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EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Microaggressions, Feelings of Difference, and Resilience Among Adopted Children with Sexual Minority Parents

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Abstract Limited research exists about the unique experiences and possible marginalization of children with sexual minority parents. From a larger longitudinal project of diverse adoptive families, we examined cross-sectional data using mixed methods from interviews with 49 adopted children ($M_{age} = 8$ years; 47 % female) in 27 two-father and 22 two-mother families. Using thematic analysis, we coded themes of awareness of difference, microaggressions, and resilience (i.e., coping and positive family conceptualizations). Children experienced "feeling different" and microaggressions from peers, but generally at a low to medium intensity and with neutral (not negative) emotion. More instances of resilience and positive family conceptualizations were reported than microaggressions or feelings of difference, suggesting that children develop positive perceptions of their family and navigate experiences of difference with resilience. Filling important gaps in the literature, we discuss implications of our results for practice and policy.

Keywords Lesbian and gay parents · Children · Microaggressions · Adoption · Resilience

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Introduction

In recent decades, the number of sexual minority parents (i.e., non-heterosexual parents) openly raising children in the United States has increased (e.g., Gates 2013). The 2013 National Health Interview Survey suggested that there are around 131,000 same-sex couples raising approximately 200,000 children in the United States (Gates 2014). Additionally, same-sex couples are four times more likely to be raising adopted children than are heterosexual couples (Gates 2013). Meanwhile, despite growing visibility of sexual minority parent families, the adoption of children by lesbian and gay adults remains controversial. Many lesbian and gay adults report facing discrimination when trying to adopt a child, despite policy changes that are increasingly welcoming (Goldberg and Smith 2011). As political and cultural climates concerning the rights of sexual minorities shift, research about the development of children with sexual minority parents has continued to be important. Of interest in our study is whether children adopted by sexual minority parents experience feelings of difference and discrimination, including subtle slights known as microaggressions (Sue et al. 2007). Moreover, we used a strengths-based approach in examining children's resilience through evidence of their positive conceptualizations of family and possible coping strategies.

Microaggressions

Herek et al. (2009, p. 33) described the term "sexual stigma" to refer broadly "to the negative regard, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords anyone associated with nonheterosexual behaviors, identity, relationships, or communities". Related to sexual stigma is heterosexism, defined as a "process that

systematically privileges heterosexuality relative to homosexuality, based on the assumption that heterosexuality, as well as heterosexual power and privilege are the norm and the ideal" (Chesir-Teran 2003, p. 267). According to Herek and colleagues' framework, overt experiences of sexual stigma are characterized as "enacted sexual stigma" while expectations about the likelihood of experiencing stigma are called "felt stigma", and finally, self-directed prejudice (i.e., internalized homophobia) is termed "self-stigma" (Herek et al. 2009, p. 33). Enacted sexual stigma that is more subtle or covert may be aptly described using a microaggressions framework. Microaggressions are defined as the subtle ways in which others oppress individuals of marginalized groups (Sue et al. 2007), including non-heterosexual persons. Microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities", and whether intentional or not, these slights communicate negativity and hostility (Sue et al. 2007, p. 273). Sexual minority youth and adults are often microaggressed in the form of heterosexist comments, such as hearing the popular expression "that's so gay" (Nadal 2013; Nadal et al. 2011; Woodford et al. 2013).

The term microaggression was coined in the late 1970s in research about discrimination against African American individuals (Pierce et al. 1977). Microaggressions have been organized into three different categories based on severity: microinvalidations, microinsults, and microassaults (Sue 2010). Microinvalidations are communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the experiences/thoughts/feelings of a marginalized group. Microinsults are defined as verbal, non-verbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey insensitivity and rudeness that demeans another individual based on their minority status. Finally, microassaults are the most overt of the three categories and refer to conscious and intentional acts of name-calling, avoidance, or other derogatory behaviors toward a marginalized group (Nadal et al. 2011; Sue 2010). To date, the majority of microaggression research has focused on racial/ethnic minority experiences, with more research with college and adult populations than with adolescent or younger children (e.g., Huynh 2012; Sue et al. 2007). More recently, researchers have begun to examine the ways in which other minority groups are microaggressed during adolescence, such as among sexual minority youth (Nadal et al. 2011), religious minority adolescents (Dupper et al. 2015), and adopted teenagers (e.g., Garber and Grotevant 2015).

Although there is a growing literature about the experiences of microaggressions among sexual minority individuals, few studies have examined the microaggression experiences of children adopted by sexual minority parents. Nonetheless, some studies have examined the ways in which microaggressions are experienced within adoptive families headed by heterosexual parents. As bio-normative values (i.e., cultural emphases on the superiority of biological relationships) and stereotypical narratives surrounding the experience of adoptees and their families are common in the US, Garber and Grotevant (2015) conducted one the first examinations of adopted children's experiences with microaggressions. Through thematic analyses, 15 common themes of microaggressions experienced by adoptees were identified. Comments like, "who are your *real* parents?", or the assumption that adoptees must have been "crack babies" are examples of microaggressions reported (Garber and Grotevant 2015, p. 14, p. 16). Garber and Grotevant's conceptual framework and methodology provide a framework for our study, as we also examined the experiences of adoptees, extending this exploration to adoptive families with same-sex parents. Given the increased empirical attention to microaggressions among different minority groups, it is important to understand how adopted children with sexual minority parents may experience discrimination on the basis of their parents' sexual orientation.

Some research has attended to overt stigma or discrimination experienced by children with same-sex parents. Kosciw and Diaz (2008) examined experiences of a national sample of children in grades K-12 in the US with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) parents. Their results showed that 23 % of these children reported feeling unsafe in school because of their family constellation (i.e., having LGBT parents) and 40 % reported being harassed in school because of their family. Some students with LGBT parents also reported harassment due to their peers' assumptions or perceptions about the students' sexual orientation. Moreover, 23 % encountered mistreatment and negative remarks by their peers' *parents* as a result of having LGBT parents. Although this study revealed that children experienced challenges based on their family make-up, the majority with LGBT parents did not report victimization or excess mistreatment (Kosciw and Diaz 2008). Other studies have revealed somewhat contrasting findings. In the United Kingdom, Tasker and Golombok (1995) found that young adults from lesbian parent families ($n = 25$) were no more likely to remember being teased or bullied because of their mothers' sexual orientation as compared with young adults from heterosexual parent families ($n = 21$). In another study conducted in the UK, a school-based survey was administered to approximately 2000 7–9th graders in 14 different schools; results showed that children with same-sex parents ($n = 21$) did not report significant differences in peer victimization as compared with their classmates with opposite-sex parents (Rivers et al. 2008). Likewise, using a nationally representative sample in the US, Wainright and

Patterson (2006, 2008) found no differences in victimization or peer relationship quality reported by adolescents with female same-sex parents ($n = 44$) and a demographically matched group of adolescents with heterosexual parents ($n = 44$).

Studies about stigmatization specifically targeting the experiences of preadolescent children with sexual minority parents have also been conducted. Among a sample of 8- to 12-year-old children ($N = 63$) with lesbian mothers in the Netherlands, Bos and van Balen (2008) found generally low levels of reported stigmatization. However, daughters with lesbian mothers felt that their peers gossiped about their families while sons with two mothers more often felt excluded by peers on the basis of their family structure. In the US, among a sample of 78 lesbian-mother families with 10-year-old children, 43 % of children reported experiencing homophobia (e.g., "Did other kids ever say mean things to you about your mom(s) being a lesbian?") and 69 % of these children felt negatively about these experiences (Bos et al. 2008, p. 459; Gartrell et al. 2005).

The ways in which children with sexual minority parents respond to potentially hostile situations has also gained recent empirical attention. Van Gelderen et al. (2012) investigated experiences regarding stigma and coping strategies of US adolescents in planned lesbian families. The study revealed that one half of the 78 participating youth reported experiencing homophobic stigmatization, primarily in school and among peers. Importantly, adolescents described using a number of adaptive strategies, such as optimism, seeking support, and confrontation to cope with stigmatization. Adolescents used adaptive strategies significantly more often than maladaptive ones, such as avoidance and depression. The type of adaptive strategy selected varied across age; younger children tended to use social support, whereas older children were more likely to use confrontational coping strategies (van Gelderen et al. 2012). Gershon et al. (1999) interviewed 11- to 18-year-old children ($N = 78$) with lesbian mothers about their experiences with sexual stigma and related coping mechanisms; they discovered stigma and self-esteem were significantly associated and moderated by coping skills (e.g., disclosure).

