

# SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH: DECONSTRUCTING MYTHS ABOUT HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES



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This section exposes ten myths about homoparental families and deconstructs them using thirty years of scientific research. The scientific findings summarized in this section have been gathered from articles published in recognized scientific journals<sup>1</sup> with the help of UQAM's Équipe de recherche sur la famille et son environnement (ERFE) and the McGill University Sexual Identity Centre (MUSIC).

Myth 1: Homosexual people do not have children.

Myth 2: There is no scientific research on families with gay and lesbian parents.

Myth 3: Homosexual people are incapable of being good parents.

Myth 4: Children in contact with homosexual people are at a higher risk of being victims of sexual abuse.

Myth 5: Children in homoparental families may be confused about their gender identity (Am I a girl? A boy?) and about conventional gender roles (tomboys, girly boys).

Myth 6: Children with homosexual parents will also be homosexual.

Myth 7: Children in homoparental families are at risk of developing more social, emotional, learning and behavioural problems than other children.

Myth 8: Children in homoparental families will have more difficulty in their social relationships with other children.

Myth 9: Children in homoparental families have less contact with their extended families (grandparents, etc.) than children in families with heterosexual parents.

Myth 10: Continued research on homoparental families is not necessary.

**N.B. The endnotes for this section are found on pages 31-32. For a complete bibliography, see the bibliography module.**



## MYTH 1

# HOMOSEXUAL PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE CHILDREN

Far from being a marginal occurrence, the growing number of homoparental families is the result of a series of interdependent factors, such as:

- The growing diversity of family types since the 1960s (single-parent families, bicultural families, blended families, etc.).
- The increasing number of gay and lesbian parents who affirm their sexual orientation.
- The passage of laws in Québec that recognize and assign the same legal rights and responsibilities to all families, including those with same-sex parents.
- The ability of same-sex couples to adopt children together through Québec adoption services.
- The accessibility of new reproductive technologies.
- The growing number of gays and lesbians who want to and are able to start families in a society that is more and more accepting of their sexual orientation.<sup>2</sup>

## MYTH 1 OVERVIEW

Homosexual people do not have children

GROWING NUMBER OF HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES

2 TO 8 MILLION GAY AND LESBIAN PARENTS IN THE U.S.

1.3% OF ALL MOTHERS AND 0.2% OF ALL FATHERS IN QUÉBEC ARE HOMOSEXUAL

THOUSANDS OF QUÉBEC CHILDREN ARE PART OF HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES

DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOMOPARENTAL FAMILY STRUCTURES EXIST (SEE PAGES 30–33)



**Several factors make it difficult to determine the number of homoparental families in a given population. First of all, many gays and lesbians are reluctant to declare their sexual orientation in large social surveys. Besides their desire for privacy, many gay and lesbian parents fear losing their jobs or even custody of their children. After all, Québec judges were still taking children out of lesbian households because of their mothers' sexual orientation<sup>3</sup> as recently as the 1980s.**

Statistics on the prevalence of homoparental families also vary depending on the definition of a homoparental family and of homosexuality used by researchers. Investigators sometimes define homosexuality as a sexual behaviour, sometimes as a sexual identity (I am gay, lesbian, etc.) declared by the individual. However, a person can have sexual relations with people of the same sex without self-identifying as homosexual, and others can self-identify as homosexual even though they are not sexually active. The inherent difficulty of defining homosexuality makes it hard to account for all homoparental families.

In the United States, various studies estimate that between 2 and 8 million gay and lesbian parents are raising between 3 and 14 million children.<sup>4</sup> Data on European populations is harder to come by. It is estimated that several million European children are growing up in homoparental families: about 20 000 in the Netherlands, 650 000 in Germany and tens of thousands in France.

According to a secondary analysis of the data collected by the 1998 Québec Health and Social Survey, it is estimated that 1.3% of mothers and 0.2% of fathers in Québec with custody of at least one child (biological or adopted) under 18 years old are homosexual or bisexual.<sup>5</sup> These are conservative estimates given that they are based on voluntary disclosure of sexual behaviour in a government-sponsored survey. Nevertheless, these statistics show us that thousands of children are part of homoparental families in Québec.

Are these homosexual parents single or in a relationship? Did they adopt or use a surrogate? Was a fertility clinic involved? Is the sperm donor known? Surveys and population statistical analyses have not yet determined the proportions of different types of familial structures that make up the category we call “homoparental families.”



## DIFFERENT HOMOPARENTAL FAMILY STRUCTURES

As is the case for most families with heterosexual parents, the generic term “homoparental family”<sup>6</sup> covers a variety of familial structures. Here is a brief description of the different forms that a homoparental family may take.

