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Adolescents' attitudes toward same-sex marriage and adoption in France

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Abstract

Research on attitudes toward sexual minority rights has predominantly focused on adults within the U.S. Adolescents' positions have been neglected, yet they will have a major influence on future policies for sexual minorities. To extend previous research, this study examined 405 French high school students' views toward same-sex marriage (SSM) and same-sex adoption (SSA), while testing factors (homophobia, social dominance orientation [SDO], empathic concern, and perspective-taking) that could account for variability in these views. Results indicated that females were more supportive than males on SSM and SSA, and that both were more in favor of SSM than SSA. Controlling for age, gender, and socially desirable responding, mediation tests revealed that the effects of SDO and perspective-taking on SSM and SSA positions were mediated through beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals, but not through feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals. Empathic concern did not account for SSM and SSA over and above these other factors. Implications for future research in this area are discussed.

Keywords: same-sex adoption; same-sex marriage; homophobia; empathy; social dominance orientation

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The status of GLBTQ rights around the world is undoubtedly very heterogeneous. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in a report published in 2011 about the discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, stated that 76 countries retain laws that are used to criminalize people on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, and that penalties range from short-term to life imprisonment, and even the death penalty. In 2014, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) stated in its annual report that the international situation had changed little since that 2011 report: 78 countries now condemn homosexuality (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2014).

In other countries, GLBTQ people are not criminalized on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, and they are protected from discriminations in areas such as work, health, or housing. Specific to same-sex relationships and families, some countries have come to allow registered partnerships, with the Netherlands being the first of these countries to allow same-sex marriage and adoption in 2001. To date, 16 countries allow same-sex marriage throughout their territory: Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, Denmark, Uruguay, New Zealand, France, Brazil, and Luxembourg¹. Moreover, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and the United States allow same-sex marriage in some of parts of their country. In the U.S., where the Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act in June 2013, the number of States permitting same-sex marriage increased in the months that followed. Some studies suggest that access to marriage might be positively associated with psychological wellbeing in lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons (Wight, LeBlanc & Badgett, 2013; see also American Psychological Association's Resolution on Marriage Equality for Same-Sex Couples, 2011). Moreover,

¹ Finland will also allow same-sex marriage in 2017.

more than 20 countries have established same-sex civil unions or registered partnerships, offering same-sex couples some or all rights of marriage (ILGA, 2014). Similar to same-sex marriage, there are major disparities faced by same-sex couples who wish to adopt, as only a few more than twenty countries have legalized joint adoption by same-sex couples (ILGA, 2014). Although there is indeed overlap between countries allowing same-sex marriage and those allowing adoption (excepted Portugal where same-sex marriage is legal but not adoption), these issues are often treated separately in the legislative process (a dozen countries legalized marriage or other forms of union for same-sex couples, but did not offer joint adoption). Similarly, some individuals may feel differently about marriage and adoption. Since the 1990s, in France, public opinion surveys have shown an increase of positive opinion on allowing marriage more so than on adoption. A year and a half after this legalization in France, 68% of people were in favor of marriage, but only 53% were in favor of adoption by same-sex couples (IFOP, 2014). Thus, it is important to consider these attitudes separately for the purpose of comparing whether individuals do make distinctions in their attitudes toward these two issues and identifying whether similar factors predict both attitudes.

France is among the countries that have seen a recent and important change in their legislation on GLBTQ rights. On May 18, 2013, the President of the Republic introduced a bill to open marriage and adoption rights to same-sex couples, which was eventually adopted by the National Assembly after 8 months of debates in the Parliament and across the country. This period of debate was tumultuous: there were large demonstrations against the bill, there was offensive discourse against sexual minorities and their families that capitalized on stereotypes associating homosexuality with bestiality or pedophilia. French people were much more sensitive to the issue of child adoption than to marriage itself. Indeed, the arguments of opponents of the bill mainly concerned the question of risks faced by children in their psychological development (e.g., identity disorders, gender confusion) and these arguments

were greatly reinforced by psychoanalysts placed under the media spotlight in France.

Traditionalist Catholic movements were also much more mobilized, unlike in other countries that have opened up marriage and adoption in Europe, and expanded their audience in a political context that crystallized, on this legislation, more diffuse and wider sources of discontent against the political establishment.

During this period, there was an increase in aggression against gay and lesbian individuals in France (SOS Homophobie, 2014). However, little is known about the attitudes toward GLBTQ people and equal rights for them in the French population. Recently, Vecho & Schneider (2012) focused on attitudes from 275 psychologists toward gay and lesbian parenting. This study, extended in a comparison with 270 French-speaking psychologists from Quebec (Canada), revealed that Quebec psychologists were significantly more confident and positive than French psychologists toward the positive development of children with same-sex parents, toward the parenting abilities of same-sex couples, and thus more favorable to the legalization of access to parenting for gays and lesbians, whatever the way to become a parent (adoption, in vitro fertilization, surrogacy). Most of the demographical characteristics (i.e., gender, parental status, marital status) and professional characteristics (i.e., professional experiences with gay and lesbian families, programs concerning gay and lesbian parenting in their studies or after) included in the analyses did not revealed any significant effect on attitudes. Only a small and negative effect of the adherence to the psychoanalytic theory appeared: the more psychologists adhered to psychoanalytic theory, the less they were open to grant legal access to parenting for same-sex couples. The legal context in each country at the time of data collection (marriage and adoption had been legalized in Quebec for 7 years, while it was not yet so in France) led the authors to hypothesize a potential overall evolution of attitudes that would contribute to anthropological transformations of views on same-sex parenting.

