. In line with Hypothesis 3a, Model 3A shows that children had stronger homophobic attitudes about having a future gay son when their fathers and mothers held stronger homophobic attitudes about having a gay son. Model 3B shows that the association between boys' and their fathers' attitudes about having a (future) gay son was stronger than the association between boys and their mothers. The association between girls' and their mothers' attitudes about having a (future) gay son was not stronger than the association between girls and their fathers. Therefore, Hypothesis 3c was partly confirmed by our data. Following Hypothesis 4a, Model 4A shows that children had stronger homophobic attitudes about having a future lesbian daughter when their fathers and mothers held stronger homophobic attitudes about having a lesbian daughter. Model 4B shows no significant interaction effects between the gender of the

Table 5. Mean (standard deviation) of parental discomfort when parents discuss coming-out vignettes.

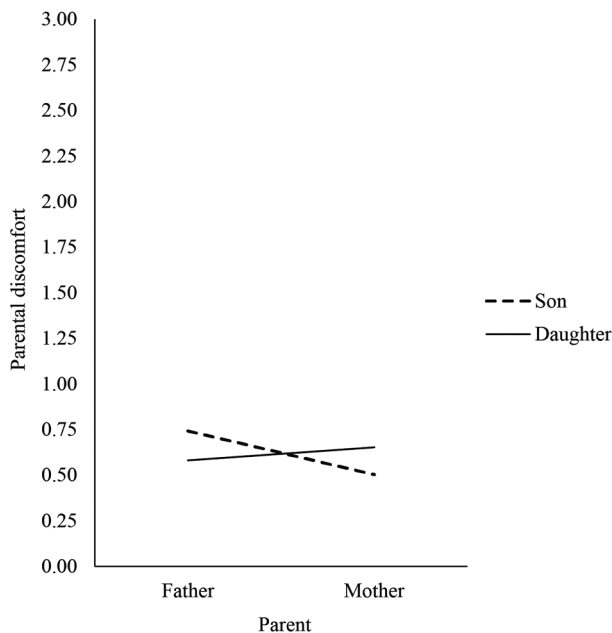
	Son		Daughter	
	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl
<i>N</i>	32	41	66	55
Father	0.78 (0.79)	0.70 (0.76)	0.62 (0.79)	0.55 (0.66)
Mother	0.47 (0.62)	0.54 (0.67)	0.66 (0.69)	0.65 (0.70)

In each family, a father and a mother discussed the coming-out vignette of a boy or a girl with their son or their daughter.

child and the gender of the parent for attitudes about having a (future) lesbian daughter. Therefore, Hypothesis 3d was not confirmed by our data.

Parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes

In Table 5, the mean scores and standard deviations of parental discomfort can be found. Among fathers, the mean observed parental discomfort score was 0.64 ($SD = 0.75$), for mothers, the mean observed discomfort score was 0.59 ($SD = 0.67$). To test whether the sample mean of observed discomfort among both parents differed from zero (and discomfort thus occurred), we carried out one-sample t-tests. Among both parents, the average of observed discomfort deviated from zero ((fathers($t(194) = 12.13, p < .001, d = 0.74$); mothers($t(194) = 12.27, p < .001, d = 0.68$)). These results were in line with Hypothesis 4. To investigate the possible effects of the gender of the second child, the gender

**Figure 1.** Estimated mean scores of parental discomfort for parents talking to their child.

of the child in the vignette, and the gender of the parent on parental discomfort, we employed a three-way split-plot ANOVA, with parent gender as a repeated measure. There were no significant main effects. We found a significant two-way interaction effect of the gender of the second child and parent gender, $F(1, 190) = 4.17$, $p = .043$, $\hat{\omega}_p^2 = .008$ (full ANOVA table and formula for $\hat{\omega}_p^2$ can be found in Table A1 in the appendix, see also Kroes & Finley, 2023). The interaction indicates that parents show more discomfort when their gender matches the gender of their child (Figure 1). Hypothesis 5a was confirmed by our data. Simple main effects were investigated to further explore the interaction. Statistical significance was accepted at the Bonferroni-adjusted p -value of .025. There were no significant simple main effects. However, there was a trend for the simple effect of gender of the second child when the child was a boy, $F(1, 190) = 3.94$, $p = .049$, $\hat{\omega}_p^2 = .015$. Mean discomfort was 0.24 higher for fathers with sons than for mothers with sons. There were no other significant two-way or three-way effects, and thus Hypothesis 5b was not confirmed by our data.

