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Same-Sex Parent Socialization: Understanding Gay and Lesbian Parenting Practices as Cultural Socialization

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ABSTRACT



Cultural socialization refers to the processes by which parents communicate cultural values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors to their children. To date, research on cultural socialization has focused primarily on racial- and ethnic-minority families, and more contemporary studies have examined these practices among international and transracial adoptive families. In general, four main themes have emerged in the literature: Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, Promotion of Mistrust, and Egalitarianism. Since families with same-sex parents continue to experience stigma in society, there is reason to believe these parents engage in cultural socialization strategies specifically around issues of sexual orientation. Yet, current research on cultural socialization has not explicitly investigated same-sex parenting. Thus, the present study examined same-sex parent socialization among families headed by sexual-minority parents (52 fathers, 43 mothers) using a preexisting socialization framework. Findings revealed that the majority of parents endorsed behaviors designed to promote children's awareness of diverse family structures and prepare them for potential stigma-related barriers socialization along three dimensions: Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, and Proactive Parenting. These results contribute to our empirical understanding of same-sex parenting and justify the need to broaden our conceptualization of cultural socialization to be more inclusive of these diverse family structures.

KEYWORDS

Gay and lesbian parents; cultural socialization; children; parenting strategies

Introduction

Parents transmit values, information, and social perspectives to their children through dynamic family processes collectively referred to as cultural socialization (Lee, 2003). Research on cultural socialization has traditionally focused on racial- and ethnic-minority parents and the strategies they use to instill a sense of racial or ethnic pride in their children and to help prepare them for potential race- or ethnicity-related barriers they might encounter (for reviews, see Hughes, Smith,

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Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006 and Priest et al., 2014). More contemporary research has examined cultural socialization among other minority groups, such as Asian Americans (Moua & Lamborn, 2010), Native Americans (Tynes, 2007), and transracially adoptive families (Bebiroglu & Pinderhughes, 2012; Berbery & O'Brien, 2011). However, the increasing diversity of today's families extends far beyond race and ethnicity, and therefore, research examining parent socialization practices needs to be expanded to include other aspects of family diversity (Priest et al., 2014). In particular, the ways in which same-sex parents socialize their children around their diverse family structure is noticeably absent in the literature.

Same-sex parent socialization practices

There are an estimated 690,000 same-sex couple households in the United States (Gates, 2014), and while these couples remain less likely to have children than their heterosexual counterparts, the number of gay and lesbian couples who are becoming parents through diverse means such as donor insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogacy, foster care, or adoption is on the rise (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Patterson & Riskind, 2010). In fact, an estimated 19% of the same-sex couples report raising a child under the age of 18 (Gates, 2014). Furthermore, 10% of children raised by gay and lesbian couples are adopted, and same-sex couples are believed to be raising 1.4% of all adopted children under the age of 18 in the United States (Gates, 2013).

Despite the growing visibility of same-sex parent families and improvements in affirmative legislation for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) individuals, studies continue to show that GLBT individuals contend with sexual-orientation-related stigma, both in internalized and enacted forms (Goldberg & Smith, 2011). Sexual minorities face heightened discrimination during activities of daily living, such as being fired from jobs, hassled by police, or denied a bank loan, and during day-to-day interactions with others (Becker, 2014; Mays & Cochran, 2001). Furthermore, perceived discrimination has been shown to negatively impact career development and college adjustment (Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2010). Although the majority of gay and lesbian individuals, even as adolescents, achieve similar levels of well-being as their heterosexual peers (Saewyc, 2011), many of these individuals remain at risk for emotional and behavioral challenges across the life span (Cochran & Mays, 2000; Williams, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2005); ostensibly this is largely due to heterosexism and minority stress (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Cochran, Greer, & Mays, 2003; Meyer, 1995).

Despite potential risk factors, research has continually demonstrated that GLBT individuals make more than capable parents (e.g., Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010; Golombok, Spencer, & Rutter, 1983; Patterson, 1994; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001). Studies examining child outcomes across a variety of measures suggest children of sexual-minority parents appear to adjust and develop in healthy ways, with few significant differences as compared to children of heterosexual parents (Golombok

et al., 2014; van Gelderen, Gartrell, Bos, van Rooij, & Hermanns, 2012). Thus, it appears that gay and lesbian parents are “effective socialization agents” (Patterson, Farr, & Hastings, 2015, p. 216). Yet few studies have systematically and explicitly examined the ways in which same-sex parents socialize their children. This is problematic given that family process variables are more strongly related to child outcomes than family structure (Farr et al., 2010).

