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### Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Adoptive Parents: Couple and Relationship Issues

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## Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Adoptive Parents: Couple and Relationship Issues

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*This study explored some dynamics of couples' relationships in 106 adoptive families headed by 29 gay, 27 lesbian, and 50 heterosexual couples with young children. Regardless of sexual orientation, most couples reported long-term relationships, secure attachments, and high relationship satisfaction. Parental sexual orientation was related to how often couples reported having sex. Lesbian couples reported having sex the least often, while gay couples reported having sex the most often. Sexual relationship satisfaction did not, however, differ as a function of parental sexual orientation. Overall relationship satisfaction was significantly correlated with sexual satisfaction, frequency of sexual relations, and greater attachment security. We discuss these results in context of earlier research on sexual orientation, parenting, and couple relationships.*

**KEYWORDS** *sexual orientation, adoptive couples, relationship satisfaction, sexual relationships, lesbian and gay*

The degree to which the romantic relationships of same-sex couples are similar to those of other-sex couples has been the subject of some

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discussion (e.g., Herek, 2006; Kurdek, 2005). Considerable research has compared same-sex and other-sex couples, some of which has focused on same-sex and other-sex couples who are parents (e.g., Henehan, Rothblum, Solomon, & Balsam, 2007; Kurdek, 2001). However, research regarding same-sex and other-sex couples who became parents by adopting children is lacking.

From earlier research, it is clear that gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adults are all likely to form deep emotional bonds with their romantic partners (Herek, 2006; Kurdek, 2001, 2005; Mackey, Diemer, & O'Brien, 2000; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Gay and lesbian couples appear to be as capable as heterosexual couples in maintaining long-term, committed relationships. Many gay and lesbian couples have been together a decade or longer. Enduring romantic relationships between gay and lesbian adults may be particularly common among older adults (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Bryant & Demian, 1994; Herek, 2006; Kurdek, 1995, 2004; Peplau & Spalding, 2000).

On average, gay and lesbian couples are satisfied in their romantic relationships (Kurdek, 2005), and they report levels of relationship satisfaction that are comparable to those of heterosexual couples. Regardless of sexual orientation, the same factors predict relationship satisfaction for all couples (Duffy & Rusbult, 1986; Gottman et al., 2003; Herek, 2006; Kurdek, 2001, 2004, 2005; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986a,b; Mackey et al., 2000; Peplau & Beals, 2004; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Peplau, Pedasky, & Hamilton, 1982). Even after controlling for age, education level, income, race, and years cohabiting, no significant differences in relationship satisfaction have been found among diverse samples of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples (Kurdek, 1998; Peplau, Cochran, & Mays, 1997). As is true for heterosexual couples, relationship satisfaction among gay and lesbian couples gradually decreases over time. For all couples, greater relationship dissatisfaction is related to a greater likelihood of relationship dissolution (Kurdek, 1998, 2004).

Sexual relationship satisfaction has also been found to be comparable among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples. In their sample of more than 12,000 couples, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that sexual satisfaction was similar between same-sex and other-sex cohabiting and married couples. For both the same-sex and other-sex couples, frequency of sexual activity was positively related to sexual relationship satisfaction. Previous research has indicated that frequency of sexual relations and sexual relationship satisfaction may be particularly important to gay men's overall relationship satisfaction (Coleman, Brian, Rosser, & Strapko, 1992; Meyer, 2003). In general, gay men have reported the greatest frequencies of sexual relations with their primary partner, while lesbian women have reported the lowest frequencies (e.g., Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Heterosexual adults have reported intermediate frequencies (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Peplau, 1991; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Rosenzweig & Lebow, 1992; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2005). In Blumstein and Schwartz's (1983) study, 46% of gay male

couples reported “having sexual relations” at least three times a week. Only 35% of heterosexual couples and 20% of lesbian couples reported “having sexual relations” this often. However, in one study that included a more racially diverse sample, African American gay and lesbian couples did not differ in how often they reported “having sex” (Peplau et al., 1997).

Assessments of sexual activity between gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples have been critiqued. Loulan (1988), McCormick (1994), and others have argued that gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adults may have different conceptions of what constitutes “having sex,” such that questions regarding sexual relationships may be answered differently by these three types of couples.