Discussion

This study aimed to add to the literature by examining to what extent 1) parental explicit homophobic attitudes about gay or lesbian individuals in their environment (i.e., same-sex couples kissing in public, having a gay or lesbian child) are associated with their children's explicit attitudes about gay or lesbian individuals in their environment 2) parents show discomfort with coming-out vignettes in interactions with their children, and, 3) gender (of the parent, child, and target) plays a role in a) similarity in homophobic attitudes between parents and children, and b) observed parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes. We examined these associations in the Netherlands, a country often praised for being the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage, and for the generally positive attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals (Huijnk, 2022; Kuyper, 2018). First, we found that, in line with gender schema theory (Bem, 1981, 1983), parents' homophobic attitudes about same-sex kissing and having a gay or lesbian child are associated with their children's homophobic attitudes. Second, in line with the theory of the family process model (Endendijk et al., 2018), we found that the associations between parents' and children's attitudes about same-sex kissing are stronger between parents and children of the same gender. For attitudes about having a (future) gay son, we found that associations are stronger between fathers and sons than between mothers and sons. Yet, associations between mothers and daughters were not stronger than between fathers and daughters. For attitudes about having a (future) lesbian daughter, we found no interaction between the gender of the parent and the child. Third, we found

that observed parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes occurred in varying degrees among both mothers and fathers and was stronger among parents when interacting with children of the same gender, regardless of the gender of the child in the vignette.

Homophobic attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women

In line with gender schema theory (Bem, 1981, 1983), we found that even in current Dutch society, homophobic attitudes of adolescents about same-sex kissing and having a (future) gay or lesbian child in the future exist and are associated with the homophobic attitudes of both fathers and mothers. Previous studies repeatedly indicated that compared to families with a high social-economic background, attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals are more negative among families with a lower social-economic background (Jaspers et al., 2008). As the vast majority of the families in our sample have a higher social-economic background, the homophobic attitudes found in the current study are likely an underestimation compared to the attitudes of the general public in the Netherlands. Finding associations between both parents' attitudes and their children's is in line with previous Dutch and Belgian studies examining general attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals and rights (Jaspers et al., 2008; Meeusen & Dhont, 2015). It is, however, in contrast to previous studies examining the similarity between parents' and children's attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals in the U.S. and Turkey, which only found an effect for fathers (O'Bryan et al., 2004) or mothers (Oksal, 2008), highlighting the importance to take the cultural variation in the socializing role of fathers and mothers into account (Oksal, 2008).

Following the family process model (Endendijk et al., 2018) we found that associations between parents' and children's explicit homophobic attitudes about same-sex couples kissing in public are stronger for parents and children of the same gender. This is not in line with previous studies on the general acceptance of gay/lesbian individuals and their rights, which did not find more similar attitudes among parents and children of the same gender (Jaspers et al., 2008; Meeusen & Dhont, 2015; O'Bryan et al., 2004). This suggests that in contrast to general attitudes toward gay/lesbian individuals, gendered processes within the family do play a role when it comes to homophobic attitudes about same-sex kissing. Perhaps, this can be explained by the potentially distinct ways in which homophobic attitudes are communicated from parents to children. In a country like the Netherlands, where the general acceptance of gay or lesbian individuals is high, parents are less likely to explicitly condemn gay or lesbian identities. Yet, when it comes to same-sex kissing, they might provide explicit or implicit homophobic messages (e.g., showing discomfort when encountering same-sex kissing in the street with their