In sum, it appears that children with sexual minority parents do contend with experiences of sexual stigma and discrimination, even if relatively minor (i.e., not considered as more overt victimization), and children appear to employ various coping mechanisms to manage these experiences. No studies to our knowledge, however, have addressed more covert or subtle forms of discrimination using a microaggressions framework among children adopted by sexual minority parents, and few have examined these topics among preadolescent children.

Feelings of Difference, Family Conceptualizations, and Resilience

Most research with children of sexual minority parents has focused on outcomes, such as behavioral or psychological adjustment (e.g., Bos and van Balen 2008; Bos et al. 2008; Farr et al. 2010; Golombok et al. 2013; Wainright and Patterson 2006); fewer studies have addressed the day-to-day experiences of children with LGB parents, including microaggressions, feelings of difference, family conceptualizations, and resilience. In the adoption literature, feelings of difference among adopted children have been directly examined (e.g., Grotevant 1997). Being keenly aware of how one differs from the dominant group is a defining feature of the experiences of many individuals from marginalized groups, such as those defined by race/ethnicity, ability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and adoption. Research suggests that, as adopted children come to understand and reconcile their adoption, adoptees may feel particularly different from their adoptive family. This feeling of difference among adoptees can also extend into feeling different in other domains, including ethnicity, physical appearance, abilities and talents, and so on (Grotevant 1997). Moreover, other people (e.g., peers) may single out ways that adoptees are different, which further stigmatizes the adoptee as part of a marginalized group. Often, one's ability to acknowledge difference in one's self, or as part of an affiliated minority group, is a result of experiencing oppressive behavior and existing societal norms (Grotevant 1997). For these reasons, we investigated awareness and feelings of difference among young children adopted by sexual minority parents in conjunction with using a microaggressions framework.

Resilience has been defined as "good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (Masten 2001, p. 228) and characteristics linked with positive adjustment include abilities in enacting coping mechanisms and regulating emotion (van Gelderen et al. 2009). Despite potential adversity, children of sexual minority parents appear to be resilient on the whole—they adjust and develop in healthy ways across a variety of outcome measures, with few significant differences as compared to children of heterosexual parents (Golombok et al. 2013; van Gelderen et al. 2009). Moreover, research suggests that children with lesbian and gay parents generally experience adequate levels of social support from family and friends and often develop unique and sophisticated coping strategies to combat sexual stigma (Bozett 1987; Gershon et al. 1999; Kuvalanka et al. 2014; Leddy et al. 2012). While some research has examined young children's conceptualizations of family among those with two mothers (Tasker and Granville 2011), there are few studies surrounding awareness of differences among young children with

sexual minority parents. In one study of 38 5- to 9-year-old children with lesbian mothers, 95 % of children demonstrated awareness of their mothers' sexual orientation (Stevens et al. 2003). Some studies of older children and young adults reared by sexual minority parents have intentionally examined participants' feelings of difference and positive family conceptualizations (e.g., Gartrell et al. 2012; Goldberg 2007a, b; Leddy et al. 2012; Welsh 2011). In this study, we sought to extend the concept of resilience by focusing on young children's positive feelings about their families and examining the coping strategies they use to manage any experiences of discrimination. This also extends the LGB literature by utilizing a strengths-based approach with a population that has been historically examined through a deficits-based lens (Vaughan and Rodriguez 2014).

Developmental Considerations

As this may represent the first study to specifically use a microaggressions framework with preadolescent children, it is important to consider the developmental context of school-age children, particularly their cognitive awareness and understanding of potentially discriminatory experiences, as well as having the language skills to articulate and describe these experiences in an interview setting. Middle childhood (i.e., between 6 and 12 years of age) is marked by significant gains in cognitive and socio-emotional development that solidify children's sense of identity (Eccles 1999). For example, advancements in logical thought and more sophisticated abilities in problem solving and perspective-taking (i.e., being able to hold in mind several solutions to a problem and understanding that others may have different viewpoints on an issue) emerge during middle childhood (Brodzinsky 2011). Beginning around age six, children develop the ability to reason more effectively (Eccles 1999) and their descriptions of themselves achieve greater stability and depth (Collins et al. 2002). They can more readily recall information that can be used in managing new situations or solving problems.

Socially, children compare themselves to peers more frequently in middle childhood, facilitating a sense of self-concept and individuality, a desire to be accepted by peers, and a greater attunement to the feelings of others (Eccles 1999). Peer relationships are increasingly important to children in middle childhood, especially as children have developed stronger skills in initiating and maintaining friendships, as well as managing conflict (Collins et al. 2002).

School-age children also come to more complex understandings about how families may be described and defined, including adoptive parenthood. For instance, after age six, adopted children have a more nuanced understanding of what adoption means (Brodzinsky 2011) and children can identify adoption and birth parenting as alternative pathways to becoming a family (Collins et al. 2002).

While microaggression experiences have not been specifically examined (to our knowledge) among preadolescent children, research has examined peer aggression, victimization, bullying, and teasing. Studies have demonstrated that children in middle childhood provide accurate and reliable reports about victimization experiences as compared with other informants. For example, in one study of peer aggression among children in second to fourth grade ($N = 392$; $M_{age} = 8.73$), self-reports about victimization experiences were as reliable as compared with parent, teacher, and peer reports (Ladd and Kochenderfer-Ladd 2002). Other research with children in middle childhood indicates their capacity to understand and articulate possible reasons that children may be teased or bullied (e.g., Visconti et al. 2013a, b).

Teasing is generally understood to be an aspect of bullying that can be more ambiguous in having both positive, or playful attributes, as well as more negative, or harmful characteristics (Harwood and Copfer 2015). In one qualitative study of 89 children from preschool to third grade (ages 5–9), children's responses to questions about defining teasing and describing teasing behaviors were coded by two primary coders and one other research assistant for consistency (Harwood and Copfer 2015). Results showed that teasing appears to be a common experience in early to middle childhood and young children tend to differentiate physical (bullying) and emotional (teasing) harm. Even with children as young as in Kindergarten to second grade, perceptions of teasing have been demonstrated using conversational interview and drawing techniques (e.g., Harwood et al. 2010). Specifically among adopted children ($M_{age} = 8.6$; $N = 43$), Neil (2012) found that over half reported in qualitative interviews that they had been teased by or experienced uncomfortable questions from their peers about being adopted. Finally, while relatively scant, some research supports the existence of heterosexist and homophobic commentary within primary school classrooms (e.g., among 10- and 11-year-old children; Renold 2002).

Thus, extant findings suggest that children in middle childhood are capable of reporting experiences of victimization and marginalization, including those that may be more subtle. Qualitative methods have appeared useful in understanding young children's experiences with teasing, including teasing based on adoption status or heteronormative ideals. Given that children were in middle childhood in our study, we expected that they would be able to describe feelings about their own self-concept, how they conceive of their families, and how they manage possible experiences of teasing with their peers.

The Present Study: Aims, Research Questions, and Hypotheses

The goal of this study was to contribute to the literature about the experiences of adopted children with sexual minority parents. As we focused on children in middle childhood, we realized that some children in this age range might be too young to identify or report about experiences of discrimination directly. Thus, in efforts to capture a comprehensive picture of children's experiences, we also examined children's feelings of difference. As a way to assess evidence of resilience, we examined children's positive conceptualizations of family and possible coping strategies. We sought to assess children's resilience in order to conduct this research from a strength-based perspective. Given the long history of LGB and adoption research using a deficits framework, we aimed to contribute affirmative research about sexual minority adoptive families (Vaughan and Rodriguez 2014).