To date, studies that have examined socialization as it relates to sexual orientation have focused on GLBT youth. For example, Kuper, Coleman, and Mustanski (2014) compared racial-ethnic socialization and GLBT strategies to explore how parents help GLBT youth navigate minority stress. Yet, as the authors point out, while racial-ethnic socialization was measured quantitatively, GLBT-specific strategies relied on open-ended, qualitative reports from youth. Indeed, questions about how parents socialize their children around issues of sexual orientation warrant further empirical exploration (Kuper et al., 2014).

Other research has examined how gay and lesbian parents talk with their children about family structure. However, conclusions from these studies are often extrapolated from a few open-ended questions or anecdotal reports from small samples (Bos & Gartrell, 2010; Breshears, 2010; Litovich & Langhout, 2004). In general, children with same-sex parents do not appear to experience increased harassment and victimization as compared to youth with heterosexual parents (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Rivers, Poteat, & Noret, 2008; Tasker & Golombok, 1995; Wainright & Patterson, 2006, 2008). In fact, although children with same-sex parents continue to report experiences of microaggressions and feelings of difference due to having sexual-minority parents, research suggests that these children also develop positive conceptualizations of their families and navigate experiences of stigma with resiliency (Farr, Crain, Oakley, Cashen, & Garber, 2016).

Despite these findings, much less is known about the strategies and behaviors used by same-sex parents to prepare or buffer children from potentially hostile experiences. Bos and Gartrell (2010) suggested that future research should aim to examine the specific strategies that contribute to effective communication between same-sex parents and children around issues related to family structure. Thus, broad questions remain about the specific strategies employed by gay and lesbian parents to cope with stigma, discrimination, and heterosexism and the ways in which they translate these messages to their children (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). To this end, it may be useful to adapt the themes pioneered by ethnic-racial socialization researchers and apply them to same-sex parented families.

Applying ethnic-racial socialization themes to same-sex parented families

Empirical research on racial and ethnic socialization first emerged alongside growing recognition that minority youth were encountering societal discrimination and

devaluation that resulted in additional developmental tasks, such as having to overcome stigma based on racial and ethnic group membership (Hughes et al., 2006). Studies on ethnic-racial socialization have predominantly centered around four major themes: Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, Promotion of Mistrust, and Egalitarianism (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes et al., 2006; Priest et al., 2014).

Cultural Socialization refers to explicit and implicit emphasis on racial and ethnic pride and a promotion of cultural traditions and heritage (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes et al., 2006) and has been shown to be the most common form of racial-ethnic socialization (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1999). Preparation for Bias involves preparing children for experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006; Hughes & Chen, 1999), and Promotion of Mistrust includes parental warnings about different races and ethnicities and promotes keeping a distance from these groups (Hughes et al., 2006). Lastly, Egalitarianism refers to socialization strategies in which parents explicitly encourage their children to value individual qualities over group membership or avoid conversations about race and ethnicity altogether (Hughes et al., 2006; Spencer, 1983).

Despite a robust empirical literature (e.g., Caughy et al., 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006; Peters, 2002; Spencer, 1983; Thornton, 1997; White-Johnson, Ford, & Sellers, 2010), empirically assessing socialization behaviors continues to pose challenges. To start, most studies rely on self-report, which is limiting because parents are not always aware of the extent to which they may be engaging in these broad and highly theoretical processes (Hughes et al., 2006). Moreover, concepts and terms related to ethnic and racial socialization have been used interchangeably in the literature, making it difficult to synthesize findings across studies (Priest et al., 2014). Nonetheless, quantitative measures have been developed that ask about specific parenting behaviors (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Tran & Lee, 2010) to examine the extent to which parents engaged specifically in common underlying dimensions of socialization and to clarify our understanding of ethnic-racial socialization across theoretical and empirical studies.