### 1 CHILDREN CONCEIVED IN A PREVIOUS HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

Until recently, the majority of homoparental families were comprised of parents who conceived their children in previous heterosexual relationships and went on to form a same-sex relationship. After separating from a heterosexual partner, the homosexual parent can obtain full or joint custody of the children. This parent might be in a same-sex relationship, or may identify as homosexual but be single, as is the case for many divorced heterosexuals. If the homosexual parent is in a relationship, his or her partner can assume a certain parental role towards the children, although this is not always the case. However, the law does not recognize the parental rights of a new partner, hetero or homosexual, regardless of the person's involvement in childrearing..

### 2 ASSISTED REPRODUCTION

Lesbians and gay men can also start families within a same-sex conjugal relationship. For a lesbian couple or single woman, one option is to turn to a fertility clinic. The federal law on assisted reproduction (*Assisted Human Reproduction Act, 2004*) prevents fertility services from refusing people access to services because of their sexual orientation or civil status. This law requires egg and sperm donors to remain anonymous. In a lesbian couple, each woman may want to experience pregnancy. Sometimes, both partners give birth to one or more of the couple's children.

### 3 AT-HOME INSEMINATION

A single or partnered lesbian can also ask a friend or acquaintance to donate his sperm. In this case, the sperm donor is a “known donor.” At-home insemination is practiced with the help of a needleless syringe. When the donor is known, the lesbian mother(s) and the donor must decide together what his role in the child's life will be. Because the law only allows for two parents to be legally recognized, the lesbian couple or the single lesbian, along with the donor, must decide which names (a maximum of two) will be on the birth certificate, and, thus, will be legally recognized as the child's parents.







In Québec, lesbian couples usually decide to be legally recognized as the parents and assume all responsibilities for raising the child. Many donors agree to help lesbians start a family without wanting to take on the legal or financial responsibilities. The social commitment of the donor varies greatly depending on the case. Thus, some children know their biological father without him being involved in their lives, while other donors play an important role in the child's life and can even be recognized socially as the father..

#### 4 CO-PARENTING

Gays and lesbians can decide to be co-parents of the same child. For example, a lesbian couple and a gay couple can decide to start a family together using home-based insemination. The legal and social involvement of each parent depends on each person involved at the beginning of the parental project and the responses they give to the following questions: Which parents will be legally recognized? How will the care of the child be divided between the four parents? How will custody of the child be shared?

Though possible, according to the LGBT Family Coalition's statistics, this type of homoparental family is rare. According to France's Association des parents gais et lesbiens, the homoparental family with multiple parents is more common in that country, where the possibility of same-sex parents being recognized legally does not exist.

#### 5 FOSTERING OR ADOPTING A CHILD RESIDING IN QUÉBEC

The *Civil Code of Québec* allows all adults, regardless of sexual orientation, to adopt or foster a Québec child.<sup>7</sup> This is a particularly appealing option for gay men. Adoption and fostering of Québec children is managed by Québec's Youth Protection Agencies.



## 6 INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

International adoption, though possible, is very difficult for gays and lesbians. The majority of countries involved in international adoptions do not allow homosexual people to adopt. Thus, the Secretariat à l'adoption internationale (the organization responsible for supervising adoptions outside of Québec) cannot accept gays and lesbians as future adoptive parents if they declare themselves as such.

## 7 SURROGACY

Some gay men turn to a surrogate mother in order to start a family. The federal *Assisted Human Reproduction Act* prohibits payment of surrogate mothers. Thus, gay men must find an altruistic woman willing to help them. This practice is legal in Québec, but contracts between surrogate mothers and future parents are not recognized by the *Civil Code of Québec*.

### LAWS COVERING SURROGACY

In Québec, contracts with surrogate mothers have no legal validity and are considered null and void. Because of this, a heterosexual or homosexual couple who has an agreement with a surrogate mother to carry “their” child has no legal recourse if she changes her mind and decides to keep the child. Likewise, the surrogate mother cannot force the adopting couple or individual to care for the child.

When the child is born, the obstetrician must draw up an “attestation of birth” that indicates, among other things, the name of the mother. The mother must also sign the birth certificate that is sent to the Registrar of Civil Status. This can also contain the name of the father (or of the person agreeing to be named father), as long as that person signs it.

After the birth, if the mother gives the child to the biological father and his partner, renounces her own parental rights, and consents to a special adoption by the biological father’s partner, the partner can then request a placement order with a view to adoption, which is the first of two steps towards adopting the child. The final adoption judgment establishes a new filiation. The biological mother will “disappear” from the child’s birth certificate and the second father’s name will appear along with the first.