In addition to the virtual absence of research on attitudes held toward GLBTQ issues among the French people, the recent events in France and the recent threats posed by the conservative parties against this law in the event that they would win the next presidential and legislative elections underscore even further the pressing need to examine attitudes toward same-sex marriage and adoption in France.

Most research on individuals' views toward GLBTQ rights has focused on adults. Although adolescents have not yet secured the right to vote, they represent a demographic that soon will attain such rights and thus have a major influence on future policies for sexual minorities. A substantial amount of international youth-based research has focused on the issue of civic engagement and factors that promote youths' civic engagement (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006; Torney-Purta, 2002; Youniss et al., 2002). Nevertheless, few studies have considered adolescents' positions on specific civic policies, especially policies toward sexual minorities. Understanding youths' positions toward marriage and adoption equality, as well as factors that account for variability in youths' positions on these policies, is critical as social policy advocates continue in their efforts to promote equality in these areas. To extend previous research, we focus on French adolescents' views toward same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples, while testing factors (homophobia, social dominance orientation, empathic concern, and perspective-taking) that could account for variability in these views.

Factors Associated with Attitudes toward Sexual Minorities and Related Social Issues

Most studies about same-sex marriage are recent, concentrated within North America, and focus almost exclusively on adults. Herek (2009) argued that attitudes toward civil rights should be treated distinctively from attitudes toward gay and lesbian people. Indeed, when considered as two different concepts, studies among adults have shown that while the association between homophobia and support for same-sex civil rights is significant, it is not

so high as to suggest that the constructs are synonymous or that attitudes toward gay and lesbian people account for social policy views entirely (Case & Stewart, 2010; Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; Moskowitz, Rieger, & Roloff, 2010; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004).

Individuals' positions on social policies toward sexual minorities are certainly a reflection of their attitudes toward sexual minorities, but individuals also rely on other ideological beliefs to inform their positions on these policies (e.g., egalitarian values, moral traditionalism and political conservatism; Herek, 2009). Also, few studies have investigated this association among adolescents (Horn, Szalacha, & Drill, 2008). As such, we consider several factors that could distinguish adolescents who hold either favorable or unfavorable positions toward same-sex marriage and adoption, as these represent two pressing current issues in France.

Empirical research has consistently documented gender differences in heterosexual adolescent and adult attitudes toward sexual minorities among the general population, with heterosexual men expressing more negative attitudes than women (Herek, 2002; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Mata, Ghavami, & Wittig, 2010; Poteat & Anderson, 2012). This difference has been connected to traditional gender norms, particularly those for masculinity (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1994). Although masculinity can be expressed in many ways, the dominant expression of masculinity has been one that includes a denigration of sexual minorities and views homosexuality as incompatible with a male identity that is valued in society (Mahalik et al., 2003; Pascoe, 2007). In contrast, while femininity norms can be equally rigid for women, they do not typically include the same denigration of sexual minorities (Mahalik et al., 2005). As such, for women, support for lesbian and gay individuals does not necessarily risk a loss of status in the same way as for men (Whitley & Kite, 2006). Research also has examined gender differences in positions on rights for GLBTQ individuals but primarily among adults, and findings are mixed. Some studies show that heterosexual men are less supportive of these rights than women (Duncan & Kimmelmeier, 2012; Gato & Fontaine, 2013; Hollekim,

Slaatten, & Anderssen, 2012; Moskowitz, et al., 2010; Poteat & Mereish, 2012; Todd & Ong, 2012). However, some studies show no gender differences among professional groups such as psychologists or social workers (Crawford, Jordan, McLeod, & Zamboni, 1999; McLeod, Crawford, & Zeichmeister, 1999; Ryan, 2000; Vecho & Schneider, 2015). To our knowledge, the only study to examine this issue among adolescents revealed a gender difference, with girls being more supportive than boys of gay rights advocates (i.e., to hold a peaceful march in the respondent's neighborhood and to talk on public television about their views; Hooghe, Claes, Harell, Quintelier, & Dejaeghere, 2010).

Although adolescents' positions on same-sex marriage and adoption may differ based on gender, we suspect that ideological beliefs and other psychological factors may have an additional role in accounting for differences on these issues. For instance, dominance ideology beliefs partially account for gender differences in homophobia among adolescents (Mata et al., 2010). Social dominance orientation (SDO), as part of social dominance theory, represents the extent to which individuals desire or support the existence of hierarchies in society wherein their in-group dominates and is superior to other out-groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Further, individuals in dominant groups, whether experimentally created or naturally occurring, report greater SDO than individuals in subordinate groups (Guimond, Dambrun, Michinov, & Duarte, 2003; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). These tenets of social dominance theory have been supported across research studies revealing that heterosexuals who express higher SDO also report more prejudice against sexual minorities, both among adults (Bahns & Crandall, 2013; Goodman & Moradi, 2008; O'Brien, Shovelton, & Latner, 2013; Whitley, 1999) and adolescents (Hooghe & Meeusen, 2012; Mata et al., 2010; Poteat & Anderson, 2012; Poteat, Espelage, & Green, 2007). SDO may be particularly relevant in understanding individuals' positions toward social policies that institutionalize inequality and reinforce existing hierarchies between heterosexuals and sexual minorities.