Similar to racial and ethnic minority parents, gay and lesbian parents contend with instances of discrimination and stigmatization in their daily lives (Goldberg & Smith, 2011). Therefore, there is reason to believe that same-sex parents may engage in protective and proactive behaviors that promote children's awareness of their diverse family structures and prepare them for potential stigma-related barriers, such as teasing or victimization (Stevenson, 1994). Moreover, many gay and lesbian parents are adopting children, which presents additional socialization dynamics, particularly for transracial adoptions. Lee (2003) referred to a *transracial adoption paradox* in which adoptees are considered ethnic and racial minorities in society but are often perceived or treated as majority members due to the fact that most adoptive parents are White and of

European descent. This paradox has led to empirical inquiry about the abilities of parents to effectively socialize children of different races and ethnicities (Ausbrooks & Russell, 2011; Lee, 2003). Studies of cultural socialization have provided a useful framework for examining how parents and children in adoptive families overcome racial and ethnic differences as well as how these efforts are related to child development. Furthermore, it has been suggested that socialization behaviors are influenced by parental attitudes about race and beliefs about the importance of cultural socialization (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, & Gunnar, 2006). Yet despite advancements in our empirical understanding of cultural socialization among adoptive families, there remains a gap in the literature with respect to how gay and lesbian parents socialize their children around their diverse family structure.

To date, only two unpublished dissertations have directly examined same-sex parenting through an ethnic-racial socialization lens (Gipson, 2008; Kosciw, 2003). Using qualitative data, Gipson (2008) found that lesbian parents engaged in Preparation for Bias and Cultural Socialization but not Promotion of Mistrust or Egalitarianism. The author concluded that it would be useful to have a standard instrument that assessed same-sex parent socialization strategies explicitly (Gipson, 2008). To measure parent socialization among a sample of 50 gay and lesbian parents with children between the ages of four and 14, Kosciw (2003) modified the Parent Racial Socialization Scale developed by Hughes and Johnson (2001) and added 10 additional items addressing parent-child involvement with gay cultural events and discussions about homophobic discrimination. Factor loadings were significant for the underlying dimensions of Preparation for Bias/Discussions of Diversity and Cultural Socialization/Awareness (Kosciw, 2003). However, this sample consisted of primarily lesbian parents (78%) in the New York metropolitan area, and the inclusionary criteria did not preclude biologically related children. Thus, it remains unclear how same-sex adoptive parents from geographically diverse regions engage in these socialization practices.

The present study

Given the overlap between the experiences of sexual-, racial-, and ethnic-minority parents, the present study adapted a well-established measure of racial socialization to assess whether and how gay and lesbian parents engage in cultural socialization around being a same-sex parent family.¹ We hypothesized that same-sex parents would report using strategies consistent with two previously identified dimensions of cultural socialization: Preparation for Bias and Cultural Socialization. Also, based on the literature, we believed that gay and lesbian parents would report engaging in additional behaviors specific to their identities as sexual-minority individuals. Thus, seven additional items were added to the measure, which ask about whether same-sex parents compared their families to those with heterosexual

parents, moved to a gay-friendly community, or openly coached their children on how to discuss family structure with others (Gipson, 2008). We refer to this dimension as Proactive Parenting.

Method

Participants

Participants included families from a larger longitudinal study, which examines adoptive family functioning, child development, parenting, and family relationships among families with gay, lesbian, and heterosexual parents (Farr & Patterson, 2013). 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 (e.g., 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.

During Wave 1, 106 families participated (29 gay couples, 27 lesbian couples, and 50 heterosexual couples) in the study (Farr et al., 2010). Following Wave 1 participation, families signed a “Permission to Recontact” form. After approximately five years, families were contacted via e-mail, phone, and Facebook and invited to participate in Wave 2 of data collection. The final sample for the present study included 95 parents (from 51 same-sex parent families; 52 fathers, 43 mothers) from Wave 2 data collection. Eighty-eight parents (93%) identified their sexual orientation as gay or lesbian, four as bisexual (4%), and three parents identified as questioning/other (3%).

Forty-four families had two parents respond, and one parent reported for the remaining seven families. The overall sample was 83% White, 13% African American or Black, 1% Asian American, and 3% multiethnic or other. Demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in [Table 1](#), broken down by family. Eighty-seven percent of fathers were White, and 79% of mothers identified as White. The majority of parents were well educated, worked full-time, and had family incomes above the national average. Among gay fathers, 27% reported being an interracial couple as compared to 14% of lesbian mothers. Of the 44 families in which both parents were reporters, seven reported that they were no longer romantically involved with the coparent. Twenty-five families resided in the Mid-Atlantic region, and others lived in 10 states along the East and West Coasts, or in the southern United States.