## RECENT LAWS CONCERNING HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES

### CIVIL MARRIAGE AND CIVIL UNIONS FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES

On June 7, 2002, Québec's National Assembly unanimously voted in the *Act Instituting Civil Unions and Establishing New Rules of Filiation* (Law 84). This law was adopted 25 years after Québec's *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* was amended to include sexual orientation as a basis for discrimination. With the modification of 54 Québec laws, couples in civil unions now have the same rights and responsibilities as married couples.

In 2004, Québec recognized same-sex civil marriages, and in 2005, thanks to the *Civil Marriage Act*, gays and lesbians across Canada were finally granted access to the institution of marriage.

### LEGAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HOMOSEXUAL PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

In an important step for homoparental families, Law 84 also amended the *Civil Code* to include rules about assisted reproduction and to clarify adoption rules for homosexual parents, whether common-law or in a civil union.

Gay and lesbian couples and individuals can adopt children residing in Québec through youth protection centres.

In the case of assisted reproduction, the *Civil Code* establishes legal filiation that gives the same rights and responsibilities to the nonbiological parent as the biological parent in the case of lesbian couples whose children are born through a common parental project. When a child is born, the lesbian mothers can simply write both of their names on the birth certificate in order to establish the legal link between mothers and child. Once the mothers' names are on the birth certificate, the law makes no distinction between the biological and non-biological parent as far as rights and responsibilities are concerned.





## MYTH 2

# THERE IS NO RESEARCH ON HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES

Many articles on homoparental families have been published since the 1970s. However, a good number of them present points of view or ideological debates without consideration for empirical data.<sup>8</sup> In order to separate facts from opinions and value judgments, we will only consider studies using scientific methods and statistical analysis of data collected from members of homoparental families compared to heterosexual families.

In Québec and elsewhere in the world, valid empirical scientific research has been of great importance in determining politicians' and judges' decisions on questions of gay and lesbian parental rights, and above all the rights of their children. Members of Québec's National Assembly, for example, needed this information in order to create laws that protect homoparental families.

## MYTH 2 OVERVIEW

There is no scientific research on homoparental families

STUDIES PUBLISHED SINCE THE 1970S

COMPARITIVE STUDIES CONDUCTED ON FAMILIES WITH HOMOSEXUAL PARENTS VERSUS HETEROSEXUAL PARENTS

MUCH RESEARCH DONE ON PARENTING ABILITIES OF GAYS AND LESBIANS AND ON DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR CHILDREN

1<sup>ST</sup> GENERATION STUDIES: CHILDREN BORN INTO A FAMILY WITH HETEROSEXUAL PARENTS WHO EXPERIENCE THE "COMING OUT" OF ONE OF THEIR PARENTS

2<sup>ND</sup> GENERATION STUDIES: CHILDREN BORN INTO HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES

3<sup>RD</sup> GENERATION STUDIES: RANDOM SAMPLING AND NATIONWIDE SURVEYS

Research initially focused on evaluating the parenting skills of gays and lesbians compared to heterosexuals. Investigators also assessed psychosexual and emotional development of children with gay or lesbian parents compared to that of other children. Finally, studies were conducted to understand the social interactions of these children with their peers and with adults.

The first studies took place in the 1970s in England and the U.S. They were conducted following court cases where lesbian, divorced mothers were psychologically evaluated because their ex-husbands challenged their right to custody on the basis of their sexual orientation. This first generation of research compared children of divorced, heterosexual women to children of divorced, lesbian women.<sup>9</sup> The results of these studies are, however, limited, since they do not include information on the development of children born in the context of a family headed by two men or two women. Given the growing number of openly gay and lesbian parents that have children (by artificial insemination or adoption), researchers have started to study children that grow up, from birth, in homoparental families.

Starting in the 1990s, a second generation of research projects studied children born into homoparental families compared to those born into families with heterosexual parents. One limitation of these studies, like those that came before, is the generally small sample size and the lack of variability. The demographic characteristics of the study participants are too homogenous. For example, be they homosexual or heterosexual, parents using private fertility clinics to start families generally have a high income and a high level of motivation to become parents. It is therefore difficult to generalize results of these studies to encompass all types of homoparental families.