Indeed, heterosexual adults who express high levels of SDO also appear to be less supportive of sexual minority social policies that promote equality, including marriage and adoption equality (Poteat & Mereish, 2012). By enacting discriminatory legislation, heterosexuals high on SDO and homophobia can perpetuate the dominant position of their group. We expect that the same associations between SDO, prejudice, and positions on same-sex marriage and adoption extend to adolescents because this is a critical period during which individuals are continuing to form and evaluate their belief systems, ways of reasoning about social issues, and intergroup attitudes (Nesdale, 2001; Poteat & Anderson, 2012; Smetana, 2013).

The role of empathic concern and perspective-taking in relation to homophobia has been investigated, but to a lesser extent than SDO. Research has led to a greater comprehension of the multidimensional nature of empathy; Davis (1980) highlighted four dimensions, including empathic concern and perspective-taking skills. Empathic concern is an affective aspect that assesses individuals' comprehension of others' feelings and their concern for others. Perspective-taking is a cognitive aspect of empathy that reflects a cognitive ability to adopt others' psychological point of view in everyday life. Levels of both empathic concern and perspective-taking have been linked to homophobic behavior among adolescents (Poteat, DiGiovanni & Scheer, 2013, Poteat & Espelage, 2005). Further, Johnson, Brems, and Alford-Keating (1997) found a negative correlation between these factors and negative attitudes toward gay rights, suggesting that higher levels of empathic concern and perspective-taking skills are related to less negative attitudes. Expanding on these findings, it is likely that empathic concern and perspective-taking also are significantly associated with adolescents' positions toward lesbian and gay social policies.

The Current Study

The issues of marriage and adoption equality for same-sex couples have received growing attention internationally, yet most of the focus has been on the views of adults. It is

important for research to widen this focus to be inclusive of earlier developmental periods. Contemporary youth are being raised during an historic period reflecting major shifts in views toward sexual minorities, their representation in culture and media, and their treatment under the laws of their countries. Although some studies have considered homophobic beliefs held by adolescents (Horn, 2006; Mata et al., 2010; Poteat & Anderson, 2012), few studies have considered youths' positions toward specific prominent social issues and legal rights for sexual minorities, including same-sex marriage and adoption. We address this need in the current study by examining French adolescents' positions toward same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples, while also considering several predictors of their positions on these two issues. Specifically, we tested two models in which the effects of several independent variables (perspective-taking, empathic concern, and SDO) on adolescents' positions toward same-sex marriage (model 1) and same-sex adoption (model 2) were mediated through their beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals. We considered marriage and adoption separately because individuals may hold distinct views toward each issue (e.g., they may feel more favorably toward marriage than adoption) and it would also be important to determine if our set of factors operated similarly or differently in predicting individuals' positions toward each issue.

We tested several preliminary hypotheses prior to testing our main mediation models. First, we hypothesized that boys would report lower perspective-taking and empathic concern than girls, and higher SDO than girls. Further, we hypothesized that boys would report stronger negative beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals and more negative feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals than girls. We based these hypotheses on prior findings for gender differences on these variables among adolescents and adults (Herek, 2000; Mata et al., 2010; Poteat & Anderson, 2012; Poteat et al., 2013; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). For exploratory purposes, we tested whether adolescents differed in their relative level of support for same-sex

marriage and adoption by same-sex couples. Because little research has considered adolescents' positions on these two issues, we did not have a priori expectations for whether differences would be present.

As our main hypotheses, we considered two models in which we tested the direct effects of perspective-taking, empathic concern, and SDO on adolescents' positions toward same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples as well as the indirect effects of these variables through adolescents' beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals (Figure 1). We expected that these factors would predict beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals, which in turn would predict positions toward same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples. We controlled for adolescents' age, gender, and socially desirable responding in both models. We hypothesized that the effects of perspective-taking, empathic concern, and SDO on positions toward marriage and adoption predominantly would be indirect through their beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 405 students (56.2% girls, one participant did not identify gender), from 14 to 20 years old ($M = 16.84$, $SD = 1.18$), in four public High Schools from two small-sized towns (less than 20,000 inhabitants) and two medium-sized towns (between 30,000 and 80,000 inhabitants) of the department of Yvelines (west part of the Parisian metropolitan area). Students were enrolled in 3 grades (Second, First, and Terminal) corresponding with the American school system of grades 10 ($n = 200$), 11 ($n = 72$) and 12 ($n = 133$). As the questions of ethnic/racial identity and sexual orientation were sensitive, we did not collect this information. Parents provided informed consent for their child to participate in the study. The contact information for the principal investigator was provided for any questions about or reactions to participating in the study. Between the end of March and the end of April 2013,

before the adoption of the bill by the National Assembly, participants completed the survey during 50-minute class periods and survey proctors were present to answer questions.