While some research has explored the relationship dynamics of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples, little research has addressed the intimate relationships of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples who are parents (e.g., Kurdek, 2001). Some researchers have addressed the close relationships of lesbian adoptive parenting couples (e.g., Goldberg & Smith, 2008). To the best of our knowledge, however, there is no research specifically addressing couple relationship dynamics among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adoptive parenting couples simultaneously. Some work has examined relationship dynamics of heterosexual adoptive couples (e.g., Borders, Black, & Pasley, 1998; Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988; Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003; Santona & Zavattini, 2005; Ward, 1998), but not in comparison with gay and lesbian adoptive couples.

From research with heterosexual adoptive parents, we know that adoptive parents demonstrate similar, or sometimes more favorable, psychological adjustment than do other parents (Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988; Hoopes, 1982; Levy-Shiff, Bar, & Har-Even, 1990; Plomin & DeFries, 1985). Adoptive parents are often older than other parents (Berry, Barth, & Needell, 1996; Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988). Couples who adopt are also likely to have been married or in their romantic relationship for a number of years prior to undertaking an adoption (Farber, Timberlake, Mudd, & Cullen, 2003; Groza & Rosenberg, 1998; Hollingsworth, 2000; Levy-Shiff et al., 1990). Adoptive parents have all been screened by adoption agencies and determined to be healthy and fit prospective parents (Hartman & Laird, 1990; Leon, 2002; Levy-Shiff et al., 1990; Westman, 1994). Thus, it is not surprising that most seem to be capable parents. Previous research has also suggested that adoptive parents are likely to report having a secure attachment relationship with their partner or spouse (Santona & Zavattini, 2005).

The current study seeks to address the question of how the romantic relationships of gay and lesbian adoptive couples are similar to or different from those of heterosexual adoptive couples. Based on earlier research, we expected that couples would be similar with regard to (1) relationship length, (2) attachment style, (3) overall relationship satisfaction, and (4) sexual relationship satisfaction. We expected that couples would have been

together for a number of years, and that most parents would report having a secure attachment relationship with their partner or spouse. Overall, we expected couples to be in generally healthy and functional relationships and have relatively high relationship satisfaction. In addition, we expected several associations among the variables of interest. We expected that, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, having a secure attachment style and higher sexual relationship satisfaction would be related to higher overall relationship satisfaction (e.g., Coleman et al., 1992).

We did, however, expect differences among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adoptive couples in terms of (1) frequency of sexual activity and (2) the relative importance of frequency of sexual activity to sexual satisfaction and overall relationship satisfaction. Based on earlier research, we expected gay couples to report the greatest frequency of sexual relations, and lesbian couples the least (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Peplau, 1991; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Rosenzweig & Lebow, 1992; Solomon et al., 2005). We expected sexual and overall relationship satisfaction to be associated with frequency of sexual activity for all couples, with these associations being strongest among gay adoptive couples.

All couples in our study were adoptive parents of young children. For this reason, we expected them to report fewer opportunities for intimacy than at earlier stages of their relationship (Cowan & Cowan, 1988; LaRossa, 1986; Osofsky & Culp, 1989). We therefore expected that couples would report lower recent sexual satisfaction than over the course of the couples' entire relationship. In agreement with previous research, we expected longer relationship length to be associated with lower sexual satisfaction, less frequent sexual activity, and lower overall relationship satisfaction (Kurdek, 1998; Peplau, 1991; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). In sum, we expected that gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adoptive couples would be similar in most ways, but that a few differences among couple types might also emerge.

## METHOD

### Participants

Adoptive families were recruited through several adoption agencies in the United States. Using the agencies' domestic adoption records, all two-parent families were identified who lived in the same household with an adopted child between one and five years of age and in a jurisdiction where joint adoptions are legally recognized for both same-sex and other-sex couples. Our primary cooperating agency, in the Mid-Atlantic United States, identified 44 same-sex couples (including 23 female and 21 male same-sex couples) and 73 other-sex couples who were eligible, and all were invited to participate. Families were contacted by letters, e-mails, and/or phone calls, depending upon the information available in agency files.