To respond to the limits posed by this sampling, a third generation of more recent studies use random sampling methods in the context of vast national surveys on family or health.<sup>10</sup>





### MYTH 3

## GAYS AND LESBIANS ARE INCAPABLE OF BEING GOOD PARENTS

Professional associations in the fields of psychiatry, psychology and social work no longer consider homosexuality as a mental illness. Many decades have passed since the American Psychiatric Association removed “homosexuality” from its list of mental disorders, declaring that “homosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities.”<sup>11</sup> The decision to remove homosexuality from the list of mental disorders followed three decades of exhaustive research showing that homosexuality was not an issue of psychological maladjustment.<sup>12</sup>

### MYTH 3 OVERVIEW

Gays and lesbians  
are incapable of being  
good parents

SEXUAL ORIENTATION DOES NOT HINDER  
PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNCTIONING

NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN CHILD-  
REARING APPROACH

LARGE NUMBER OF GAYS AND LESBIANS  
ARE IN STABLE, SATISFYING LONG-TERM  
RELATIONSHIPS

DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY  
TASKS IS EQUITABLE

NON-BIOLOGICAL PARENTS ARE  
ACCEPTED EQUALLY BY CHILDREN

**There is no proof that sexual orientation in itself hinders psychological functioning. However, solid empirical data exists proving that the social stigma, homophobia and heterosexism experienced by gays and lesbians lead to psychological distress that can impact mental and physical well-being.<sup>13</sup> (For empirical data regarding the negative effects this can have on families, see the next chapter on homophobia, page 61).**

Despite the fact that different North American professional associations removed homosexuality from their diagnostic manuals in the 1970s, certain professionals working with families maintain negative attitudes towards the parenting abilities of gays and lesbians. Some continue to believe that gays and lesbians are psychologically maladjusted, that lesbians are not as maternal as heterosexual women and that gay fathers are less responsible than heterosexual fathers, or that the sex lives of gays and lesbians leave little time for parenting.<sup>14</sup> And yet, research implies that the opposite is true,<sup>15</sup> and that these prejudices and beliefs are unfounded.



There is no empirical data to support the belief that gays and lesbians are incompetent parents.<sup>16</sup> Lesbian and heterosexual women are no different in regards to their overall mental health or their approach to parenting.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, it has not been proven that romantic or sexual relationships with other women impede their ability to care for their children.<sup>18</sup> Studies on gay fathers have also proven that they have the same parenting competencies as heterosexual fathers.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, gays and lesbians have the same desire as heterosexuals for long-term romantic relationships.<sup>20</sup> A large number of gays and lesbians are in satisfying, committed, long-term relationships. The fight for same-sex marriage in Canada illustrated the importance of legally recognizing these types of partnerships.

Studies show that lesbian couples divide household and family-related tasks equitably. They report satisfaction in their relationships.<sup>21</sup> Research on gay men has similar findings: gay fathers also report an equal division of childcare tasks and general satisfaction in their romantic relationship.<sup>22</sup>



Several studies examined the role of biological and non-biological parents in blended homoparental families. As with blended families with heterosexual parents, a study of gay fathers showed that family satisfaction increased when the children considered their biological father's male partner as part of the family<sup>23</sup>. For blended families with lesbian parents, three studies also showed that the children considered their mother's partner as part of the family.<sup>24</sup> For children born to same-sex parents, there is no significant difference in the children's relationship with their biological and non-biological parent, nor any notable differences in regards to authority and acceptance.<sup>25</sup>

Science has not found any reason to believe that lesbian mothers and gay fathers are inadequate parents. On the contrary, study results indicate that lesbian and gay parents are identical to heterosexual parents; neither better, nor worse.







## MYTH 4

# CHILDREN IN CONTACT WITH HOMOSEXUAL PEOPLE ARE AT A HIGHER RISK OF BEING VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Studies have revealed that the vast majority of adult that sexually abuse children are not part of the child's immediate family, but rather uncles, grandfathers, extended family members, neighbours, etc. The abuse is generally recognized as related to a lack of parental supervision.<sup>26</sup> Sexual abuse of children committed by women is extremely rare.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, most cases of sexual abuse involve an adult male and a young girl.<sup>28</sup> Research has shown that gay men are no more likely to sexually abuse children than heterosexual men.<sup>29</sup>

## MYTH 4 OVERVIEW

Children are at higher risk of being sexually abused

MOST ABUSERS ARE NOT PART OF THE IMMEDIATE FAMILY

SEXUAL ABUSE BY WOMEN IS RARE

MAJORITY OF CASES: ADULT MALE ABUSING YOUNG FEMALE

GAY MEN ARE NOT MORE LIKELY TO ABUSE CHILDREN

PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS UNDERGO RIGOROUS PSYCHOSOCIAL EVALUATION



Very few relevant studies about sexual abuse of children by gay or lesbian parents have been published. A recent study, however, showed that not one lesbian mother participating in a longitudinal study had abused her child.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, in Québec, gays and lesbians that adopt children through the adoption services of a Centre jeunesse de Québec undergo a rigorous psychological evaluation before being able to adopt. A sexual predator passing this evaluation would be highly unlikely. Fears that children under the care of gay or lesbian parents are more likely to be sexually abused are completely unfounded.