An ethical approval was requested. French ethics committees, named “Comité de Protection des Personnes” (CCP) are constituted by doctors in medicine, jurists, people qualified in biomedical research, hospitable pharmacists, competent people as regards questions of ethics, and representatives of associations of users of the health system. They supervise biomedical research and aim to ensure protection of participants. The law as of August 9, 2004 grants them the decision-makers’ role in the authorization of research (Art. L.1123–6 of Public Health Code). After examination of our protocol, the ethics committee “CPP-Est III” deemed our study unnecessary for ethical review and thus allowed to be completed (Art. L.1123–1 of Public Health Code).

Measures

Demographic information. Adolescents reported their grade level, gender, and age.

Social dominance orientation. The 16-item SDO scale (Pratto et al., 1994) translated into French by Duarte, Dambrun, and Guimond (2004) assesses support for unequal social hierarchies between groups in society (e.g., “Certains groupes de personnes sont tout simplement inférieurs aux autres groupes [Some groups of people are simply not the equals of others]”, “Il est normal que certains groupes de personnes aient plus de chance dans la vie que d’autres [It is normal for some people to have more of a chance in life than others]”). Response options range from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores represent greater support for intergroup dominance and social hierarchies. Items were internally consistent, $\alpha = .87$.

Empathic concern and perspective-taking skills. Adolescents completed the Empathic Concern (7-items; e.g., “J’éprouve souvent de la tendresse pour les gens moins chanceux que moi [I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than

me]”) and Perspective-Taking (7-items; e.g., “Lors d’un désaccord, j’essaie d’écouter le point de vue de chacun avant de prendre une décision [I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision]”) scales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983) translated into French by Gilet, Mella, Studer, Grünh, and Labouvie-Vief (2013). Response options range from 0 (*absolutely untrue*) to 4 (*absolutely true*). Higher average scores represent greater empathic concern and perspective-taking. The internal consistency for empathic concern was $\alpha = .74$ and the perspective-taking scale demonstrated a moderate level of internal consistency, $\alpha = .67$.

Negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality. Negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals and homosexuality were assessed based on two scales developed for this study. Adolescents completed a negative beliefs scale (14-items; e.g., “C’est une honte de laisser des couples gays se tenir la main dans la rue [It’s a shame to let gay couples hold hands on the street]”, “Les lesbiennes ne se comportent pas comme devraient se comporter les femmes [Lesbians do not behave as women should behave]”) that assesses negative beliefs about gay and lesbian people, and homosexual orientation or relations. None of the items concerned GLBTQ rights.

We also assessed negative feelings with a 4-items scale with the following instructions: “Il arrive qu’à la télévision, sur internet, dans les magazines, et dans les discussions d’adultes ou d’adolescent(e)s, on parle d’homosexualité, de couples homosexuels. Indique à quel point tu ressens chacune de ces émotions quand tu entends parler d’homosexualité, de gays ou de lesbiennes, ou quand tu en vois [Sometimes, on TV, on the Internet, in magazines, or in discussions with adults or adolescents, people talk about homosexuality or homosexual couples. Please indicate how much you feel each of the following feelings when you hear about homosexuality, gays or lesbian people, or when you

see them]”. Adolescents were asked to evaluate how much they feel discomfort, fear, nervousness, and shame in these situations.

The 18 items were submitted to a principal axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation. The first factor accounted for 38.56% of the variance and included the 14 negative beliefs items, with factor loadings ranging from .51 through .80. The second factor accounted for an additional 14.09% of the variance and included the 4 negative feeling items, with factor loadings ranging from .57 through .74.

For items on both scales, the response options range from 0 (*absolutely not*) to 5 (*absolutely yes*). Higher average scores represent greater negative beliefs or negative feelings on the respective scale. The internal consistency for negative beliefs was $\alpha = .94$ and the internal consistency for negative feelings was $\alpha = .77$.

Attitudes toward same-sex marriage and adoption. Adolescents’ position toward same-sex marriage (SSM) was assessed with a single item (“Il est normal que deux personnes du même sexe aient le droit de se marier [It is normal that two people of the same sex should have the right to marry]”). Adolescents’ position toward same-sex adoption (SSA) was assessed with two items, one for adoption by lesbian couples and one for adoption by gay couples (e.g., “Il est normal qu'un couple d'hommes puisse adopter des enfants [It is normal that a male couple have the right to adopt children]”). Given that the correlation was very high between these two items ($r = .96, p < .001$), we combined them into a single variable by computing the mean. For these items, response options range from 0 (*absolutely disagree*) to 5 (*absolutely agree*). Higher average scores represent greater positive attitudes toward SSM and SSA. Of note, the correlation between SSM and SSA was significant ($r = .62, p < .001$), but not so high as to suggest there was complete overlap or that there was no distinction. Thus, for both statistical and conceptual reasons, we treated scores for SSM and SSA separately in our analyses.

Socially desirable responding. To control for the tendency to give socially desirable responses, we used a scale consisting of 10 items derived from Tournois, Mesnil, and Kopp (2000) and assessed individuals' tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner (e.g., "Je respecte toujours les règles que l'on me donne [I always respect the rules given to me]"). The response options range 0 (*absolutely untrue*) to 4 (*absolutely true*). Higher average scores represent a greater tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner. The internal consistency was $\alpha = .78$.