Using thematic analysis of children's interviews in this mixed method study (involving both qualitative and quantitative data), we addressed three sets of research questions surrounding feelings of difference, microaggressions, and resilience. First, are children aware of differences in their families, particularly on the basis of having sexual minority parents? Do these children report feeling different from peers on this basis? Second, do adopted children with sexual minority parents experience microaggressions on the basis of the parents' sexual orientation? If microaggressions are reported, how are the experiences described (i.e., what are children's emotional reactions)? Who is initiating the microaggressions? How frequently do they occur? And what is the intensity of the offense? Third, do children talk about their difference or experiences of discrimination from a place of resilience (e.g., do they describe positive feelings about having two mothers or two fathers)? Do they identify any specific coping skills or strategies for handling microaggressions?

We hypothesized that children with sexual minority parents would generally be aware of difference in regards to having families with two mothers or fathers. Based on previous research, we expected children would report experiencing microaggressions initiated by their peers in low or moderate intensity (e.g., Garber and Grotevant 2015; Kosciw and Diaz 2008). However, we expected that awareness of difference and reported microaggressions would vary across children's ages. We expected that older children would report more instances of microaggressions and would articulate a broader range of feelings of difference with greater sophistication than would younger children (across children aged approximately 6–11 years). Research shows that adopted children experience and acknowledge various feelings of difference (Grotevant 1997), so we hypothesized that children in our sample would be able to articulate difference on the basis of having same-sex parents. Lastly, given previous research indicating that children with sexual minority parents develop typically over time, and even acquire unique and sophisticated coping strategies (Bozett 1987; Kuvalanka et al. 2014; Leddy et al. 2012), we expected that children would demonstrate resilience in the context of feeling different and/or experiencing microaggressions.

Methods

Participants

Participants included families from a larger longitudinal study, which examined adoptive family functioning, child development, parenting, and family relationships among families with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents (Farr et al. 2010). Participating families were originally recruited from five different adoption agencies throughout the United States. Children were domestically adopted during infancy, and the agencies provided options for openness in adoptions (i.e., communication or information sharing between the adoptive family and birth family). Adoption agencies were selected on the basis of several criteria: (1) agencies were located in a jurisdiction that allowed same-sex couples to legally adopt; (2) agencies worked openly with gay, lesbian, and heterosexual parent families; and (3) agencies had previously placed infants with lesbian and gay parents through domestic adoption.

In Wave 1, participants included 56 same-sex parent families (Farr et al. 2010). At the end of Wave 1 participation, families signed a Permission to Re-contact form. Approximately 5 years later, families from Wave 1 were contacted via email, phone, and Facebook and invited to participate in a second data collection wave. The sample for the present study from Wave 2 included 49 children from same-sex parent families (27 gay couples and 22 lesbian couples; 9 of these couples were no longer in a relationship at Wave 2). Children's ages ranged from 6 to 11 years ($M = 8.1$). Twenty-nine of the children were reported by parents as a minority race (i.e., Black/African American, Latino/a, Multiracial, etc.) and 25 of these children were transracially adopted (i.e., children who were adopted by at least one parent of a different race). For additional demographic information, see Table 1.

Materials and Procedure

At Wave 2, the first author visited participating families in their homes. Parents and children completed online

Table 1 Child demographic information

Demographic domains	Demographic data
1. Age	$M = 8.06$ (6, 11)
2. Family type	Lesbian: 22
	Gay: 27
3. Sex	F: 23
	M: 26
4. Race	White: 17
	Black/African American, Latino/a, multiracial: 32
5. Siblings	Yes: 29
	No: 20
6. Transracial adoption	Yes: 27
	No: 22
7. Geographic location	South: 5
	Northeast: 6
	Northwest: 6
	West Coast: 7
	Mid-Atlantic: 25
8. Two-parent household	Yes: 40
	No: 9

questionnaires (i.e., demographic questionnaire and various assessments of adjustment) and participated in separate interviews conducted by a researcher. Children's interviews lasted an average of 20–30 min. After informed consent was obtained from all individual parents in the study, children assented to participate in the research project. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Virginia, George Washington University, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Coding Interview Data

Videotaped, semi-structured child interviews were the primary source of data. Children were asked a series of questions (83 core questions with some probes—see "Appendix") inquiring about their family and adoption that were developed for the larger longitudinal project and adapted from other adoptive family studies (e.g., Grotevant et al. 2013). Trained research assistants transcribed the video interviews. Responses were globally coded from the entire interview transcripts, though 25 questions were particularly targeted for analysis because they elicited specific information about the child's experiences of having sexual minority parents, e.g., "Are there any things you particularly like/do not like about having two moms/-dads?" and "What do your parents tell you about the type of family that you have?" A portion of the interview questions also addressed awareness of difference, e.g., "How would you describe your family?" and "How is your family different from/the same as other families?" Several questions prompted information specifically related to microaggressions: "Have you ever been afraid to tell someone that you have two dads/moms?" and "Have you ever been bullied or treated unfairly?" Full interview transcripts and video files were analyzed (i.e., globally coded) for evidence of microaggressions, feelings of difference, and resilience and coping skills for managing experiences of discrimination on the basis of having same-sex parents. Other aspects of difference (e.g., adoption, race), while noted, were not the subject of analysis in this paper. Moreover, specific questions probing for information about coping strategies or skills were not directly asked of children as this information was not a primary focus of the larger longitudinal project. "Appendix" includes the full list of interview questions asked of children in this study.

Deductive thematic analysis, a method for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (e.g., Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 6), was used to code the qualitative interview data in this study with investigator triangulation, in which a diverse team helped to code and interpret the data (Bryman 2004). The research coding team (including three research assistant coders and the PI, the first author) provided a range of viewpoints that contributed to analyzing the data. For example, two of the four coding team members represent individuals within the sexual minority community, one has an adopted sibling, one has a gay sibling, and one is biracial. While each of these different identities may affect individual perspectives and interpretation of the data, these diverse worldviews also provided a more comprehensive examination of interview themes. A number of common themes emerged from the complete data set. These themes were identified, combined, or differentiated through a winnowing process (Wolcott 1990) until consensus was reached (Harwood and Copfer 2015).

During the first stage of data analysis, the three primary coders immersed themselves in the data by watching approximately one-third of all video interviews of children with sexual minority parents and reading the corresponding transcriptions (e.g., Braun and Clarke 2006). Collaboratively, the PI and coders began the unitizing process, i.e., establishing a comprehensive and thorough list of themes that appeared during the data immersion phase and ensuring that all members of the coding team were coding the same unit of data (Braun and Clarke 2006; Garber and Grotevant 2015). Two rounds of preliminary coding (5 transcripts per round; 10 total) were completed before coding the remaining interviews. These initial transcripts were chosen systematically, aiming to have an equal representation of interviews with female and male children,

some with lesbian mothers and some with gay fathers, as well as interviews with children of varying ages (from 6 to 11 years) and from different regions of the US.

After individual ratings were assigned, coders met to determine the final codes through consensus. After this initial review, a template was created as a guide for coding responses to the 25 target questions (e.g., Garber and Grotevant 2015). The template was evaluated and amended following each round of practice coding. Throughout the coding, an "Other" category was included for instances in which coders observed the emergence of additional themes. During discussion, one coder (the second author) posed as the moderator. The role of the moderator was to make an executive decision if there was disagreement. The moderator took detailed notes about any needed changes for establishing and refining the codebook and rating system. These coding notes provide evidence of the decision-making process during coding and offer documentation for others if needed to use the same method to replicate findings. The PI was present to monitor meetings for consistency and strong reliability was found across the thematic analysis (alpha levels reaching .80 or above). Krippendorff's alpha was used in reliability calculations, as this is an appropriate statistic for studies involving three or more individual coders, as well as for use with small or large sample sizes (Krippendorff 2004). The average alpha was .83 across all coded variables: .86 across all "counts" (subthemes for microaggressions, feelings of difference, and resilience), .83 across all emotional valence ratings, and .79 across all intensity/salience ratings.