Sixty-three families (33 same-sex couples; 30 other-sex couples) who completed a domestic adoption with the cooperating agency agreed to participate. Thus, we attained response rates of 75% for same-sex couples and 41% for other-sex couples. Families headed by same-sex couples were more likely to agree to participate than were families headed by other-sex couples,  $\chi^2(1, n = 44) = 12.70, p < .001$ . The most common reason parents gave for non-participation was lack of time.

As a result of recruiting families from four other adoption agencies in the Northeast, the South, and the West Coast of the United States, 43 additional families (12 gay-parented, 11 lesbian-parented, and 20 heterosexual-parented) agreed to participate. The adoptive families contacted the researcher directly after receiving an e-mail or letter inviting participation. Due to concerns about confidentiality, the number of families who were eligible to participate could not be disclosed by these agencies, so participation rates cannot be calculated for this subsample.

The final sample consisted of 106 families with a total of 212 parents. Participation was entirely voluntary and the researcher obtained written consent from all participating parents. The study was approved by the University of Virginia Institutional Review Board.

Table 1 provides demographic characteristics of participating families. There were 56 same-sex parented families, including 29 male couples and 27 female couples, and 50 other-sex parented families. Parents averaged 42 years of age and children averaged 3 years of age. Eighty percent of parents were white, 17% were African American, and 3% were Latino, Asian American, or Multiethnic/Biracial. Parents were generally well-educated. Most worked full-time and earned family incomes above national averages (see Table 1). The sample was comprised of 86% same-race couples and 14%

**TABLE 1** Demographic Information about Families Headed by Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Parents

	Lesbian Mothers ( <i>n</i> = 54)	Gay Fathers ( <i>n</i> = 58)	Heterosexual Parents ( <i>n</i> = 100)	ANOVA <i>F</i> (1, 210) or $\chi^2$ Test	<i>p</i> value
Age (in years)	43 (5)	41 (5)	42 (6)	<i>F</i> = 2.78	<i>ns</i>
Race (% white)	80%	86%	78%	$\chi^2 < 1$	<i>ns</i>
Education (% college degree)	94%	89%	85%	<i>F</i> = 1.34	<i>ns</i>
Work status (% full-time)	72%	81%	77%	$\chi^2 < 1$	<i>ns</i>
Annual family income (\$K)	168 (77)	190 (130)	150 (89)	<i>F</i> = 1.34	<i>ns</i>
Length of couples' relationship (in years)	13 (5)	13 (6)	14 (5)	<i>F</i> < 1	<i>ns</i>
Interracial relationship	11%	28%	8%	$\chi^2 = 12.14$	< .01**
One child in household	63%	62%	50%	$\chi^2 = 1.69$	<i>ns</i>
Transracial adoption	48%	55%	30%	$\chi^2 = 13.27$	< .001***

Note: Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

\*\* *p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001.

interracial couples. About half of the sample was drawn from the East Coast. Most families lived in Maryland or the District of Columbia ( $n = 56$ ), but some lived in New York ( $n = 7$ ), another Northeastern state ( $n = 4$ ), or a Southern state ( $n = 7$ ). About one-third of the sample was drawn from the West Coast, with some living in Washington ( $n = 6$ ), Oregon ( $n = 8$ ), and California ( $n = 18$ ). The majority of adoptive families had one child living in their household. All parents in our sample were the legal parents of their adopted children.

Gay, lesbian, and heterosexual parents and their adopted children were demographically similar, and were generally well-matched. No parents in the sample were biologically related to their adopted child, and all intentionally became adoptive parents. We have reported demographic similarities and differences as a function of parental sexual orientation elsewhere (Farr & Patterson, 2009).

## Materials

All parents completed three self-report measures related to attachment, their relationship satisfaction, and their sexual relationship with their partner or spouse.

### PARENTAL ATTACHMENT STYLE

The Adult Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) is a brief, combined forced choice and Likert rating measure for attachment style with a romantic partner. In the AAQ, participants are presented with three descriptions of romantic relationships, each one representative of secure, preoccupied, or dismissing relational styles. Participants are asked first to rate how characteristic each of three descriptions of romantic relationships are of their own romantic relationship on a 5-point scale (“very uncharacteristic of me” to “very characteristic of me”) resulting in continuous scale ratings of attachment style. Participants are then asked to select which description best fits their own romantic relationship. Categorical attachment classification (i.e., “Secure,” “Insecure-Avoidant,” or “Insecure-Anxious/Ambivalent”) is based on the description endorsed by the subject.

### PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) is an instrument designed to measure satisfaction, consensus, cohesion, and affection within one’s current romantic relationship. The 10-item satisfaction subscale was used to assess couples’ relationship satisfaction. Items are scored on a 0 (“Never”) to

5 (“All the time”) scale, with higher numbers indicating greater satisfaction. An example item is, “In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?” A sum of the 10 items is calculated for the relationship satisfaction score. Spanier (1976) found the average score for enduring relationships among a large sample of married couples ( $n = 218$ ) to be 40.5 with a standard deviation of 7.2. For relationships that eventually ended, Spanier (1976) found the average relationship satisfaction to be 22.2 with a standard deviation of 10.3.

#### PARENTS’ SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIP LONGEVITY

Participants were asked several questions regarding their sexual and relationship history, as well as about their sexual relationship with their primary partner. Items regarding sexual orientation and identity were adapted from Forsell (2004), Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948), and Wagner, Remien, and Carballo-Dieguez (2000). Participants designated who they were primarily attracted to, ranging from “same-sex only” to “opposite-sex only” with several intermediate selections. Participants also reported how they primarily identified their sexual orientation, from “Gay/Homosexual,” “Lesbian/Homosexual,” “Bisexual,” or “Heterosexual.” Lastly, questions regarding sexual satisfaction were Likert-style ratings from “Completely Dissatisfied” to “Completely Satisfied” that were adapted from the Reynolds Brief Sexual Functioning Scale (Reynolds, Frank, These, Houck, & Jennings, 1988).

#### Procedure

All eligible adoptive families were initially contacted with a letter or e-mail from the director of the cooperating adoption agency that described the study and invited participation. Follow-up telephone calls were made by a researcher and provided an opportunity for the researcher to describe the study further and to request participation.

After families agreed to participate, a researcher scheduled a visit to participating families’ homes. During this visit, parents completed a number of questionnaires regarding their relationship as a couple, and families participated in other activities, not relevant to this report. Participation was completely voluntary, and no financial incentives were offered.

## RESULTS

First we report results regarding several dynamics of adoptive parents’ relationships with their partners or spouses as a function of parental sexual orientation and gender. Next we report associations among the relationship



**TABLE 2** Assessments of Relationship Dynamics among Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Couples

	Lesbian Mothers ( <i>n</i> = 54)	Gay Fathers ( <i>n</i> = 58)	Heterosexual Parents ( <i>n</i> = 100)	ANOVA <i>F</i> (1, 210)	<i>p</i> value
Frequency of sexual relations	1.24	2.09	1.75	22.88	.01**
Sexual satisfaction (recent)	3.85	4.79	4.34	3.37	.05*
Sexual satisfaction (overall)	4.26	5.07	4.89	3.01	<i>ns</i> <sup>†</sup>
Relationship satisfaction	39.08	40.62	40.57	2.12	<i>ns</i>

Note: Frequency of sex was assessed using the Sexual Relationships Scale, ranging from “once a month or less” (a score of 1) to “one to six times per week” (a score of 3). Sexual relationship satisfaction was assessed both recently (in the past month) and overall (during the course of the entire relationship) using the Sexual Relationships Scale. Relationship satisfaction was assessed using a subscale of Spanier’s (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

<sup>†</sup>.05 < *p* < .10, \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .001.

variables of interest for our sample of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adoptive couples.

We used chi-square tests (for categorical data) and ANOVAs (for continuous data) to investigate whether there were significant differences as a function of couple type. Regardless of sexual orientation or gender, couples were similar to one another in several ways. Parents had been with their partners or spouses an average of 13 years, and the length of these relationships did not differ as a function of parental sexual orientation (see Table 1). There were no significant differences in attachment security among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples. Most reported being securely attached to their primary partner (91% for lesbian couples and 88% for both gay and heterosexual couples,  $\chi^2[1, n = 54] = .31, ns$ ). All parents reported experiencing relatively high relationship and sexual satisfaction with their partners or spouses, and there were no significant differences in this regard among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples (see Table 2).