Results

Group Differences and Basic Associations

We performed a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test for gender differences on all our measures. Box's M was significant ($p < .001$), which would suggest a departure from multivariate normality, but it is important to note that this test is extremely sensitive and would be of more concern if our groups were uneven in size (there was balanced gender representation in our analyses, thus the MANOVA is robust to certain violations). Still, to be cautious, we relied on Pillai's Trace comparison rather than Wilks' lambda for our assessment of significance of the MANOVA. The main effect for gender was significant, Pillai's Trace = .24, $F(8, 383) = 14.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .24$. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed gender differences on SDO, $F(1, 390) = 30.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, empathic concern, $F(1, 390) = 40.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, perspective-taking, $F(1, 390) = 18.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, negative beliefs toward gay and lesbian individuals, $F(1, 390) = 24.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, negative feelings toward gay and lesbian individuals, $F(1, 390) = 21.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, attitudes toward SSM, $F(1, 390) = 13.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, attitudes toward SSA, $F(1, 390) = 8.52$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, and socially desirable responding, $F(1, 390) = 68.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$. As specified in Table 1, boys reported higher levels of SDO, negative beliefs and feelings

toward gay and lesbian individuals, and socially desirable responding than girls, whereas girls reported higher levels of empathic concern, perspective-taking, and positive attitudes toward same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples than boys.

We performed a repeated-measures ANOVA to test whether adolescents differed in their level of support for same-sex marriage or adoption, with attention to whether potential differences were moderated by gender. Results indicated that adolescents reported significantly greater support for same-sex marriage than for same-sex adoption, Wilks's $\Lambda = .80$, $F(1, 399) = 98.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$, (Marriage: $M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.73$; Adoption: $M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.87$), and that this was comparable for boys and girls (i.e., gender did not moderate this degree of difference in individuals' views toward these two issues).

Correlations among our variables are included in Table 2. With the exception of age, all the correlations between the independent variables were significant ($r_s = -.10$ to $-.73$). Also, all the independent variables were associated with attitudes toward same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption, with correlations ranging from small to large in size (Table 2).

Mediating Effects

For our main analyses, we tested our hypothesis that the associations between our set of independent variables (i.e., perspective-taking, empathic concern, and SDO) and the dependent variables of adolescents' positions on SSM and SSA would be mediated through their beliefs about and feelings toward gay and lesbian individuals. We tested two models, one in which SSM was the dependent variable and one in which SSA was the dependent variable. We used the *MEDIATE* macro for SPSS (Hayes & Preacher, 2014) to test the significance of the direct effects of each independent variable (i.e., perspective-taking, empathic concern, and SDO) as well as their indirect effects through each of the two mediators (i.e., beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals) on these dependent variables. We controlled for age, gender, and socially desirable responding in both models. We used bias-corrected

bootstrap confidence intervals to calculate the 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effects based on 5,000 generated samples. As a foundation for testing these two multiple mediator models, as noted previously, the independent variables of perspective-taking, empathic concern, and SDO were associated with the dependent variables of SSM and SSA; the independent variables were associated with the mediator variables of beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals; and the mediator variables were associated with the dependent variables (see Table 2).

Our first model included SSM as the dependent variable. The results indicated that lower perspective-taking ($b = -.16, p = .02$) and higher SDO ($b = .22, p < .001$), but not empathic concern ($b = -.03, p = .68$), predicted more negative beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals, and that these negative beliefs predicted less favorable SSM ($b = -1.26, p < .001$). None of the direct effects of perspective-taking, empathic concern, or SDO were significant in predicting SSM; however, the indirect effects of perspective-taking ($b = .20, SE = .09, 95\% CI [.02, .38]$) and SDO ($b = -.27, SE = .08, 95\% CI [-.43, -.13]$) through beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals were significant. Only SDO significantly predicted more negative feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals ($b = .16, p < .001$), though feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals did not have a direct effect in predicting SSM ($b = -.05, p = .62$). All coefficients, including those for the control variables, are included in Table 3.

Our second model included SSA as the dependent variable. The results indicated that lower perspective-taking ($b = -.16, p = .02$) and higher SDO ($b = .22, p < .001$), but not empathic concern ($b = -.03, p = .70$), predicted more negative beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals, and that these negative beliefs predicted less favorable SSA ($b = -1.10, p < .001$). None of the direct effects of perspective-taking, empathic concern, or SDO were significant in predicting SSA; however, the indirect effects of perspective-taking ($b = .18, SE = .08, 95\% CI [.03, .35]$) and SDO ($b = -.24, SE = .07, 95\% CI [-.38, -.11]$) through beliefs about lesbian and

gay individuals were significant. Only SDO significantly predicted more negative feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals ($b = .16, p < .001$), though feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals did not have a direct effect in predicting SSA ($b = -.08, p = .45$). All coefficients, including those for the control variables, are included in Table 3.

Discussion

To date, few studies have explored adolescents' attitudes toward social issues and legal rights for sexual minorities. As active citizens who soon will attain the right to vote, it is critical to better understand youths' positions toward LGBT rights. Such knowledge will aid social policy advocates as they continue to promote equality in these areas. In the current study, we addressed this need by examining French adolescents' positions toward same-sex marriage and adoption, focusing on gender differences and on how SDO, empathic concern, and perspective-taking predicted these positions indirectly through adolescents' beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals. As hypothesized, all of these variables had significant bivariate associations with adolescents' positions toward same-sex marriage and adoption. Also as hypothesized, there were significant gender differences, in which boys reported higher SDO, lower empathic concern and perspective-taking, more negative beliefs and feelings toward gay and lesbian individuals, more socially desirable responding, and less positive attitudes toward same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples than girls. Further, the effects of SDO and perspective-taking, but not empathic concern, on marriage and adoption attitudes were mediated through beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals, but not through affect-based feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals. These findings highlight how broader ideological and psychological factors are important to understand not only adolescents' views toward lesbian and gay individuals, but also how they operate in connection with homophobia to predict adolescents' positions toward specific sexual minority-related social policies.