## MYTH 5

# CHILDREN LIVING IN HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES EXPERIENCE CONFUSION ABOUT THEIR GENDER IDENTITY AND ABOUT CONVENTIONAL GENDER ROLES

It is a commonly-held belief that gay and lesbian parents cannot provide their children with appropriate role models that allow them to develop their gender identity and an understanding of gender roles. Research shows that the majority of gay and lesbian parents ensure that their children are in contact with a variety of role models, such as their grandparents, teachers, coaches, aunts, uncles, friends and neighbours. Like children of heterosexual parents, children are exposed to a variety of positive models all around them.

## MYTH 5 OVERVIEW

Children's confusion about their gender identity and gender roles

CHILDREN ARE REGULARLY IN CONTACT WITH A VARIETY OF POSITIVE MALE AND FEMALE ROLE MODELS

THEIR GENDER IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IS NORMAL

CHILDREN ARE NEITHER MORE FEMININE NOR MORE MASCULINE THAN THEIR PEERS

GREATER PSYCHOLOGICAL "FEMININITY" (EX: EMPATHY)

FEWER STEREOTYPICAL PREFERENCES FOR ACTIVITIES

GENDER ROLES FIT WITHIN ESTABLISHED NORMS

## GENDER IDENTITY

Gender identity refers to the belief a person holds of being male or female. In general, this belief corresponds to the person's biological sex. A total of three hundred children from homoparental families, aged 5–14, took part in several studies that used a variety of methods. Taken as a whole, these studies showed that gender identity development in these children was normal, and comparable to that of children with heterosexual parents. The vast majority of children did not experience any problems related to gender identity, did not wish they were the opposite sex nor act as if they were. According to these studies on gender identity, children from both types of families develop their gender identities in the same way, and the idea of increased difficulties for children with lesbian mothers is not based on any empirical evidence. To date, no scientific research has been conducted on children with gay fathers.



## GENDER ROLES

Gender roles are related to behaviours, practices and social roles attributed to people according to their sex in a given time period and culture. As is the case with gender identity, studies of children in families with gay or lesbian parents have results comparable to those of children with heterosexual parents. Behaviours fit within the boundaries of traditional gender roles.<sup>31</sup> For example, Kirkpatrick et al. (1981) did not detect any difference between children with lesbian mothers and those with heterosexual mothers in regards to their favourite toys, activities, interests or choice of profession. These children were neither more masculine nor more feminine than their peers raised by heterosexual parents.

Rees (1972) administered the “Bem Sex Role Inventory” (BSRI) to 24 adolescents, half of whom had a divorced, lesbian mother and the other with a divorced, heterosexual mother. This test evaluates masculinity and femininity as independent factors and results in an androgyny score based on the masculinity/femininity ratio. Children with lesbian mothers were no different in regards to masculinity or androgyny compared to

those with heterosexual mothers. However, they did show a higher level of psychological “femininity” (affectionate, loyal, sensitive to the needs of others). This result seems to contradict predictions that lesbian mothers socialize their children in a masculine way.

Children’s gender roles were also evaluated by Green et al. (1986). No difference was detected between 56 children with lesbian mothers and 48 with heterosexual mothers over the course of interviews about their preferences for television shows, television characters, toys or games. On the other hand, children with lesbian mothers had fewer stereotypical preferences for activities at school and in their neighbourhood.

In accordance with this result, lesbian mothers have reported that their daughters participate often in roughhousing games or sometimes play with “masculine” toys, such as trucks, but they reported no such difference for their sons. Lesbian mothers were no more inclined than heterosexual mothers to report that their sons played with “feminine” toys, such as dolls. For both types of families, the children’s gender roles fell into the normal range.



More recently, Brewaeys et al. evaluated the gender roles of 30 children from 4–8 years old, conceived by artificial insemination by lesbian couples, and compared them to 30 children of the same age, conceived in the same manner by heterosexual couples, as well as 30 children conceived naturally by heterosexual couples. They used the “Pre-School Activities Inventory,”<sup>32</sup> a questionnaire designed to identify the “masculine” and “feminine” behaviours of a sample of randomly selected children. They found no difference between these groups of children as far as preferences for toys, games and activities associated with a particular gender.<sup>33</sup>

In short, research indicates that children of lesbian mothers develop gender roles in similar ways to other children. Very few differences were observed in preferred toys, games, activities or clothing, nor in choice of friends or career between children with lesbian mothers and those with heterosexual mothers. When differences were observed, they respected the norms of Western culture. To date, no research has studied gender roles of the children of gay fathers.