In other ways, the couples in our sample differed from one another as a function of sexual orientation and gender. As expected, gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples were significantly different from one another in their reports of their frequency of sexual activity (see Table 2). Although there was considerable variation, lesbian couples reported having sex the least often (on average, about “once a month or less”). Heterosexual couples reported an intermediate frequency (on average, almost “two to three times a month”). Gay male couples reported the highest frequency of sex (on average, more than “two to three times a month”).

Even though gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adoptive parents reported different frequencies of sexual activity with their partners, having sex more often was positively related to overall sexual satisfaction and to overall relationship satisfaction for all couples (see Table 3). This association between frequency of sex and relationship satisfaction was significant for all couple

**TABLE 3** Correlations among Variables of Couples' Relationship Dynamics ( $n = 106$  couples)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Relationship length	—	.05	.07	.00	-.06
2. Overall relationship satisfaction		—	.36***	.41***	.29***
3. Attachment security			—	.36***	.13 <sup>†</sup>
4. Overall sexual satisfaction				—	.55***
5. Frequency of sex					—

<sup>†</sup>.05 <  $p$  < .10, \*\*\* $p$  < .001.

types, but was greatest for gay men, and smallest for lesbian women (see Table 4). Also as expected, all parents, on average, reported lower sexual satisfaction recently (i.e., in the past month) than sexual satisfaction overall with their partners (see Table 2). There were no significant differences in this regard among couple types.

As expected, we found that overall relationship satisfaction was significantly related to attachment style for all couples. Higher relationship satisfaction was linked with having a secure attachment style. However, contrary to our expectations, there were no significant associations between length of relationship and relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, or frequency of sexual relations among gay, lesbian, or heterosexual adoptive couples (see Table 3).

## DISCUSSION

Consistent with the findings of previous research with gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples, we found that relationship dynamics of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples who have adopted children were strikingly similar

**TABLE 4** Correlations among Variables as a Function of Parental Sexual Orientation

Variable	1	2	3
Lesbian Mothers ( $n = 54$ )			
1. Frequency of sex	—	.39***	.29*
2. Sexual satisfaction		—	.52***
3. Relationship satisfaction			—
Gay Fathers ( $n = 58$ )			
1. Frequency of sex	—	.78***	.34**
2. Sexual satisfaction		—	.44**
3. Relationship satisfaction			—
Heterosexual Parents ( $n = 100$ )			
1. Frequency of sex	—	.47***	.21*
2. Sexual satisfaction		—	.29**
3. Relationship satisfaction			—

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

overall. Prior research with gay and lesbian couples has focused mainly on childless couples, so our results are new in suggesting ways that same-sex parenting couples are similar to other-sex parenting couples. The gay, lesbian, and heterosexual parenting couples in our sample did not differ from one another in terms of the length of their relationships, attachment styles, sexual relationship satisfaction, or overall relationship satisfaction. All types of couples regarded the frequency of their sexual relations as important to their satisfaction with their sexual relationships and with their relationships overall. However, gay, lesbian, and heterosexual adoptive couples differed from one another in their reports of how frequently they engaged in sexual relations. In some ways, adoptive couples, regardless of sexual orientation or gender, appear to be similar to other couples. However, contrary to earlier findings, several characteristics of these adoptive couples' relationships appear to be distinctive.

Regardless of sexual orientation or gender, the vast majority of adoptive couples in our sample had been in a romantic relationship for many years, were relatively satisfied in their relationships, and were securely attached to each other. Adoptive parents in our sample reported higher than average rates of secure attachment with their primary partner (89%). In contrast, Van IJzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg (1996) reported that only 55% of mothers and 62% of fathers were securely attached to their romantic partners in a large, non-clinical sample of heterosexual parents. However, our results are more similar to those of Santona and Zavattini (2005), who found that among their sample of adoptive parents, 76% demonstrated a secure attachment style. Overall, the parents who participated in our research reported high levels of secure attachment to their partners.