Comparing Levels of Support for Marriage and Adoption Equality

We compared adolescents' level of support for same-sex marriage and adoption equality and found that adolescents expressed significantly stronger support for marriage than adoption. Further, the size of this difference in level of support for these two social policies was similar for boys and girls. This represents a finding of interest, as it suggests that adolescents may not be completely uniform in their level of support on the range of laws that affect sexual minorities in society. As an exploratory analysis, attention to this issue warrants greater consideration and should be studied more closely in order to explain this difference.

There are several possible explanations for why French adolescents in this study may have reported greater support for marriage equality than adoption equality. This generation of adolescents represents a unique population in France: they were born in a society that had already come to recognize and allow same-sex partnerships (same-sex partnerships have been legal in France since 1999, predating marriage rights now afforded to same-sex couples). In contrast, many restraints still exist against adoption by same-sex couples in France. It is possible that the views held by these youth on marriage and adoption have been shaped by their internalization of distinctly different societal norms for these two issues. For instance, during the national debates on same-sex marriage and adoption, few arguments were advanced to reject same-sex marriage and instead most arguments against the legislation were based on stereotype- and bias-based arguments against adoption by same-sex couples (SOS Homophobie, 2014). Thus, research should consider these as distinct attitudes and should more directly consider how societal norms shape adolescents' views on these issues. In addition, while the factors we considered had similar sized correlations with support for same-sex marriage and adoption, there may be other individual psychological factors that have distinctly different associations with these two issues. Identifying such factors could help

further explain why adolescents hold more favorable positions for some forms of equality than others.

Gender Differences in Support for Marriage and Adoption Equality

As hypothesized, we found significant gender difference across our measures. In particular, girls reported less negative beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals than boys. These results are consistent with prior research among adolescents and adults (Herek, 2000; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Mata et al., 2010; Poteat & Anderson, 2012). Girls also reported stronger support for same-sex marriage and adoption than boys. This, too, adds to the limited and mixed findings on gender differences on attitudes toward specific social policies (Whitley & Kite, 2006). Like adults, boys experience strong pressure to conform to masculine norms that value hierarchy and exert strong pressure to avoid being perceived as gay and to hold negative views toward sexual minorities (Mahalik et al., 2003). Indeed, adolescence is a period during which the socialization of these masculine norms can be pervasive and intense (Pascoe, 2007; Pleck et al., 1994). To conform to these expectations and to minimize the possibility of being perceived as gay, boys may not only voice stronger homophobia (e.g., negative beliefs about sexual minorities or more negative feelings toward them) than girls but also voice less support for GLBTQ rights.

SDO, Empathy, and Prejudice in Relation to Marriage and Adoption Equality

Our results highlighted several important factors that were associated with French adolescents' support for same-sex marriage and adoption. Based on simple bivariate correlations, higher levels of empathic concern and perspective-taking as well as lower levels of SDO were associated with greater support for same-sex marriage and adoption. Also as hypothesized, homophobia, as indicated by negative beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals, was associated with weaker support for same-sex marriage and adoption. In support of Herek's (2009) argument that individuals' policy positions should be considered

as distinct from their attitudes toward sexual minorities themselves, we found that the associations between homophobia and these policy positions were strong, but not to the degree that would suggest they are synonymous.

We also documented support for a more complex mediation model in which the effects of SDO and perspective-taking on support for same-sex marriage and adoption were entirely indirect through adolescents' beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals. We found these patterns while controlling for age, gender, and socially desirable responding. Of interest, empathic concern did not account for adolescents' positions on these issues over and above the contribution of SDO or perspective-taking. Also of note, adolescents' feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals did not contribute to their policy positions over and above the contribution of their beliefs toward lesbian and gay individuals. Similarly, the indirect effects of SDO and perspective-taking were only through their beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals and not through their feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals. These findings highlight several issues that should be addressed in order to test potential explanations for these sets of findings.

Unlike perspective-taking, empathic concern did not show any (direct or indirect) effect on SSM or SSA in our overall mediation model. Empathic concern was, however, associated with SSM and SSA based on simple bivariate correlations. First, it must be noted that we measured a tendency to be empathic in general, and not to be empathic specifically toward sexual minorities. One could express empathic concern toward people in the abstract, but with exceptions toward some specific groups such as sexual minorities, especially if one holds negative beliefs toward them. In this case, individuals may be able to engage in perspective-taking, which is a more cognitive-based representation of empathy that could be more dispassionate or unaffected by their personal feelings, but this may not extend to their affect-based expressions of empathy toward the group. Moreover, some ideological beliefs

could explain why empathic concern may not necessarily lead to expressing stronger support toward SSM or SSA. For example, some individuals who express high religiosity or spirituality tend to express greater empathic concern for others and, at the same time, express negative views toward sexual minorities and oppose equal rights for this group (Herek, 1987; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006). Similarly, beliefs about the definition of family or values and opinions about which family contexts are deemed “good” for a child could also play a role: adolescents likely will not hold a favorable position on SSM and SSA if they have internalized stereotype-based messages socialized by society that denigrate these families (e.g., notions that a child cannot develop in a non-heterosexual household or that the child is endangered by having two parents of the same sex). Thus, this not only highlights the need to increase adolescents’ knowledge about child development in general, but also about the empirical findings that counter such stereotypes (e.g., Patterson, 2013; Vecho & Schneider, 2005).