**To find out more about issues of gender identity and gender roles, excellent research summaries are available in both French and English.<sup>34</sup>**





## MYTH 6

# CHILDREN WITH HOMOSEXUAL PARENTS WILL ALSO BE HOMOSEXUAL

A frequently asked question about children with gay or lesbian parents is whether or not they too will become homosexual. Many studies have investigated this issue.<sup>35</sup> Beyond the observation that the majority of homosexual individuals have heterosexual parents, and that the cause of homosexuality is unknown—be it innate or acquired—documentation shows that adult children of gay fathers or lesbian mothers are no more likely to be homosexual than children of heterosexual parents.

In all studies, the vast majority of children from gay fathers or lesbian mothers identify as heterosexual. Research shows that between 0 and 10% identify as homosexual, which matches the estimated proportion of homosexual and bisexual individuals in the population at large.<sup>36</sup>

## MYTH 6 OVERVIEW

Children will also be homosexual

THE CAUSE OF HOMOSEXUALITY IS NOT KNOWN

CHILDREN ARE NO MORE LIKELY TO BE HOMOSEXUAL

CHILDREN ARE MORE OPEN TO SEXUAL DIVERSITY

A QUEBEC STUDY SHOWS THAT 3% OF DAUGHTERS AND 6% OF SONS WERE HOMOSEXUAL

Another study by Bailey et al. (1995) surveyed adult sons of homosexual fathers and found that 90% of the sons were heterosexual. Despite the small sizes of these studied groups, taken overall, the data does not show a higher rate of homosexuality among children with homosexual parents.

Golombok and Tasker<sup>37</sup> studied 25 young adults raised by lesbian, divorced mothers and 21 young adults raised by heterosexual, divorced mothers. The study indicated that the children of lesbian mothers were no more likely than those of heterosexual mothers to be attracted to same-sex partners. However, of those declaring an attraction to the same sex, those with lesbian mothers were more likely to envision a homosexual relationship and were more likely to have had such a relationship. They were not, on the other hand, more likely to identify as non-heterosexual (that is, as lesbian, gay, or bisexual). Quite obviously, children from homoparental families that are attracted to people of the same sex are less reluctant about declaring their sexuality thanks to the presence of a role model and a favourable environment, unlike children of heterosexual parents who experience the same feelings. These results were obtained from a small sample group, so they must be carefully interpreted. However, this study is the first to track children of divorced, lesbian mothers through to adulthood.

A Québec study<sup>38</sup> of 148 lesbian mothers with 139 daughters and 141 sons, reports that, according to these mothers, 3% of daughters and 6% of sons having reached the age for determining their sexual identity were homosexual. This data is comparable to the estimates of homosexuality in the general population. Research suggests that gay fathers and lesbian mothers are no more likely to have homosexual children than the population overall.





## MYTH 7

# CHILDREN FROM HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES ARE MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, LEARNING AND BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS THAN OTHER CHILDREN

People who oppose the phenomenon of same-sex parenting often highlight studies of single-parent families showing that children raised by a single-parent are more at risk for adaptation problems (dropping out, behavioural problems, drug abuse, etc.). Conclusions drawn by this research give the idea that children need a mother and a father to function normally. It is important to clarify, however, that studies of singleparent families<sup>39</sup> do not focus on parents' sexual orientation. They compare families with a mother and father to those with a single parent.

## MYTH 7 OVERVIEW

Les enfants risquent de développer davantage de problèmes sociaux, affectifs, cognitifs et comportementaux

LE NOMBRE DE PARENTS ET NON PAS  
LEUR SEXE EST IMPORTANT

AUCUNE DIFFÉRENCE SUR LES ASPECTS  
DÉVELOPPEMENTAUX DES ENFANTS

PAS PLUS DE PROBLÈMES DE  
COMPORTEMENT

AU POINT DE VUE DE LA PERSONNALITÉ  
IL N'Y A PAS DE DIFFÉRENCE





The results of these comparisons suggest that the number of parents (without specifying sex) as well as the disruptive effects of divorce are to blame, and not the parents' gender. For example, a study<sup>40</sup> has shown that self-esteem is better for children raised by a mother in a relationship, be it hetero or homosexual, rather than by a single mother. Children from single-parent families generally have access to fewer economic and educational resources than those from two-parent families, and their single parents usually have smaller support networks. Studies show that this is true for heterosexual and homosexual singleparent families.