All parents were the legal parents of their children. Children (24 male, 27 female) had been placed as infants—at birth or within the first few weeks of life. The majority of children were reported to be healthy, with no special needs.

Table 1. Wave 2 demographics and descriptive statistics for major study variables according to family type.

	Full Sample <i>N</i> = 95 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Gay Fathers <i>n</i> = 52 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Lesbian Mothers <i>n</i> = 43 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i> test or χ^2 <i>t</i> (93)
Parents (<i>n</i> = 95)				
Mean age at visit	47.12 (5.42)	47.73 (5.16)	48.79 (5.30)	<i>t</i> (93) = 2.84**
Race (% White)	83%	87%	79%	χ^2 = 1.56
Education (% college degree)	93%	88%	98%	χ^2 = 5.82
Work status (% full-time)	73%	75%	70%	χ^2 = 1.70
Annual family income (\$K)	189 (147)	238 (163)	129 (96)	<i>t</i> (93) = 3.88**
Interracial relationship	21%	27%	14%	χ^2 = 2.38
Transracial adoption	52%	60%	42%	χ^2 = 2.97
Children (<i>n</i> = 51)				
Mean age at visit	8.33 (1.60)	8.23 (1.48)	8.60 (1.69)	<i>t</i> (49) = .58
Sex (% girls)		39%	72%	χ^2 = 11.93**
Race (% White)		37%	47%	χ^2 < 1
Same-Sex Parent Socialization				
Cultural socialization	2.79 (.73)	2.79 (.70)	2.80 (.78)	0.31
Preparation for bias	1.84 (.59)	1.89 (.63)	1.79 (.55)	-0.75
Proactive parenting	2.76 (.89)	2.83 (.80)	2.69 (.99)	-0.74

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses. Two parents reported in 44 families and 7 families had one parent reporter. For families in which both parents reported, one family score was calculated for each domain of child adjustment. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Children's ages ranged from six to 11 years ($M = 8.33$, $SD = 1.60$). Thirty-five percent of children were identified by their parents as White, 37% African American or Black, 4% Latino or Hispanic, 2% Native American or American Indian, and 22% were reported to be multiethnic. In the current sample, 53% of families had adopted across race (i.e., transracial adoption). Nearly half of families had some type of direct contact or visitation with birth families a few times per year. All families were English-speaking. There were some demographic differences among parents, which are reflected in Table 1. Lesbian mothers ($M = 48.79$, $SD = 5.30$) were older than gay fathers ($M = 47.73$, $SD = 5.16$), $t(93) = 2.84$, $p = .006$. Also, lesbian mothers tended to parent more daughters, whereas gay fathers had more sons, $\chi^2 = 11.93$, $p = .001$. On average, gay fathers had significantly higher family incomes, $t(93) = 3.88$, $p < .001$. The number of interracial couples and transracial adoptions did not significantly differ as a function of family type.

Procedure

In Wave 1, all eligible adoptive families were contacted with a letter or e-mail from the director of their cooperating adoption agency describing the study and inviting participation. For Wave 2, families were recontacted directly via e-mail, phone, and Facebook and invited to participate in a second wave of data collection. One or two researchers visited participating families in their homes. After obtaining consent from parents, participants independently completed a series of online surveys (via Qualtrics survey software).