child). Following the gender process model (Endendijk et al., 2018) sons are more prone to this role model behavior of their fathers, and daughters to their mothers. Further, we found that associations between fathers' and sons' attitudes about having a (future) gay son are stronger than for mothers and sons. Yet, we did not find stronger associations between mothers and daughters in attitudes about having a gay son. This is in line with qualitative studies that found that especially fathers fear the possibility of their sons being gay, which they express by condemning the behavior of their sons that could signal a gay identity (e.g., playing with barbies, dancing; Kane, 2006) or by actively promoting heterosexuality for their sons (Solebello & Elliott, 2011). For attitudes about having a lesbian daughter, we did not find stronger associations between parents and children of the same gender, highlighting the importance of disentangling attitudes about gay men and lesbian women. The absence of stronger associations between parents and children of the same gender in attitudes about having a lesbian daughter could perhaps be explained by "specifically silencing the lesbian identity" (i.e., never discussing this identity; Martin, 2009). *In Western-Industrialized cultures, lesbian women are sometimes romanticized and fetishized and therefore perceived as less threatening, especially by heterosexual cis men* (Worthen, 2013). *Whereas this might result in more accepting attitudes, lesbian women might also be taken less seriously* (Worthen, 2013). *This is reflected in Dutch television series* (van Meer & Pollmann, 2022). *In these series, lesbian women are, compared to gay men, represented with (even) less accuracy, more sexualized behaviors, and in less diverse roles* (van Meer & Pollmann, 2022). *As a consequence, the lesbian identity might not (or to a lesser extent) come up during conversations at home. By silencing the lesbian identity, parents could provide the heteronormative message that lesbian women are not considered important or serious* (Martin, 2009). When both fathers and mothers silence this identity and thus show similar role model behavior, associations between parents and children of the same gender can be similar to parents and children of the opposite gender. Future studies should further examine how attitudes regarding lesbian women are transmitted to fully understand these gendered processes.

Nonverbal heteronormative messages of discomfort

Observing parents' discomfort when discussing/talking about a coming-out vignette with their children provided the opportunity to examine the non-verbal heteronormative messages parents communicate to their children. Parental discomfort was observed among approximately half of the parents in varying degrees. Further, we found that parents in a same-gender dyad show more discomfort discussing coming outs. This could indicate that

parents identify more with adolescents of the same gender (Nikiforidis et al., 2018). While providing advice about the gay or lesbian character in the coming-out vignette, they might therefore be more aware of how a child of the same gender receives their message, making them more uncomfortable. More research is needed to gain an understanding of these processes. In contrast to our expectations, however, we did not observe more discomfort when the gender of the target corresponded to both the gender of the parents and the child. It was not the case that parents showed more discomfort in discussing the coming-out vignette of a boy or girl. Whereas explicit homophobic attitudes about male or female gay or lesbian individuals differ, potentially subtle messages of parents do not. The latter would be in line with qualitative studies on the reactions of parents to the coming outs of their children. These studies show that although parents do react differently to the coming outs of male and female gay or lesbian individuals, in all cases showing discomfort to some degree is a common reaction (Kuhar & Švab, 2022).

Limitations

The current study has some limitations. First, due to its cross-sectional design, this study cannot provide insights into issues of causality. Future research would benefit from a panel design to investigate to what extent explicit homophobic attitudes of parents about same-sex kissing and having a gay or lesbian child cause homophobic attitudes in children over time. Second, as our sample was not representative (highly educated, White, nuclear families consisting of a father and a mother, mostly living in non-rural areas), we cannot generalize our findings to the general Dutch population. Previous studies show that negative attitudes toward gay or lesbian individuals vary among families with different backgrounds. For example, negative attitudes about gay and lesbian individuals are more common among families with lower social-economic status (Jaspers et al., 2008) and children from ethnic minorities (Bos et al., 2012). Third, we did not ask about the sexual orientation of parents and children, and whether or not they know each other's sexual orientation. This is a limitation because socialization in rainbow families is generally less heteronormative (McGuire et al., 2016; Sobočan & Brzić, 2013) and is therefore likely to affect observed parental discomfort in the coming-out vignette and homophobic attitudes of parents and children. Future studies should aim for more gender-inclusive samples (i.e., including rainbow families) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of these heteronormative socialization processes. Rainbow families are relevant in particular, as these families are known to socialize their children with messages that are more inclusive and less heteronormative (McGuire et al., 2016; Sobočan & Brzić, 2013). Examining attitude socialization processes among these families could therefore provide insight into how all parents can adopt these more inclusive