Three research assistants coded each transcript and video-recorded child interview in Wave 2. Each coder used the highlighting features in Microsoft Word to note specific instances of awareness of difference, microaggressions, and resilience. Each coder maintained an individual Excel document to organize all instances identified, including the emotional valence as well as the intensity and/or salience of these instances. Individual instances referred to responses to specific questions and/or distinct responses (e.g., a few words, several sentences) that reflected any subtheme identified in the coding template. Particular instances were not necessarily mutually exclusive—if there was agreement among coders, individual instances could be coded as more than one subtheme. Emotional valence, which referred to the child's emotional reactions and responses during the interview, was coded on a scale that included positive, neutral, and negative anchors. Intensity of microaggressions was coded as low, medium, or high; "low" corresponded to microinvalidations (i.e., behaviors that subtly single out or minimize the experiences of an individual in a minority group; e.g., "They ask me a lot of questions about my parents"), "medium" to microinsults (i.e., expressions that convey insensitivity and demean an individual in a minority group; e.g., hearing "you're gay" among peer groups or in the media as a derogatory phrase), and "high" to microassaults (i.e., intentional insulting behaviors such as name-calling that derogate members of a minority group; e.g., "I was told I was going to hell because I had two moms") (Sue et al. 2007). Salience was substituted for intensity with regard to feelings of difference and resilience/positive conceptualizations, coded on a three-point scale: low (1), medium (2), or high (3). A detailed coding manual is available upon request.

Results

We present results in three categories, aligned with our research questions: (a) Feelings of Difference, (b) Microaggressions, and (c) Resilience and Positive Conceptualizations. Table 2 includes frequency, emotion, and intensity/salience data for each category and subtheme. All names in the following section have been changed.

Feelings of Difference

A majority of children indicated that they experienced feelings of difference; specifically, 38 (78 %) children reported a total of 83 distinct indications of feelings of difference. On average, feelings of difference were rated medium on intensity ($M = 1.74$) and children demonstrated a neutral emotional valence ($M = 2.15$) when talking about their feelings. Of these children, 23 indicated feelings of difference more than once (range 0–5). Table 2 contains total frequencies for all five subthemes regarding feelings of difference (Uncomfortable Disclosing, Fear of Rejection, Guard Up and Need for Security, Awareness of Difference in Own Family, Internalized Stigma), as well as the modes for emotional valence and salience. No significant associations between feelings of difference and child age were found. Examples for each subtheme of Feelings of Difference follow below.

Awareness of Difference in Own Family

Regarding subthemes of feelings of difference, the most common domain reported was Awareness of Difference in Own Family (41 counts, $n = 32$; 65 % of children), in which children expressed that their family was different from other families in some capacity. While these differences surfaced across multiple domains (i.e., having LG parents, adoptive status, race/ethnicity, ability, and "other") in children's interview responses, we focused on those related to having same-sex parents here. The majority of children's comments included in this subtheme referred to having same-sex parents (29 of 41 instances), while

Table 2 Microaggressions, feelings of difference, and resilience results

	Total count	Number of children reporting ($N = 49$)	Emotional valence (mode)	Intensity/salience (mode)
Microaggressions				
Heterosexism	30	21	Neutral	Low
Teasing and bullying	5	3	Neutral	High
Public outing	11	11	Neutral	Low
Questioning legitimacy of family	4	3	Neutral	High
Stereotypes and discrimination	4	4	Neutral	Med
Spokesperson	2	2	Neutral	Low
Feelings of difference				
Uncomfortable disclosing	7	6	Neutral	Med
Fear of rejection	4	4	Neutral	Med
Guard up and need for security	19	17	Neutral	Med
Awareness of difference in own family	41	32	Neutral	Med
Internalized stigma	12	10	Negative	Med
Resilience and positive conceptualizations				
Resilience	14	9	Neutral	Med
Positive feelings about family	55	30	Positive	Low
Positive feelings specific to LG family	23	17	Positive	Med

others were in reference to adoption (6 of 41), race (4 of 41), or other (e.g., having ADHD; 3 of 41). Children used neutral mode emotion in describing their feelings, which were rated as medium in salience (mode). Several quotes from children exemplify this theme. Lucas said, "I'm one of the only people in my school that has two daddies" (transracial adoptee, male, two fathers, age 9). In describing how her family is "not like other families," Jenna said, "Like a lot of family has mom and dads and some family has two moms and two dads" (same race adoptee, female, two fathers, age 6).

Uncomfortable Disclosing

This subtheme captured instances in which children expressed any sort of discomfort in telling others about having same-sex parents; ratings reflected neutral emotion and medium salience (both modes). For example, in responding to a question about who he tells that he has two fathers, Malcolm stated, "I won't tell anybody" (same-race adoptee, male, two fathers, age 6). Another, Hailey, described her feelings about disclosing that she has two mothers: "I usually don't tell strangers…I've been afraid to tell, like, someone said, "Where's your mom and your dad?" and… I get scared" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9). Ashton recalled his experience of being uncomfortable disclosing about his family: "I was in school and people were asking me questions about my family and they asked if you have two dads or a mom and dad, and I didn't feel like telling them" (transracial adoptee, male, two fathers, age 7).

Guard Up and Need for Security

To be coded as this subtheme, children's responses included mention of established trust with others or security in their friendships before opening up about their families and having same-sex parents. Modes observed for this subtheme were neutral emotion and medium salience. For instance, in responding to how she decides to tell others that she has two mothers, Alexandra said, "Well people that look like they want to know and they promise they won't tease me…and if they break that promise I will never tell them anything ever again" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 6). Similarly, Gavin described who he tells that he has two fathers: "Well basically I go with the people that I know the most, and who I really like…who are my good friends and who I can trust" (transracial adoptee, male, two fathers, age 9). Taylor explained her conditions for disclosing to others about having two fathers: "…if I'm their friend, like if I'm a best friend. But if I'm just their friend then I don't tell them" (transracial adoptee, female, two fathers, age 9).

Internalized Stigma

This subtheme involved any mention by children of their own negative thoughts or feelings about their parents or families on the basis of parental sexual orientation. This

subtheme was rated as having a negative mode emotion and medium salience for children. For example, in describing how she feels when others do not know that she has two mothers, Alexandra said, "I feel kind of happy, embarrassed, all at the same time…and sad" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 6). Another child, Malcolm, simply responded, "Sometimes they freak me out" (same-race adoptee, male, two fathers, age 6) to a question about whether there was anything that he did not like about having two fathers. A final example is in Maya's description of what happens for her on certain occasions: "…sometimes I feel bad like on Father's Day and things like see my friends with their dads" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9).

Fear of Rejection

If children demonstrated any concern of being rejected by others because of having same-sex parents, their responses were coded as this subtheme of Fear of Rejection. The mode for children's emotion was neutral; the mode salience of this subtheme was rated as medium. Two illustrations of this subtheme include Nicole and Maya's experiences. Nicole described why she is sometimes afraid to tell others she has same-sex parents: "They may not like me as much because I have two moms" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9). Maya noted her worries about what others might think if they found out she had two mothers: "I don't want to like scare them away where they think I'm a freak" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9).

Microaggressions

Over half of the children ($n = 28$; 57 %) reported experiencing microaggressions (with a total of 56 instances). Of these 28 children, 16 reported more than one microaggression (range 0–7). On average, microaggressions were rated as medium in intensity ($M = 1.81$), with variability across subthemes of microaggressions (e.g., the modes were high for Teasing/Bullying and low for Heterosexism; see Table 2). Children commonly demonstrated a neutral emotional valence ($M = 2.09$) when describing microaggressions, which were generally initiated by children's peers. Table 2 displays total frequencies of all microaggression subthemes (Heterosexism, Questioning Legitimacy of Family, Stereotypes/Discrimination, Public Outing, Spokesperson, and Teasing/Bullying), and the modes for emotional valence and intensity for each. No significant associations between microaggressions and child age were found. Examples of each of the six Microaggressions subthemes are listed next.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism was the most common subtheme of microaggressions reported, with neutral mode emotion coded and a low mode intensity. Several illustrations of this subtheme include responses to questions about whether children tell others about having same-sex parents. Madison reported, "…if they're like, 'Where's your mom?' or 'Is your mom coming?', and I'm like…'oh I have two dads'" (transracial adoptee, female, two fathers, age 10). Another, Kayla, said, "People ask me like when they see one mom and then they see the other mom, they say is that your grandma and I'm like that's so mean" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9). Logan stated, "…my friends sometimes they, like, then you tell your mom, then—but I'm like, dude, I have two dads" (same-race adoptee, male, two fathers, 7).