Measures

Same-sex parent socialization

A 20-item parent measure of socialization was developed for this study, intending to assess three underlying dimensions: Preparation for Bias (8 items), Cultural Socialization (5 items), and Proactive Parenting (7 items). Thirteen of the items were directly adapted from the Preparation for Bias and Cultural Socialization subscales of the Racial-Ethnic Socialization scale (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). The original 16-item measure assessed the frequency of parent-reported racial socialization practices along three dimensions: Preparation for Bias, Cultural Socialization, and Promotion of Mistrust. When applied to an African American sample, three unit-weighted scales were developed: Preparation for Bias (7 items; $\alpha = .91$), Cultural Socialization (3 items; $\alpha = .84$), and Promotion of Mistrust (2 items; $r = .68$). There was no theoretical basis for including Promotion of Mistrust as a dimension for our sample. Thus, this two-item composite was not included in the measure. Instead, we drew on the existing research on gay and lesbian parenting to develop seven additional items that assessed an exploratory dimension we operationalized as Proactive Parenting (see Appendix A for all items). Because we had reason to believe that gay and lesbian parents engage in behaviors specifically aimed at discussing their same-sex parent family structure and controlling potentially hostile situations (Breshears, 2010; Gipson, 2008), Proactive Parenting items asked about practices that included comparing their families to those with heterosexual parents, moving to a gay-friendly community, and openly coaching children on how to discuss family structure with others. For all items, parents reported whether or not they had ever engaged in the behavior with their child (yes/no) and if so, how often in the past 12 months (1 = *never*; 5 = *very often*). Those who reported never engaging in a behavior received a 1 for the previous year if they left items blank (see Appendix A for the parent measure). The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for our proposed dimension of Proactive Parenting was .72. Cronbach's alphas for Cultural Socialization and Preparation for Bias were .78 and .74, respectively.

Analytic plan and preliminary analyses

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations, correlations, and endorsement frequencies for the individual socialization items on the parent scale were calculated to determine the extent to which parents engaged in these behaviors. The response rate on each item was very good (range 85–100%). We evaluated parent and child age, parent and child race, child sex, transracial adoptive status, and family type as possible covariates with socialization practices. For correlations among all families, power reached .98 ($\alpha = .05$) for large effects. Preliminary analyses examined possible differential associations for gay fathers and lesbian mothers; no significant differences were found between gay and lesbian parent families in reports of socialization behaviors. To evaluate the construct

validity of our measure, we factor analyzed the 20 same-sex parent socialization items using a principal components analysis with varimax rotation.

Results

Descriptive statistics for major study variables

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and associations for the three dimensions of socialization based on family type. No significant differences were found as a function of whether parents were gay or lesbian. Correlations among major study variables are displayed in Table 2. Not surprisingly, Cultural Socialization ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .73$), Preparation for Bias ($M = 1.84$, $SD = .59$), and Proactive Parenting ($M = 2.76$, $SD = .89$) were significantly correlated with one another. The correlation between Cultural Socialization and Proactive Parenting was greater than the correlation between either of these and Preparation for Bias. Child age was a significant covariate for Preparation for Bias, such that parents with older children were more likely to report engaging in these behaviors, $r(95) = .24$, $p = .020$. Parents were also more likely to report using Cultural Socialization with girls ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .72$) than with boys ($M = 2.63$, $SD = .72$), $t(93) = 2.01$, $p = .047$. No significant associations were found between parent socialization practices and parent age, parent race, child race, or transracial adoptive status. Endorsement frequencies for items assessing each dimension of same-sex parent socialization are displayed in Table 3. As shown, the majority of parents in the present sample reported same-sex parent socialization, though frequencies varied across the three dimensions. Paired samples t tests revealed that Cultural Socialization occurred more frequently than Preparation for Bias, $t(94) = 12.05$, $p < .001$. In addition, Proactive Parenting occurred more often than Preparation for Bias, based on parent reports, $t(94) = 9.50$, $p < .001$. Cultural Socialization did not significantly differ from Proactive Parenting, $t(94) = .33$, $p = .745$.

Exploratory factor analyses

The 20 same-sex parent socialization items were factor analyzed using principal axis extraction and varimax rotation. The result was a three-factor solution that accounted for 47.3% of the variance (Table 3). Factor 1 explained 26.3% of the variance and consisted of items stressing equality and education around gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) history and culture, as well as items

Table 2. Correlations among parent age, child age, and socialization dimensions.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Parent Age	—				
2. Child Age	.41**	—			
3. Preparation for Bias	.18	.24*	—		
4. Cultural Socialization	.02	.12	.34**	—	
5. Proactive Parenting	.04	-.01	.24*	.37**	—

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

Table 3. Factor analysis and endorsement frequency for items measuring dimensions of same-sex parent socialization.