Results highlight the prominent role of beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals as a mediator of the associations between SDO, perspective-taking, and positions toward SSM and SSA. This central role of beliefs aligns with the results of other studies examining the association between homophobia and positions toward GLBTQ civil rights (Case et al., 2010; Hooghe & Meeusen, 2013; Moskowitz et al., 2010). Although both beliefs and feelings were associated with SSM and SSA, as indicated by bivariate correlations, it appears that beliefs had a relatively stronger contribution in accounting for variability in SSM and SSA in our models.

Feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals were not significant in our mediating models. There are several possible explanations for these patterns that should be considered. The feelings that some heterosexual youth hold toward sexual minorities can be complex and mixed, in so far as individuals can feel both positive and negative emotions toward someone

or something (Schimmack & Crites, 2005); for example, fear and interest. In the case of our study, some adolescents could feel ambivalent about gay or lesbian individuals, in that they hold both positive and negative feelings at the same time, which could attenuate the extent to which feelings predicted attitudes toward SSM and SSA. Also, adolescents' feelings toward sexual minorities may come from an array of external and internal sources. For example, negative feelings toward sexual minorities might not simply be based on individuals' personal interactions with sexual minorities, but also from their discomfort with sexuality in general or from their own inner questioning of their sexual orientation. Thus, negative feelings in and of themselves may not immediately lead someone to adopt a negative position toward granting rights to sexual minorities in the same way as holding negative beliefs about sexual minority individuals or relationships. To balance these arguments, however, there is evidence that emotion plays an important role in homophobia and hate crimes (Herek, 2009). Indeed, emotional factors may contribute more strongly to homophobia than do stereotyping and other cognitive influences (Herek, 2004). Similarly, fostering emotional ties is an important mechanism by which intergroup contact reduces prejudice (Pettigrew, 1998). Thus, feelings toward sexual minorities are important to continue assessing, and their weaker effect in this study may be an artifact of how they were assessed. In light of the theoretical complexity of emotion, it could be possible that our measure was too simple to fully capture how feelings toward sexual minorities contribute to same-sex marriage and adoption attitudes. In sum, much more nuanced attention to the role of cognitive (e.g., beliefs) and affective (e.g., feelings) factors is needed in order to understand how each may play a role in shaping individuals' positions toward social policies such as same-sex marriage and adoption.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

This study aimed to extend the literature on attitudes toward legal rights for sexual minorities, which has focused predominantly on adults within the U.S. It is among the first

studies to address several gaps in the literature on civil rights for sexual minorities by extending this focus to the earlier developmental period of adolescence, expanding representation to include a French-based sample, and by identifying several factors that account for variability in adolescents' support for two such civil rights: same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples. Our results highlight the important contributions of SDO, perspective-taking, and empathic concern, as well as the central role of beliefs toward sexual minorities in accounting for adolescents' attitudes toward these specific rights. Interventions should not only target adolescents' stereotypical beliefs about sexual minorities, but also address even broader dominance ideology beliefs that foster and perpetuate these beliefs about sexual minorities. Similarly, interventions should seek to foster adolescents' perspective-taking as part of efforts to promote their critical analysis of these issues.

Several limitations must be acknowledged and addressed. First, our scales did not allow for a distinction between adolescents' attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals. Similarly, our assessment of SSM was based on a single item and our assessment of SSA was based on two items. More robust measures are needed to capture greater complexity in individuals' positions on these two issues. Second, we did not collect information on adolescents' sexual orientation. As such, some participants likely included sexual minority adolescents. Based on the relative proportion of sexual minority youth to heterosexual youth, we suspect that this would have only a small effect on the results. Nevertheless, future research should attempt to focus specifically on heterosexual youth as members of the dominant group in society. Finally, we could not locate any established French-language measures of homophobia. Thus, our self-generated measures of beliefs about and feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals should be evaluated rigorously in future research to determine their validity. Similarly, research should test the generalizability of our findings,

particularly those related to the differential effects for beliefs about versus feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals.