Public Outing

Beyond Heterosexism, the next most frequent subtheme was Public Outing, or instances in which children felt details of their family makeup were made public in school or other social situations. This subtheme also had a neutral mode emotion coded and a low mode intensity. For example, many children reported that their families were "outed" by their friends telling others or by their families being visible in the school community. Lucas described this experience of public outing in the following quote:

> "I don't like whenever they tell other people…because it's not that nice to tell other people about their families… I don't like whenever people know that I have two daddies because whenever people know that I have two daddies they're gonna be more likely to tell people about it…and then those other people will tell other people… it's my business" (transracial adoptee, male, two fathers, age 9).

Maya also discussed how many other people know about her family even though she doesn't tell them directly: "…a lot of times I don't like always tell them but it comes out because we do a lot of parent things like we have parties and they come in for parent–teacher conferences" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9).

Stereotypes and Discrimination

This subtheme was characterized by instances in which children heard derogatory comments about sexual minority people and/or had experiences related to discrimination due to having same-sex parents, with neutral mode emotion coded and a medium mode intensity. Aaron discussed something he does not like about having two fathers

(related to the fathers' boycott of a particular restaurant because of discriminatory practices toward sexual minorities): "I don't like the fact that we don't get to go to Chik-Fil-A…I haven't had them in almost three years" (transracial adoptee, male, two fathers, age 7). Another child, David (transracial adoptee, male, two fathers, age 7), talked about his experience with the word "gay":

> David: "I hear it in shows: 'you're gay', 'you're gay', 'you're gay', 'you're gay'"
> Interviewer: "Yeah, so you've heard it in shows…do they say it in a nice way or does it feel not so nice the way you've heard it?"
> David: "Sometimes not that nice"

Teasing/Bullying

This subtheme included any experiences that the child reported being made fun of or teased specifically because of having same-sex parents, particularly in response to being directly asked in the interview about whether children had had such experiences. This subtheme had a high mode intensity, yet neutral mode emotion coded. For instance, Hailey remarked, "…a lot of people just try to make fun of you because your family is different…I just don't think they should bully us because we're different" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9). Another child, Julia, described a clear experience of verbal bullying from a boy in her class: "…he said you that 'since you have two moms that you're going to go to hell'" (transracial adoptee, female, two mothers, age 10).

Spokesperson

This subtheme addressed whether children find themselves being asked lots of questions by others about same-sex parent families; children were rated as having a neutral mode emotion and low mode intensity. For instance, when asked what his friends say about having two fathers, Bryce said that they "ask me lots of questions" (same-race adoptee, male, two fathers, age 8). Hailey noted that she discloses about her family to "people that don't really know two moms exist" and tells them about how families with two moms are the same as other families (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9).

Questioning Legitimacy of Family

This final Microaggressions subtheme captured situations where others questioned the authenticity and legitimacy of children's family on the basis of having same-sex parents. This subtheme was rated as high in intensity yet neutral in emotional tone (both modes). For example, Donovan, with two mothers, noted, "I don't have a dad… and my brother is like I want a dad, I want a dad, I'm looking for him" (transracial adoptee, male, two mothers, age 8), indicating that even within his own family, this child has heard comments that threaten the legitimacy of his family being headed by two mothers rather than a mother and father.

Resilience and Positive Conceptualizations

Children reported an abundant number of positive feelings regarding their families (more so than microaggressions and feelings of difference; see Table 2), specifically 35 children (71 %) reported 92 total instances of resilience and positive feelings, and 25 of these children reported more than one such instance (range 0–8). The three subthemes of Resilience and Positive Family Conceptualizations (Resilience, Positive Feeling about Family, and Positive Feelings Specific to LG Family) are presented in Table 2, including total frequencies, emotional valence, and salience. On average, the children demonstrated medium ($M = 1.67$) salience in regards to these instances. There was a positive correlation between age and total resilience and positive conceptualizations, $r(49) = .45$, $p = .001$, such that older children's responses were coded as having more instances of positive conceptualizations and resilience than younger children.

Resilience

This subtheme was to specifically target children's experiences demonstrating coping skills and resilience as related to their family structure; ratings were of neutral mode emotion and medium mode intensity. Some examples of the Resilience subtheme included how children coped with microaggressions or feeling different as a result of having same-sex parents. Hailey described how she "talked it out" with one of her peers: "One of my friends used to bully me because I had two moms but I told him about how it [my family] is different and how it [my family] is the same and he changed his mind" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9). Other children alluded to cognitive coping skills and using social support. Leah offered advice to other children like her: "…if somebody teases you, don't really get upset and cry and stuff, just tell an adult and make sure it doesn't happen again" (transracial adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9). Julia discussed how her parents talk with her about their family, "…so that if somebody makes fun of me that I won't worry about it because it's okay" (transracial adoptee, female, two mothers, age 10). Lastly, reflecting on her experience in "coming out" about her family to peers, Maya said, "…when they think it's a little weird, it's like I don't take it personally at all, because it's not like I got to choose if I wanted two moms or not, but

I'm blessed with two moms" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9).

Positive Feelings About Family

This subtheme captured children's positive conceptualizations about their family broadly. Children generally expressed positive emotional valence (mode) yet low mode intensity for this subtheme. Many children used the word "special" to describe their families and why they loved them. Some positive perceptions of family included Micah's description, "They're [my parents] really kind and awesome…flawless" (same-race adoptee, male, two mothers, 9), as well as Adrienne's comments, "…we're the best family…they're [my parents] so, so nice to me" (same-race adoptee, female, two fathers, age 8). After describing her family as "fun, awesome, exciting, and energetic," Heidi added, "…it's just really fun because I feel special" (transracial adoptee, female, two fathers, age 9).

Positive Feelings Specific to LG Family

This final subtheme was to particularly focus on children's positive comments related to having same-sex parents, narrowing in from more general positive feelings about their family. Children were rated as expressing positive emotions (mode) in medium mode intensity for this subtheme. For instance, Leah noted, "…we're not really different and we're equal as everybody" (transracial adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9). Micah simply stated that "it's cool" to have two moms (same-race adoptee, male, two mothers, age 9), while Hailey had a special description of her family: "I have a rainbow family that always sticks together" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9). In addressing what she likes most about having two fathers, Madison noted, "I like that they're boys because sometimes like the boy stuff I can do" (transracial adoptee, female, two fathers, age 10). Lastly, in describing her family, Maya exclaimed, "…it's like I have two times the loving because I have two of my moms" (same-race adoptee, female, two mothers, age 9).

Discussion

Although a number of studies have indicated that children with lesbian and gay parents develop in ways that are typical and healthy (e.g., Golombok et al. 2013; van Gelderen et al. 2009), the current study is pioneering in exploring, for the first time, the experiences of microaggressions, feelings of difference, and resilience among preadolescent adopted children with sexual minority parents. Using a microaggressions framework (e.g., Nadal 2013; Sue et al. 2007) and a strengths-based approach, we sought to understand how these children navigate experiences with peers related to having same-sex parents and how they conceptualize their families. Our findings offer new information about the social and introspective experiences of children with sexual minority parents, directly from the children's perspectives. As such, our results have important implications about cultural sensitivity training and socialization practices for parents, educators, clinicians, social workers, and other child welfare professionals.