Item	Factor			EverLife (Y/N)	% of Parents Reporting Item				
	1	2	3		Never	Rarely	Past Year Some times	Often	Very Often
Factor 1: Cultural Socialization									
Done things with your child to celebrate gay pride	.80	.14	.03	71%	37.9	21.1	29.5	10.5	1.1
Taken your child to gay cultural events	.78	.17	.03	78%	25.3	30.5	40.0	4.2	0.0
Thought of your child as part of the gay community	.66	.06	-.07	65%	35.8	25.3	18.9	13.7	6.3
Exposed your child to media (music, books, television, Internet) about gay culture	.63	.01	.25	79%	22.1	21.1	35.8	16.8	4.2
Talked about being gay or lesbian with someone else when your child could hear	.61	.01	.25	79%	20.0	26.3	34.7	12.6	6.3
Talked to your child about important people or events in the history of cultures different from your own	.53	.20	.37	97%	4.2	10.5	31.6	31.6	22.1
Done or said things to show your child that all people are equal regardless of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation	.51	.17	.46	100%	1.1	3.2	20.2	33.0	42.6
Factor 2: Preparation for Bias									
Told your child he/she may be treated badly because of his/her parents sexuality	.09	.80	-.02	48%	52.6	31.6	11.6	4.2	0.0
Told your child people may try to limit him/her because of his/her parents' sexuality	.10	.76	-.08	17%	82.1	11.6	5.3	1.1	0.0
Explained something that your child saw on TV or social media that showed poor treatment of LGBT individuals	.03	.74	.17	36%	64.5	20.4	11.8	3.2	0.0
Talked to your child about what it means to be gay	.04	.64	.30	91%	9.6	27.7	52.1	7.4	3.2
Talked to your child about things they may learn in school that portray gay people unjustly? (i.e., heteronormative language)	.07	.59	.08	37%	63.2	25.3	9.5	0.0	2.1
Talked to your child about the fight for equality among the LGBT community	.26	.56	.31	78%	23.4	28.7	34.0	10.6	3.2
Factor 3: Proactive Parenting									
Talked to your child about how your family is similar to families with heterosexual parents	-.04	.03	.74	88%	13.6	29.6	43.2	7.4	6.2
Talked with your child about how to discuss your family structure with others (i.e., give them language)	.26	.14	.72	83%	19.1	20.2	31.9	16.0	12.8
Said or done things to emphasize to your child that your family is "normal"	.02	-.04	.70	77%	24.5	18.1	24.5	20.2	12.8
Talked to your child about how your family is different from families with heterosexual parents	.19	.08	.69	92%	10.6	22.3	52.1	8.5	6.4
Omitted Items									
Told your child he/she had to be better than other children to get the same rewards because of who his/ her parents are	.04	.25	-.12	6%	95.8	3.2	1.1	0.0	0.0
Organized events for your child to play with other children of gay and lesbian parents	.22	.03	.39	97%	3.2	4.3	33.0	33.0	26.6
Intentionally done things to control the openness of your child's environment (i.e., move to a specific region, choose a particular school, monitor social interactions with peers)	.38	.05	.25	65%	37.9	18.9	17.9	15.8	9.5

Note. Loadings larger than .50 are shown in bold. Eigenvalues were 5.26, 2.37, and 1.83 for Factors 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

promoting diversity and awareness of other cultural groups (cultural socialization). Factor 2 was made up of items concerning prejudice and discrimination of the GLBTQ community (preparation for bias) and accounted for 11.9% of the variance. Finally, Factor 3 explained 9.1% of the overall variance and included items explicitly related to talking about same-sex parent family structures (proactive parenting). Seventeen of the 20 items had factor loadings of .50 or greater. The other three items (e.g., “intentionally done or said things to control the openness of your child’s environment,” “organized events for your child to play with other children of gay and lesbian parents,” and “told your child he/she had to be better than other children to get the same rewards because of who his/her parents are”) were omitted from the subscales because their factor loadings were below the .50 cutoff. Three unit-weighted measures were constructed to represent Cultural Socialization (7 items; $\alpha = .81$), Preparation for Bias (6 items; $\alpha = .80$) and Proactive Parenting (4 items; $\alpha = .77$).