Regarding couples' frequency of sexual activity, our results mirrored those of Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), Peplau (1991), Rosenzweig and Lebow (1992), and Solomon and colleagues (2005). Lesbian adoptive mothers reported having sex least often, and gay adoptive fathers reported having sex most often, with heterosexual couples falling in between. Regardless of parental sexual orientation, however, frequency of sexual relations was positively related to sexual relationship satisfaction and overall relationship satisfaction. As reported in earlier research (e.g., Coleman et al., 1992), frequency of sexual activity was particularly important to gay adoptive fathers in terms of their sexual and relationship satisfaction. In contrast, frequency of sexual activity was the least important to lesbian adoptive mothers in relation to their sexual and relationship satisfaction.

Contrary to our expectations, we found no significant associations between the length of time couples had been together and levels of relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, or frequency of sexual activity. While decreased relationship quality over time has been found to be a common trend for all couples in long-term relationships (e.g., Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Hackel & Ruble, 1992; Kurdek, 2004, 1998; LaRossa, 1986; MacDermid, Huston,

& McHale, 1990; Osofsky & Culp, 1989), adoptive couples who have recently become parents may be an exception. The couples in our sample had been together for many years, but had only recently become adoptive parents. For these couples, it may have required enormous effort to become parents. While the official process of adopting a child takes an average of 9 to 24 months, couples who eventually adopt often initiate planning to become parents a number of years before beginning the formal adoption process (Farber et al., 2003; Groza & Rosenberg, 1998; Levy-Shiff et al., 1990). As a result of the deep satisfaction derived from finally becoming parents, couples who adopt might be buffered from decreases in relationship satisfaction that are typical of other couples in long-term relationships (Daniluk & Hurtig-Mitchell, 2003; Levy-Shiff et al., 1990). Consistent with this view, Humphrey and Kirkwood (1982) found that the marital satisfaction of adoptive parents remains high across the transition to parenthood. Furthermore, becoming adoptive parents may even serve to bolster couples' relationship satisfaction in their newfound identity as parents (Bartholet, 1993; Borders et al., 1998).

The adoptive gay, lesbian, and heterosexual parents in our sample generally reported feeling quite satisfied with their romantic relationships. All parents reported feeling more satisfied overall than in recent months with their sexual relationships with partners or spouses. This finding may stem from the fact that these couples are all parenting young children, and therefore have less time for physical intimacy than they did before they became parents (Cowan & Cowan, 1988; LaRossa, 1986; Osofsky & Culp, 1989).

The current study has several strengths. This is the first study, to our knowledge, that has included comparisons of relationship dynamics of gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples who have adopted children. The adoption of children by gay and lesbian adults has been a controversial issue, and more information about adoptive families headed by gay and lesbian parents is needed. In addition, there is much less research on the transition to parenthood for gay and lesbian couples as compared to their heterosexual counterparts (e.g., Goldberg & Sayer, 2006; Goldberg & Smith, 2008). Little research exists on gay male couples who are parents. Thus, our research also contributes to the growing knowledge base about gay fathers. Overall, our findings are in some ways consistent with earlier research about gay and lesbian couples, but our results also highlight specific characteristics of couples who adopt children. The current study is the first to demonstrate that although there are a few differences among gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples who adopt children, there are many more similarities. Many issues that face first-time parents are unrelated to parental sexual orientation.

Despite its strengths, this study also has some limitations. For instance, the data are entirely cross-sectional in nature. More information about couples' relationship dynamics could be derived from a longitudinal study design. Because we have no information about couple relationships prior to becoming parents, we cannot ascertain the specific impact of adopting

children on the couples' relationship. For example, it is not clear whether couples' levels of sexual or relationship satisfaction have changed during the adoption process. Longitudinal research could address such questions.

In sum, gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples who have adopted children were similar to one another in many respects. These adoptive parents were relatively happy in their relationships with their spouses or partners and reported high rates of secure attachment to them. The few differences that distinguished gay fathers, lesbian mothers, and heterosexual parents from one another, such as differing frequencies of sexual activity, were unrelated to couples' attachment security and overall relationship satisfaction. Our results point to the contributions of parental sexual orientation and gender to the relationship dynamics of adoptive parenting couples.

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