Furthermore, developmental studies of children with lesbian or gay parents have evaluated a vast array of developmental characteristics, such as separation-individuation,<sup>41</sup> psychiatric traits,<sup>42</sup> behavioural problems,<sup>43</sup> personality,<sup>44</sup> self-image,<sup>45</sup> locus of control\* (see footnote),<sup>46</sup> moral judgment,<sup>47</sup> school adaptation,<sup>48</sup> intelligence<sup>49</sup> and self-esteem.<sup>50</sup> Some studies used the "Teacher's Report Form," an assessment of the child's behaviour filled out by the teacher. Overall, these studies show that children with homosexual parents are not significantly different than those with heterosexual parents for the totality of characteristics evaluated. In conclusion, research leads us to believe that concerns about difficulties in these areas for children with lesbian mothers are unfounded.

\* **Locus of control:** A personal belief about what provokes the positive and negative outcomes in one's life, whether overall or in a specific area such as health or academics. A person can believe in internal control, that is, that they are personally responsible for their successes or failures. People who believe in an external locus of control think that their environment, a higher power or other people control their decisions and life.



## MYTH 8

# CHILDREN RAISED IN HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES HAVE MORE DIFFICULTY WITH SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

It is a widely-held belief that children of gay and lesbian parents will be ostracized due to their parents' sexuality. As such, the peer-relationships of these children have been frequently brought under the microscope by investigators. Studies have also been conducted about their relationships with adults.







## SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CHILDREN

Published data on the relationships of children with lesbian mothers and their peers dates back nearly two decades.<sup>51</sup> Although these children must learn to navigate a world often fraught with homophobia and heterosexism, studies of both parents and children show that there is nothing atypical about their peer relationship development. The majority of children report having good friends as well as a group of friends of the same gender, regardless of the sexual orientation of their mothers.<sup>52</sup> The quality of peer relationships is generally described in positive terms by researchers,<sup>53</sup> as well as by the children and their mothers.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the quantity and quality of teenagers' and young adults' romantic relationships are not related to their mothers' sexuality.<sup>55</sup> To date, no data has been collected on this subject for children with gay fathers.

### MYTH 8 OVERVIEW

Children have more difficulty  
with social relationships

DEVELOPMENT OF PEER RELATIONSHIPS  
IS TYPICAL

YOUNG CHILDREN: GOOD FRIENDS, AS  
WELL AS GROUP OF FRIENDS OF THE  
SAME GENDER

FOR TEENAGERS: QUANTITY AND  
QUALITY OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS  
NORMAL



## CHILDREN'S SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS

According to three studies,<sup>56</sup> parental sexual orientation has no impact on the number of adults in a child's entourage. According to Patterson et al. (1998), children from homoparental families socialize with hetero and homosexual adults. Research shows that lesbian mothers, more so than heterosexual mothers, want their children to develop positive relationships with adult males. Kirkpatrick et al. (1981) established that lesbian mothers had more male friends than heterosexual mothers. Lesbian mothers include men more often in family activities, especially if the lesbians are in a committed relationship.<sup>57</sup>

Studies on the quality of children's relationships with adults have produced generally positive results.<sup>58</sup> For instance, teenagers' relationships with their parents are described as warm and loving, regardless of the parents' sexual orientation.<sup>59</sup> One study indicated that children with divorced, lesbian mothers were more likely to have had recent contact with their fathers than those of divorced, heterosexual mothers.<sup>60</sup> Another, however, found no differences in this respect.<sup>61</sup> An additional study concluded that children with gay fathers or lesbian mothers have positive parent-child relationships,<sup>62</sup> but that heterosexual parents are more likely than homosexual parents to report having difficulty with their children visiting the other parent in the case of a separation.<sup>63</sup> Finally, a study shows that young adults with divorced, lesbian mothers communicate more openly with their mother and her partner than adult children of divorced, heterosexual parents.<sup>64</sup>

### MYTH 8 OVERVIEW *(CONTINUED)*

Children have more difficulty with social relationships

TOTAL NUMBER OF ADULTS IN CHILDREN'S ENTOURAGE IS NO DIFFERENT

LESBIANS WANT THEIR CHILDREN TO DEVELOP POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH MEN

TEENAGERS HAVE POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS

IN CASE OF DIVORCE, CHILDREN MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH BOTH BIOLOGICAL PARENTS



## MYTH 9

# CHILDREN IN HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES DON'T HAVE CONTACT WITH THEIR EXTENDED FAMILY, SUCH AS THEIR GRANDPARENTS

Researchers have also focused on the contact children have with members of their extended families, especially grandparents. Parents are often the bridge between the third generation and the first. Since grandparents are often a great source of support for their grandchildren, any tension between parents and grandparents can reduce the amount of contact between grandparents and grandchildren and therefore remove an important resource from these children's lives.