Although our sample was not large enough to run a confirmatory factor analysis, the factors that emerged from our data were highly consistent with the racial and ethnic socialization literature (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Tran & Lee, 2010). For example, all five of the expected Cultural Socialization items loaded onto this factor in our sample. Six out of the eight anticipated Preparation for Bias items loaded onto this dimension for gay and lesbian parents. One of the expected Preparation for Bias items (e.g., “talked about being gay or lesbian with someone when your child could hear”) loaded on the Cultural Socialization subscale, and the other (e.g., “told your child he/she had to be better than other children to get the same rewards because of who his/her parents are”) did not load on any of the three factors. In addition, five of the seven exploratory items developed for this study loaded onto one of the three dimensions. One item (e.g., “thought of your child as part of the gay community”) loaded onto the Cultural Socialization subscale, and four made up the third Proactive Parenting factor.

Discussion

This study is among the first to empirically and systematically examine same-sex parent socialization using a cultural socialization framework. Our results suggest that, similar to racial- and ethnic-minority parents, the majority of gay and lesbian parents in our sample reported that they engage in protective and proactive behaviors designed to promote children’s awareness of diverse family structures and prepare them for potential stigma-related barriers. Specifically, based on our parent-report data, it appears that the content of same-sex parent socialization can be measured along underlying dimensions of Cultural Socialization and Preparation for Bias—themes historically associated with ethnic-racial socialization. In addition, parents in our sample largely endorsed Proactive Parenting practices, which specifically asked about how same-sex parents behaved and talked to their children differently from mother-father dyads. Although these items were initially

exploratory and theoretically based, our findings indicate that some socialization practices may be specific to same-sex parents. Thus, Proactive Parenting may represent a new and relevant theme of cultural socialization among these families.

In general, same-sex parents in our sample reported that they more often gave their children messages that celebrated gay and lesbian culture and heritage, as compared with communications about the potential victimization their children may experience from having two mothers or two fathers. These findings were consistent with the ethnic-racial socialization literature that suggests parents are more likely to emphasize racial and ethnic pride than potential discriminatory experiences (Hughes & Chen, 1999). However, the fact that same-sex parents also reported engaging in Preparation for Bias around issues related to sexual orientation highlights awareness among these parents that heterosexism and sexual stigma could differentially affect their children. At least from our data, it appears that gay and lesbian parents are more likely to report that they prepare children for these possibilities by emphasizing diversity and engaging in proactive conversations about different family structures. In fact, every parent in our sample reported that they had done or said things to show their children that people are equal regardless of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Furthermore, the majority of same-sex parents indicated that they regularly talk with their children about how their families are similar to and different from families with heterosexual parents as well as give them language to discuss their family structures with others. Notably, socialization strategies did not differ depending on whether parents were gay fathers or lesbian mothers, a similarity that is important to highlight considering gay fatherhood remains a fairly underdeveloped research area (Goldberg, 2012). Thus, just as cultural socialization studies have provided an empirical understanding for how parents in racial- and ethnic-minority and adoptive families address issues of diversity, results from our study suggest that same-sex parents also report engaging in cultural socialization practices. Such findings underscore the need to broaden our conceptualization of cultural socialization to include these diverse family structures.

Strengths, limitations, and directions for future research

This study addresses a major gap in the cultural socialization literature by systematically examining how gay and lesbian parents socialize their children, specifically around having same-sex parents. To date, the literature on specific socialization practices among same-sex parents has generally been inconsistent and anecdotal. By adapting a well-established measure of racial socialization (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001) to examine parenting practices specific to families headed by gay and lesbian parents, this study yields an empirical instrument that can assess same-sex parent strategies in a way that is explicit and consistent with how the field has historically examined these processes among ethnic- and racial-minority families. Given that gay and lesbian parents continue to experience

instances of discrimination and stigma, it is unsurprising that there is considerable overlap between the strategies reported by these parents and ethnic- and racial-minority parents. Further, Proactive Parenting provides a theoretically-grounded dimension of same-sex parent socialization that captures some of the parenting strategies specific to gay and lesbian parents. Such socialization practices have yet to be explored in the cultural socialization literature.