There are several avenues for future research in this area. Future research should examine adolescents' attitudes beyond the metropolitan region of Paris, considering possible discrepancies between rural and urban areas, and consider the effects of other variables, such as authoritarianism, religiosity and contact with lesbians and gay men, on adolescents' views toward GLBTQ civil rights. The issue of social influence should also be addressed: the positions of adolescents' close friends or the positions of other individuals who are important to them (e.g., parents or popular media figures), could play an important role in how they hold and express stereotyped beliefs and views regarding GLBTQ rights. Further studies might also consider how adolescents view other means by which same-sex couples can become parents. For example, information is needed about individuals' attitudes toward in vitro fertilization used by lesbian couples, and toward surrogacy used by gay or lesbian couples. Indeed, granting rights specifically for these medical options is becoming an important issue in a growing number of countries, including France. Ultimately, researchers and interventionists need to understand the processes underlying adolescents' attitudes toward sexual minority rights as adolescents represent the future generation who can promote the future of equality for GLBTQ people. These efforts are imperative to protect same-sex families and their children.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Measures Based on Gender

	SDO	Empathic concern	Perspective-taking	Beliefs	Feelings	Same-Sex Marriage	Same-Sex Adoption	Social Desirability
Gender								
Male	1.96 (1.08)	2.53 (0.71)	2.09 (0.69)	1.24 (1.08)	0.98 (1.04)	3.18 (1.89)	2.49 (1.98)	3.07 (0.73)
Female	1.40 (0.91)	2.97 (0.62)	2.40 (0.68)	0.74 (0.80)	0.55 (0.66)	3.92 (1.52)	3.06 (1.75)	2.51 (0.60)
All	1.64 (1.03)	2.78 (0.69)	2.26 (0.70)	0.96 (0.96)	0.74 (0.87)	3.60 (1.73)	2.81 (1.87)	2.76 (0.71)

Note. Values are average scale scores, and values in parentheses represent standard deviations. SDO = social dominance orientation scale; Empathic concern = empathic concern scale; Perspective-taking = perspective-taking scale; Beliefs = negative beliefs toward gay and lesbian individuals and homosexuality scale; Feelings = negative feelings toward gay and lesbian individuals and homosexuality scale; Same-sex Marriage = attitudes toward same-sex marriage scale; Same-Sex Adoption = attitudes toward same-sex adoption scale; Social Desirability = social desirability scale.

Table 2

Correlations among the Measures

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Age	—								
2. SDO	-.10*	—							
3. Empathic concern	.14**	-.46***	—						
4. Perspective-taking	.12*	-.29***	.40***	—					
5. Beliefs	.08	.30***	-.21***	-.20***	—				
6. Feelings	.01	.25***	-.16**	-.14**	.52***	—			
7. SSM	-.05	-.31***	.18***	.18***	-.73***	-.43***	—		
8. SSA	-.12*	-.24***	.14**	.16**	-.60***	-.34***	.62***	—	
9. Social Desirability	.01	.14**	-.25***	-.10*	.25***	.12*	-.16**	-.12*	—

Note. SDO = social dominance orientation scale; Empathic concern = empathic concern scale; Perspective-taking = perspective-taking scale; Beliefs = negative beliefs toward gay and lesbian individuals and homosexuality scale; Feelings = negative feelings toward gay and lesbian individuals and homosexuality scale; SSM = attitudes toward same-sex marriage scale; SSA = attitudes toward same-sex adoption scale; Social Desirability = social desirability scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Effects of Independent, Mediator, and Control Variables on Same-Sex Marriage and Adoption Positions

Effects	Marriage		Adoption	
	b	SE	b	SE
Independent Variables on Beliefs				
Perspective-taking	-0.16*	.07	-0.16*	.07
Empathic concern	-0.03	.08	-0.03	.08
SDO	0.22***	.05	0.22***	.05
Independent Variables on Feelings				
Perspective-taking	-0.08	.06	-0.08	.06
Empathic concern	-0.02	.07	-0.02	.07
SDO	0.16***	.05	0.16***	.05
Independent Variables and Mediators on DV (Direct Effects)				
Perspective-taking	0.03	.09	0.07	.12
Empathic concern	-0.05	.10	-0.05	.13
SDO	-0.12	.07	-0.14	.09
Beliefs about lesbian and gay individuals	-1.26***	.08	-1.10***	.10
Feelings toward lesbian and gay individuals	-0.10	.08	-0.08	.11
Independent Variables on DV (Indirect through Beliefs)				
Perspective-taking	0.20 (.02, .38)	.09	0.18 (.03, .35)	.08
Empathic concern	0.04 (-.17, .27)	.11	0.03 (-.15, .23)	.10
SDO	-0.27 (-.43, -.13)	.08	-0.24 (-.38, -.11)	.07
Independent Variables on DV (Indirect through Feelings)				
Perspective-taking	0.01 (-.01, .05)	.01	0.01 (-.01, .06)	.01
Empathic concern	.00 (-.01, .04)	.01	.00 (-.01, .04)	.01
SDO	-0.02 (-.06, .01)	.02	-0.01 (-.06, .02)	.02
Control Variables on Beliefs				
Age	0.12**	.04	0.12**	.04

Gender	-0.16	.10	-0.16	.10
Socially desirable responding	0.21**	.07	0.20**	.07
Control Variables on Feelings				
Age	0.05	.03	0.05	.03
Gender	-0.23*	.09	-0.22*	.09
Socially desirable responding	0.05	.06	0.04	.06
Control Variables on DV				
Age	0.03	.05	-0.11	.07
Gender	0.00	.14	-0.05	.17
Socially desirable responding	0.05	.09	0.01	.12

Note. Coefficients are unstandardized estimates; DV = Dependent Variable; SE = standard error; values in parentheses represent 95% confidence intervals for the estimate of indirect effects using bias-corrected bootstrap calculations based on 5,000 generated samples.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.