## MYTH 9 OVERVIEW

Children have no contact with their grandparents

GRANDPARENTS PLAY AN IMPORTANT  
ROLE IN GRANDCHILDREN'S  
DEVELOPMENT

GRANDCHILDREN HAVE REGULAR  
CONTACT WITH THEIR GRANDPARENTS

GRANDPARENTS ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR  
GRANDCHILDREN AS THEIR OWN

REFLECTS GROWING ACCEPTANCE OF  
HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES IN NORTH  
AMERICA

Different studies<sup>65</sup> suggest that, as in families with heterosexual parents, interactions with grandparents have a positive influence on children's social, cognitive and emotional development. Patterson et al. evaluated these possibilities in two separate studies.<sup>66</sup> Their conclusions reveal that the majority of children with lesbian mothers, like those with heterosexual parents,<sup>67</sup> have regular contact with their grandparents.<sup>68</sup> Two studies report that grandparents often acknowledge the children of their lesbian daughters as their grandchildren.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the available data suggests that, contrary to widespread concerns, intergenerational relationships in families with lesbian mothers are satisfactory. It is important to note that these studies are relatively recent and may reflect a growing social acceptance of homoparental families in North America.







## MYTH 10

# IT IS NO LONGER NECESSARY TO DO RESEARCH ON HOMOPARENTAL FAMILIES

Although there have been many studies over the past three decades on homoparental families, more research still needs to be done in many fields. It is clear that the parenting skills of gays and lesbians are not inferior to those of heterosexuals, that their children develop normally and are no more and no less successful than other children. Although some longitudinal studies have been conducted, 70 others following families with gay or lesbian parents over time are still necessary.

## MYTH 10 OVERVIEW

It is no longer necessary to do research on homoparental families

FURTHER LONGITUDINAL STUDIES FOLLOWING FAMILIES OVER TIME ARE NECESSARY

FURTHER STUDIES ON THE STRUCTURAL DIVERSITY OF FAMILIES ARE NEEDED

RESEARCH NEEDS TO BE CONDUCTED ON FACTORS THAT CAN AGGRAVATE THE MINORITY STATUS OF THESE FAMILIES

RESEARCH NEEDS TO BE CONDUCTED ON GAY FATHERS, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PARENTS

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF THEIR OWN FAMILIES SHOULD BE EXAMINED



With their growing visibility, homoparental families no longer represent one homogenous group. Besides the variability of homoparental families' experiences, research should concentrate more on the structural diversity of homoparental families and their particular stressors. Blended families, two-parent families and families with a known donor all experience unique challenges. Research should also focus on other factors that can aggravate the minority status of these families, such as socioeconomic status, cultural origin, level of education and differences between urban and regional settings. For all of these circumstances, researchers must examine the social support network and the homophobia experienced.

Since most studies have been conducted on lesbian mothers, there is still a great need to explore the realities of gay fathers and bisexual, transsexual and transgender parents. Among other things, adoption among gay fathers is a relatively new phenomenon that is growing in Québec, and the many facets of this type of family need to be studied.

How children perceive their own families has not been thoroughly considered in research so far. The few discoveries made in this area show that children don't seem to make any distinction between the configuration of their family and that of others,<sup>71</sup> and that children who only find out about their parents' sexual orientation as teenagers have a harder time accepting it than those who are aware of it from a young age.<sup>72</sup>

Finally, the topic of children's biological origin is nothing new and concerns not only homoparental families but all families that use a sperm or egg donor through a fertility clinic or who adopt children. While children that are adopted or are the product of assisted reproduction face similar issues, it is important to assess whether children from homoparental families deal with the issue of the unknown parent(s) differently than children with heterosexual parents.





## CONCLUSION

**Research comparing homoparental families with families with heterosexual parents shows that there is no evidence that gays and lesbians are not capable of parenting. Fears that a child with gay or lesbian parents is more likely to be sexually abused are not founded on any scientific research. Parenting skills have nothing to do with sexual orientation. Regardless of gender or sexual preferences, homosexual and heterosexual parents are equally capable of creating warm homes, rich in resources that promote the optimal development of their children.**

Children from homoparental families have normal relationships with adults and are exposed to a wide variety of role models of both genders. Grandparents play an equally important role in the lives of these children as in families with heterosexual parents. Furthermore, although they grow up in a family whose structure is different than the norm, studies show that the development of their peer relationships is typical.

Gay and lesbian parents create a family environment supportive of their children, just as well as heterosexual parents. Studies have shown no difference in the sexual identity or sexual well-being of children from homoparental families compared to their peers. Overall, studies show that these children are just as well adjusted psychologically as their peers, and that they show no more and no less signs of psychological, developmental or behavioural problems.

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