The majority of children in our sample reported feelings of difference regarding their same-sex parent families, consistent with the adoption literature (e.g., Grotevant 1997) and studies with adolescent or young adult children of same-sex parent families (e.g., Gartrell et al. 2012; Goldberg 2007a, b; Welsh 2011). These findings extend the research literature for the first time among a preadolescent sample of children adopted by sexual minority parents, reflecting experiences with cultural heterosexism and sexual stigma (Herek et al. 2009) not only on sexual minority individuals, but also on their children. Children identified feelings of difference more often than microaggressions, and children's age (from 6 to 11) was unrelated to number of microaggressions reported. Feelings of difference were typically rated at low or medium salience and with neutral emotion, indicating that these feelings of difference may not have been particularly significant for children. Indeed, most children did not report being afraid of rejection or uncomfortable to tell others about having sexual minority parents even though the majority were aware of differences characterizing their families, consistent with some previous research with similar samples (e.g., Bos and van Balen 2008; Stevens et al. 2003). These findings about children's feelings of difference related to their parents' sexual orientation and family structure are aligned with Herek et al.'s concepts of felt stigma and self-stigma, while also supporting the notion that differences do not necessarily translate to deficits or difficulties for children with sexual minority parents, similar to earlier research (e.g., Stevens et al. 2003).

Consistent with our hypotheses and previous research about experiences of marginalization among adopted children (e.g., Neil 2012) and those with sexual minority parents (Bos et al. 2008; Gartrell et al. 2005), our results showed that over half of children in this sample reported microaggressions related to their parents' sexual orientation. Children's peers, who often appeared uneducated about sexual minority issues, most commonly initiated microaggressions. For example, one child reported that a peer "didn't know same-sex couples existed" and another said that "most people don't understand" when she tells them about having two mothers. Children typically

displayed neutral rather than negative emotion when discussing microaggressions, and these experiences were generally rated at low or medium intensity—corresponding to microinvalidation and microinsults (Sue et al. 2007). This finding supports that microaggressions often seem to be unintentional and inherently part of societal systems of oppression rather than coming from a place of individual hatred and intolerance (Sue 2010). In terms of type of microaggression, children most commonly reported instances of heterosexism. Other themes, such as being publicly outed, being a spokesperson, or having the legitimacy of their family questioned on the basis of parental sexual orientation were similar to themes identified by Garber and Grotevant (2015) in their study of microaggressions experienced by adopted adolescents. Children in this study were equally likely to experience microaggressions on the basis of having same-sex parents regardless of their age (from 6 to 11 years). While microaggression experiences appeared to be fairly benign on the whole in this group, it is clear that children do perceive subtle affronts in the form of microinvalidations, microinsults, and occasionally more overt microassaults (e.g., one child who was told she "was going to hell" as a result of having two mothers; Sue et al. 2007) based on their parents' sexual orientation. More obvious and intentional, microassaults resulting from heterosexist ideals are consistent with Herek et al.'s (2009) framework of enacted sexual stigma.

In addition to indicating experiences of microaggressions and feelings of difference, children in this study demonstrated resilience and conveyed many positive feelings about their families. Consistent with research with older samples of adolescent and adult children with same-sex parents (Gartrell et al. 2012; Goldberg 2007a, b; Welsh 2011), nearly three-quarters of children in this sample indicated positive conceptualizations of their families and/or methods of coping with difficulty based on having same-sex parents. Positive feelings were consistently reported more often than both microaggressions and feelings of difference. This finding is particularly noteworthy given that children were provided with few specific prompts related to resilience in the semi-structured interview. Consistent with studies of risk and resilience (e.g., Masten 2001), children were able to communicate positive conceptualizations of their families despite marginalization that some children had encountered. Additionally, the salience levels of these positive conceptualizations were generally rated at a medium or high level, indicating that positive perceptions of family appeared to resonate more strongly with children than did microaggressions and feelings of difference. As expected, results revealed that older children demonstrated more instances of resilience and articulated positive feelings of their family as compared with younger children. This is consistent with the research showing that as adopted children mature, they are better able to identify and articulate feelings surrounding family structure (Grotevant 1997).

Importantly, evidence of resilience among children in this sample did not appear to be typically in response to any specific negative experience; rather, it emerged in the context of general comments about children's families and how they chose to describe their families. This distinction could suggest that the children had internalized positive schemas about their families more organically and not necessarily in response to any negative experience stemming from having same-sex parents; our data, however, cannot directly address this possibility. Children in this sample demonstrated resilience through evidence of coping skills, both in cognitive processes and in seeking social support, to manage any difficulties related to having same-sex parents. A number of children described their approaches in dealing with teasing and bullying based on having same-sex parents, which included positive thinking and talking with adults, such as parents and teachers. Indeed, in earlier studies, children with sexual minority parents have reported a variety of unique coping mechanisms for disclosing about their parents and navigating experiences of difference (e.g., Bozett 1987; Kuvalanka et al. 2014). Our study is among the first to indicate such coping techniques among younger children with sexual minority parents.

Strengths, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

The current study is groundbreaking in being the first of its kind to explore the qualitative experiences of school-aged children adopted into sexual minority parent households, particularly from the children's perspectives. Ecologically sound data were gathered from the children in the context of their personal home environments. Both observational and interview data were collected to broaden the depth of analyses. Using data from direct interviews with the children, rather than from only quantitative survey data or from other informants, may have facilitated a more authentic representation of children's experiences. Also contributing to the richness of the research, this study used a mixed methodology, employing both qualitative and quantitative data. The study of microaggressions is relatively new, and the current study expands the database of research utilizing this theoretical framework (Garber and Grotevant 2015). Finally, this study incorporated a strength-based approach to examine the experiences of historically marginalized populations. It highlighted existing positive conceptualizations and affirmative experiences children with sexual minority parents (Vaughan and Rodriguez 2014). Examining experiences beyond aspects of difference is crucial in advocating for children in adoptive and sexual minority

parent families who may too often be targets of societal stigma and individual oppression (Goldberg and Smith 2011; Grotevant 1997; Mays and Cochran 2001).

Our study is not without limitations. Given that the children in our sample were rather young in age, they may have been less proficient, developmentally, in articulating their feelings and identifying instances of oppression than they might be at older ages (Eccles 1999; Huynh 2012; Kurtz-Costes et al. 2014; Rogoff 2003). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that although some children did not report positive conceptualizations of their family explicitly, this does not necessarily indicate that they harbored negative feelings. Again, resilience and positive feelings of family were frequently narrated without prompting, so it is possible that more children would have acknowledged these feelings if asked more directly.

Examining children's perceptions of social experiences in early developmental periods, such as in the current study, is pertinent to children's later development in adolescence and adulthood. Indeed, resilience in middle childhood is strongly positively linked with children's positive social relationships with peers and adults, while social exclusion and victimization are closely tied with health and adjustment problems during this period and beyond (Guhn et al. 2013). Future research could include following up with this sample of children during adolescence to further examine how children are able to talk about their families and navigate experiences with peers as they get older, specifically with respect to the sexual orientation of their parents. Studies using a microaggression framework among adolescent children with sexual minority parents would be particularly useful, expanding on microaggressions research with other adolescent populations (e.g., Dupper et al. 2015; Nadal et al. 2011). Other microaggression researchers studying adolescents, such as Huynh (2012), have noted that more cognitive resources may be necessary for children to identify the sometimes ambiguous nature of microaggressive interactions. Similar to our findings, but among a sample of adopted adolescents, Garber (2013) found that children reported neutral responses to adoption-related microaggressions. Children and adolescents may not have the cognitive or social skills to negotiate these instances, they may not feel comfortable disclosing them, or they may downplay the experiences as a way of coping. These possibilities should be explored in future research, and the interpretation of microaggressions would likely be more comprehensive among adolescents as compared with children in middle childhood.