strategies. Third, a methodological limitation is that we cannot determine to what extent observed parental discomfort is rooted in implicit heteronormativity or in general discomfort discussing these issues with adolescents who go through puberty. It could be that parents find this topic very important and therefore get nervous, especially while being videotaped, resulting in more observed non-verbal social discomfort. However, when this is the case, it could signal that parents are not fully at ease with the subject of coming outs and that these are therefore not discussed at home. We tried to limit this bias by comparing the observed parental discomfort in the coming out vignette with a range of other vignettes, including vignettes concerning promiscuity.

Further, this study examined explicit homophobic attitudes and observed parental discomfort. Yet, parents can communicate heteronormativity in various other ways (e.g., implicit and explicit gender talk; Martin, 2009). Future qualitative studies should examine the other ways how parents communicate heteronormative messages to their children with heteronormativity to get a full understanding of these socialization processes. Lastly, research has shown that bisexual, non-binary, and trans people experience different kinds of and often worse forms of marginalization than cisgender gay people (Huijnk, 2022). In future research, it would be good to extend the instruments to include other gender and sexual identities.

Conclusion

Even today, gay and lesbian individuals are still not treated equally nor fully accepted in society (Cosma et al., 2022; de Lange et al., 2022). Where previous studies examined to what extent negative attitudes of parents toward gay/lesbian individuals and rights are associated with their children's attitudes, this study focused on homophobic attitudes about encountering gay or lesbian individuals in people's direct environment and everyday life (i.e., same-sex kissing and having a gay or lesbian child) and on observed parental discomfort with coming-out vignettes in interactions with their adolescent children.

Based on our findings, policies aiming at gay or lesbian inclusion in society should not be limited to accepting gay or lesbian identities in general, but pay more attention to the acceptance of expressions of same-sex intimacy (e.g., same-sex kissing), and having gay or lesbian family members. In doing so, parents' attitudes should be taken into account, as these appear to play a role in developing homophobic attitudes about gay or lesbian individuals in adolescents, thereby contributing to the continuous marginalization of these groups. Parents who want to normalize discussions about the lives of sexual minorities can be encouraged to become more aware of both verbal and nonverbal heteronormative messages they provide to their children.

Note

1. Translated from Dutch by the first author. In the original vignettes common Dutch names were used: Jeroen and Sanne.

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Data availability statement

Our data is currently not open for access, but will be in the coming months.

Patient consent and ethical standards

Informed consent was obtained from all participating families. Ethical approval for this research was provided by the Research Ethics Committee of the Institute of Education and Child Studies of Leiden University (File number ECPW-2017/189).

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Appendix – Full ANOVA table and formula for partial omega squared

Table A1. Full three-way split-plot ANOVA table for the effects of gender of the second child, vignette, and parent.

Variable	Formula Component	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Second Child	A	0.00	1	0.00	0.00	.947
Vignette	B	0.05	1	0.05	0.11	.744
Parent	C	0.62	1	0.62	1.20	.274
Second Child × Vignette	AB	0.03	1	0.03	0.06	.813
Second Child × Parent	AC	2.15	1	2.15	4.17	.043
Vignette × Parent	BC	0.24	1	0.24	0.46	.496
Second Child × Vignette × Parent	ABC	0.05	1	0.05	0.09	.763
Error (Subjects)	Subject/A	95.36	190	0.50		
Error (Parent × Subjects)	C × Subject/A	98.21	190	0.52		

Formula for partial omega squared (Kroes & Finley, 2023):

$$\frac{SS_{AC} - (df_{AC} \times MS_{C \times \text{subject/A}})}{SS_{AC} + SS_{C \times \text{subject/A}} + SS_{\text{subject/A}} + MS_{\text{subject/A}}}$$

With A representing the effect of the gender of the second child, C representing the effect of parent gender, and AC representing the interaction effect.