The interview data in this study represented self-reported experiences of young children adopted by same-sex parents. As rich as this type of data can be, there is also the possibility that some of the children may have downplayed their experiences or lacked the cognitive skills necessary to perceive social nuances. Collaborative evidence from children as well as other informants, such as parents, teachers, and peers about microaggression experiences could be informative in the future and would serve to strengthen our findings. Furthermore, research could be conducted to examine microaggressions and resilience among other larger and more diverse samples of children adopted by sexual minority parents and associations with other aspects of social identity. For example, continued research on the experiences of these children who are also transracially adopted and identify as individuals of color is important. While this study included a sample of adopted children that was racially diverse, the questions of interest focused on experiences related to having same-sex parents rather than on other aspects of difference (e.g., racial or ethnic identity, adoptive status) and the small sample size precluded sufficiently powered analyses to effectively compare group differences. Even though it was the case that children most commonly reported being aware of difference in their own family on the basis of having two mothers or two fathers rather than on adoption, race, or other characteristics, future research could explore in greater depth the intersectionality of the children's adoptive, racial, and family identities. Lastly, perhaps the experiences and conceptualizations of family for these children are different than for children who have one biological parent, stepparents, or other family configurations; additional research could explore these possibilities.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The term microaggressions is still one that remains somewhat unfamiliar to most people (Muenks 2014). This research helps to identify some of the subtle forms of marginalization that are occurring in the lives of children with sexual minority parents, and as such, our findings offer implications for teacher training related to cultural diversity and interpersonal relationships. Disseminating these findings to teachers and educators in the school systems could be influential in fostering a more positive and tolerant community for children with sexual minority parents. As teachers are in a unique position to cultivate positive classroom environments and directly intervene with situations of peer victimization (Troop-Gordon 2015), teachers could ideally identify microaggressions occurring in schools and construct ways for children to curb and resolve such offenses. Cultivating inclusive environments that positively promote children's overall development, health and psychological well-being is in the best interest of all individuals working with children.

These findings may also be useful for parents who are seeking ways to better understand their children and empathize with their children's experiences. Our results are

timely, as the promotion of children's resilience has gained increasing attention in research and pubic domains. For example, a recent blog post from the American Psychological Association's Public Interest Directorate highlighted "6 things parents can do to boost resilience in kids." Behaviors such as talking about emotions, helping children build their communication skills, and working with child care providers or schools were emphasized (Andoh 2015). Our findings support the particular importance of these activities with children adopted by sexual minority parents, informing how parents may choose to socialize their children, talk about issues such as oppression and discrimination, and cultivate children's capacity for managing adversity. A number of organizations, such as the American Academy for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), have given recommendations for how LGBT parents can prepare children for navigating experiences with stigma—including age-appropriate open communication in discussing children's background or family, talking about how to handle others' questions or comments and generating appropriate responses to teasing, using media, books, and other resources that show children in LGBT parent families, and having meet-ups with other children with LGBT parents (AACAP 2013). Our results lend empirical backing for these and similar parenting practices, given that children should be supported in learning to cope with microaggressions and feeling different, as well as forming positive family conceptualizations, and data suggest that sexual minority parents do engage in socializing their children around their diverse family structure (Litovich and Langhout 2004; Oakley 2015; van Gelderen et al. 2009).

The results of this study are also informative to clinicians and social workers who work with children of sexual minority parents, especially adopted children. Understanding some of the unique challenges these families must overcome and acknowledging the intensity of having intersecting identities are crucial tasks for professionals working with diverse family systems. The findings contribute to the existing literature recognizing that sexual minority parent families provide nurturing and loving homes for their children (Goldberg et al. 2010; Golombok et al. 2013). Children with sexual minority parents are reaching healthy developmental milestones and are capable of forming positive conceptualizations of their family. Similar studies have been influential in cases legalizing sexual minority marriage and adoption rights, serving as evidence that children adopted by sexual minority couples are developing at typical and positive rates in comparison to their counterparts raised in heterosexual parent households (e.g., Farr et al. 2010). Thus, as social and political climates are shifting with regard the rights of the sexual minorities at large, this work can be constructive in advocating greater equality for children and their parents in a diverse array of family types.

Conclusion

The results of our study reveal that many children adopted by sexual minority couples experience feelings of difference and microaggressions as a result of having same-sex parents. Although common for children, feelings of difference and microaggressions typically initiated by peers were generally experienced at a low salience level, with moderate intensity, and with neutral emotion. More salient to these children, however, were their overwhelmingly positive feelings about their families and their demonstration of coping skills in the face of adversity. This research fills current gaps in the literature concerning the social experiences and perceptions of family among children with two mothers or two fathers; while many studies have examined older children's perspectives about their same-sex parent families (Kuvalanka et al. 2014; Leddy et al. 2012), our study extended this work to children in middle childhood. Furthermore, our findings reflect the experiences of adoptive families with sexual minority parents, a population that is rapidly growing (e.g., Gates 2013) but is still understudied in terms of understanding children's lived experiences. Our research suggests that children who are adopted by sexual minority parents are capable of navigating through experiences of difference with resilience and positive conceptualizations of family.

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Author Contributions RHF and EEC conceived the research questions and overall design, participated in conducting and interpreting the principal analyses of this study, and did the primary drafting of the manuscript; RHF collected all data for the study; MKO and KKC contributed substantially to the literature review and revisions to the manuscript; MKO and KKC also coordinated a number of statistical analyses (including reliability) for this study; KJG participated in the qualitative design of the study, particularly the

methodology, coding methods, and interpretation of results. All authors made substantive intellectual contributions to this study, and all read, reviewed, and approved our final manuscript.

Conflict of interest The authors report no conflicts of interest.

Appendix: Child Interview Guide—Wave 2

Next, you and I are going to talk about a few topics related to your family and your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. I'm going to ask you questions that I have in this booklet and we'll just have a conversation together. There are no right or wrong answers. It's OK if you don't know the answer or if you don't want to answer a question at any time. You can just let me know and we can skip to the next question. You can also let me know if you get tired at any point and we can take a break. Do you have any questions before we get started?

I would like to begin by asking you a few questions to get to know a little about you and what you like to do.

1. How old are you? ______
2. When is your birthday? ______________
3. What grade are you in? _____________
4. How do you like school?
5. How do you do at school? (e.g., grades) Any favorite/least favorite subjects?
6. What things do you like to do for fun?
7. What do you want to do when you grow up?
8. Who is your best friend? (or who are some of your best friends?)
9. What do you like to do with your friends? (insert names) *if did not come up in #6*

ASK OF ALL RESPONDENTS…
PERCEIVED SOCIALIZATION PRACTICES

Now I'm interested in learning a bit more about your family, your experiences with friends and at school, and how you and your parents talk about these things together.

10. Tell me about your family/family structure (the type of family you have).
11. How is it just like (the same as/similar to) other families?
12. How is it different from/not like other families?
13. What do your parents tell you about your family/family structure (the type of family you have)? (insert any language that the child has ID'ed in #10.
14. Why do you think they say these things?
15. Do you agree with what they say? Why or why not?

IF CHILD HAS LESBIAN OR GAY PARENTS…

16. Do you tell other people that you have two _____ (moms or dads)? If **YES**, who do you tell you have two _________ (moms or dads)?
17. Do you tell your friends? What do they say? (*if has not come up*)
    a. If **yes**, how does that make you feel?
18. Do you tell your teachers? What do they say? (*if has not come up*)
    a. If **yes**, how does that make you feel?
19. Do you tell anyone else? What do they say? (*if has not come up*)
    a. If **yes**, how does that make you feel?
20. Have you ever been afraid to tell someone you have two _________ (moms or dads)?
    a. If **yes**, tell me more about that.
21. How do you decide whom you are going to tell that you have two _________ (moms or dads)?
22. Do you have friends who have two moms or two dads?
23. Do you know what being gay or lesbian means? Have you heard these words?
    a. If **YES**, How would you describe what being gay or lesbian means?
24. Is there anything else you might want to add about having two (moms/dads) or about your family? (things you particularly like or dislike)

ASK OF ALL RESPONDENTS…

25. In school or anywhere else, have you ever been made fun of or teased? (e.g., *with words,* called names, said mean things to you)
    a. If **yes**, use these probes: (1) How many times in the last year? (2) Why do you think you were teased? (3) How did you feel? (4) What did you do when it happened?
26. Have you ever been physically bullied? (e.g., hit, kicked, slapped, punched, etc.)
    a. If **yes**, use these probes: (1) How many times in the last year? (2) Why do you think you were bullied? (3) How did you feel? (4) What did you do when it happened?

27. Have you ever felt that an adult (not your parents) has treated you unfairly? (e.g., been mean to you, teased or bullied you)

    a. If **yes**, use these probes. (1) How many times in the last year? (2) How did you feel? (3) Why do you think you were treated unfairly? (4) What did you do when it happened?

28. When you hang out with friends, do you tend to go over to friends' houses or invite friends to your house to play?
29. What makes you a good friend?

ASK OF ALL RESPONDENTS…

Now I would like to ask you some questions about parents and children and how people become a family.

30. What does it mean to be a parent? (mom/dad language, etc.) How do two people become parents? (Suppose two people want to become parents—what do they have to do?)
31. Is there any other way of becoming a parent besides "having" a baby (e.g., grew in the mommy's/the woman's tummy) having a child born to parents, being biologically related)? (*if did not identify adopting in previous q—can also ask, "Are there any other ways someone can become a parent?"*)
32. *If child has mentioned adoption, ask*: What does adoption mean? (**OR**… Let's suppose that two people wanted a child and they decided to adopt one. What does this mean?)
33. Is adoption forever? When parents adopt, is the child theirs forever? (why?)
34. How do people go about adopting a child? What do they have to do? Where do they have to go? What happens there?
35. Do you think that people might want a specific kind of child when they choose to adopt a child? What kind of child do they look for?
36. Let's suppose that a child is being adopted by a family. Where do you think the child would come from? What do you think about why children might become adopted? (what reasons children might be placed for adoption/why child couldn't live/stay with birth family, etc.)?

CHILD'S PERSONAL FEELINGS ABOUT ADOPTION

Now I'm interested in learning more about your thoughts about adoption, what you know about your adoption and how you feel about being adopted.

37. What does the word "adopted" mean to you?
38. Have you heard the word "birth parent"? (probe for other birth family words)

    a. If **YES**, what does the word "birth parent" (birth mother/birth father, or other term, e.g., "first mother") mean to you?

39. Have you heard the word "adoptive parent"?

    a. If **YES**, what does the word "adoptive parent" mean to you?

40. What do you call your parents? (what names?) *IF HAS NOT COME UP BEFORE*
41. Tell me about your [Adoptive Parent #1—insert name of how child refers to parent]. What would you say are the best things about (AP 1)? Are there any things about (AP 1) that you don't like?
42. Tell me about your [Adoptive Parent #2—insert name of how child refers to parent]. What would you say are the best things about (AP 2)? Are there any things about (AP 2) that you don't like?
43. *If they have siblings* (*insert each sibling's name—ask separately*): What would you say are the best things about your brother/sister? Are there any things about your brother/sister that you don't like?
44. [*if anyone else lives with the family*, probe for more info…]
45. You have told me a lot about all your family members. Now thinking of you all together as a family, what would you say are the best things about your family? Are there any things about your family that you don't like?
46. Do you parents talk with you about your adoption or being adopted?

    a. If **YES**, what have your parents said to you about being adopted/your adoption?
    b. How old were you when your parents [use the names the child calls his/her adoptive parents] first talked to you about your adoption?

       i. What did they say?
       ii. Do you remember how you felt—happy, sad, angry?

47. Have *you* ever asked your parents about being adopted or asked them questions you have about adoption?

    a. What did you ask them?
    b. How did you feel about asking?

48. Do you know any other children who were adopted? (like friends or family?)

    a. IF **YES**, Who? (names and/or relationships if possible)

49. Do you talk to anyone else about being adopted/your adoption?

a. IF **YES**, who else have you talked to about being adopted/your adoption?

50. How often would you say that you talk about your adoption/being adopted?
51. Do you like to talk about your adoption? Why or why not?
52. Have people ever asked you what it's like to be adopted?

a. If **YES**, What do you tell them?
b. Do they ask anything else?
c. How did their questions make you feel?

53. Have people ever teased or made fun of you because you're adopted?

a. If **yes**: How did their teasing make you feel?

54. Do you know anything about your birth mother?

a. IF **YES**, tell me about your birth mother. What do you call your birth mother? (e.g., "first mother"/name) Any special name you call her?

55. Do you know anything about your birth father?

a. IF **YES**, tell me about your birth father. What do you call your birth father? (e.g., name) Any special name you call him?

56. Do you know about anybody else in ________ your birth family/(birth parent's) family?

a. If so, who and how are they related to you (in child's terms)?

57. How did you find out these things about your birth parents/birth family?
58. Have you ever met your birth mother/birth father/ other birth family members*?* (*if has not come up yet in the interview*) If **YES**, please describe. Who/when?

a. How old were you when you first met __________ (birth parents/other birth family members)?
b. Do you remember this meeting with your birthparents?

If YES:

59. How did you feel when you met them (insert names)?
60. What kinds of things did you think about them (insert names)?

IF YES OR NO:

61. How many times have you seen ____________ (birth family—insert names)? (How often?)
62. Would you like to see _______ (b.m.) or _______ (b.f.) [INSERT NAMES] again? Why or why not?
63. Do you know if your family has plans to see _______ (b.m.) or _______ (b.f.) [INSERT NAMES] again in the future? IF **YES, DESCRIBE.**
64. Have you met any other birth family members? (If yes, who?) How many times? Would you like to see any other your birth family members again? Any plans to see them again?
65. *If have met*, how do you think your parents feel about you meeting ___________ (b.p. or birth family members)?

IF CHILD HAS HAD MULTIPLE MEETINGS WITH BIRTH FAMILY:

66. What kinds of things do you do with _________ (birth parents/birth family)?
67. How do you feel about being with ___________ (birth parents/birth family)?
68. Are your parents always with you when you see ____________ (birth parents/birth family)?
69. Do your parents and ____________ (b.p.) get along?
70. Do you feel that it's easy to make __________ (ADOPTIVE PARENTS) and ________ (BIRTH FAMILY) happy at the same time? Do you ever feel it's hard?
71. Do you act the same or differently when you are with ___________ (b.p.) than when you are with your parents?
72. What ways do you act the same or different?

ASK OF ALL RESPONDENTS…

73. Have you ever seen (or do you have) pictures of your birth mother/birth father/other birth family members?

a. If **yes**, can you tell me more about that? (who have you seen pictures of, when, what do you think?)
b. If **no**, would you ever like to see a picture of anyone in your birth family? (if **yes**, who, please describe…)

74. Have you ever received a letter/email, phone call, gift, or other contact from your birth mother/birth father/other birth family members?

a. If **YES**, can you tell me more about that? (from whom, what type of contact—phone, text, Facebook, Skype, etc./when?)

i. How do you feel about getting them?

b. If **NO**, would you ever like to receive a letter/ email, phone call, gift, or other contact from

anyone in your birth family? (if **yes**, who, please describe…)

75. Would you like to send presents or pictures or talk on the phone (or messages/emails, social media, etc.) to _______ (b.p.)? Why or why not?
76. Have your parents talked with you about sending letters, gifts or pictures, or talk on the phone (or messages/social media, etc.) to _________ (b.p.)?
    a. If **yes**, what did or do they say?
77. **Would you ever like to meet or talk to anyone (else)** in your birth family? (if yes, who, please describe…)
    a. If **YES**, tell me more about that.
    b. If **NO to meeting/talking**, do you think you would like to meet/talk to___ or _____ (birth parents or other birth family members) when you get older? Why or why not?
    c. **If want to meet/talk**, How do you think your parents feel **or** would feel about this? (referring to meeting/talking to birth family members)
    d. **If want to meet/talk**, How do you think _________ (birth parents/birth family) feel **or** would feel about this (meeting/talking)?
78. Would you like to know (anything) more about your birth parents (birth mother/birth father/other birth family members)?
    a. If **YES**, what kinds of things would you like to know?

ASK OF ALL RESPONDENTS…

79. Are there any things that you really like about ______________ (birth parents or birth family), from what you know?
80. Are there any things that bother or worry you about ______________ (birth parents or birth family), from what you know?
81. Since you know what it's like to be an adopted child, what kinds of things would you tell people who want to adopt a child to help them be really good parents to that child?
82. Is there any advice you would give to other children who are adopted? Or to others about adoption?
83. We've talked a lot about adoption and your family. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about being adopted or about your family? (Probe: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your birth parents/birth family? Your adoptive parents? Your siblings?)

THANK YOU SO MUCH for talking with me! You did an excellent job. Do you have any questions before we go to the next activity?

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