Despite these strengths, it is important to interpret the findings of this study in light of some notable limitations. To start, our sample was geographically diverse but relatively small and economically homogenous. The majority of parents reported incomes well above the national average, which raises questions about how same-sex parents of lower socioeconomic status might socialize their children differently. However, given that our participants had to adopt through agencies that legally supported same-sex parent adoptions, our sample demographics are consistent with the literature (e.g., Farr et al., 2010; Goldberg & Smith, 2011). Also, not unlike the majority of ethnic-racial socialization studies, our design was cross-sectional and based on parent self-report. Therefore, longitudinal data that include multiple informants (e.g., child report) would help shed more light on how same-sex parent socialization processes change over time as children develop. In the ethnic-racial socialization literature, there is evidence suggesting that parents are more likely to engage in practices related to Promotion of Mistrust and Preparation for Bias as children get older (Hughes & Chen, 1997, 1999; Priest et al., 2014; Tran & Lee, 2010). Thus, with follow-up data and larger sample sizes we could investigate how themes of Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, and Proactive Parenting change as these children approach adolescence and emerging adulthood.

Although our socialization measure intentionally examined parenting strategies specifically related to parents' identities as sexual minorities, given that our sample also consisted of transracially adopted children, it would be interesting to understand how these parents socialize their children around issues of race, ethnicity, and adoptive status, in addition to having same-sex parents. Although this was beyond the scope of the current study, our findings suggest that the transracial adoption paradox is further complicated when parents are gay or lesbian; future research should examine the intersectionality of these processes among same-sex parent families.

Finally, because understanding same-sex parenting practices as cultural socialization is somewhat exploratory, we did not examine possible predictors of same-sex parent socialization. It will be important for future studies to identify how and why same-sex parent socialization varies as a function of specific parent, child, and contextual factors. For example, parent experiences of discrimination and sexual orientation-related stigma, child identity, and the degree to which communities and schools are accepting of same-sex parented families could be important correlates of same-sex parent socialization. Understanding why and how parents engage in cultural socialization is important because these practices play a pivotal role in the identity development and well-being of children (Hughes & Johnson, 2001).

Thus, future research might also examine the effect of same-sex parent socialization on various child psychosocial outcomes, as well as explore the ways in which children perceive these behaviors.

Implications

Despite limitations, findings from the present study have important conceptual and clinical implications. To start, our results indicate that same-sex parents generally report using socialization strategies similar in content to those used by ethnic- and racial- minority parents. Therefore, examining same-sex parenting practices as an extension of cultural socialization provides a useful way to systematically and empirically investigate these dynamic and multidimensional processes. Also, Proactive Parenting provides an additional theme of cultural socialization that includes discussions and behaviors specific to same-sex parenting. This new dimension has been noticeably absent in the cultural socialization literature, and thus, our findings justify the need for a broader and more inclusive conceptualization of cultural socialization.

From a clinical perspective, it appears that same-sex parents are reporting that they engage with their children in what appear to be age-appropriate and egalitarian messages about having two moms or two dads. It may be useful for parents to increase the intensity of these behaviors as children mature into adolescence when having gay and lesbian parents could present additional challenges related to peer acceptance and heteronormativity (Bos & Gartrell, 2010; Litovich & Langhout, 2004). According to the ethnic-racial socialization literature, preparation for bias and other race-/ethnicity-related discussions tend to be more common among parents of older children (Priest et al., 2014). Thus, open dialogue about issues of heterosexism and stigmatization of the GLBT community may be more developmentally relevant for older children whose engagement with a broader social context might have important implications for identity and psychosocial development.

To date, studies examining the relationship between ethnic-racial socialization and child outcomes, including self-esteem, stigmatization, academic achievement, and psychosocial functioning, have produced mixed findings (Hughes et al., 2006). This relationship is further complicated for adopted children of same-sex parents, whose family structures are even more diverse. In an effort to help clarify the complexities of cultural socialization, Lee, Vonk, and Crolley-Simic (2015) developed a model of socialization among international transracial adoptive parents. The authors underscored a need to differentiate between racial socialization and cultural socialization in order to fully understand the complicated relationship between parent socialization and child identity development (Lee et al., 2015). Although a number of factors related to socialization practices were reviewed, sexual orientation was noticeably absent. Thus, we posit that this aspect of family diversity should be included in contemporary models of cultural socialization, as there is good reason to

believe that socialization around sexual identity may have important implications for the psychosocial development of children with same-sex parents.

Conclusion

The current study addresses gaps in the cultural socialization literature and contributes to our understanding of how gay and lesbian parents socialize their children, specifically around having same-sex parents. Findings corroborate previous research that has shown that gay and lesbian parents are capable parents (e.g., Farr et al., 2010; Golombok et al., 1983; Patterson, 1994), and the results contribute uniquely to the literature by offering same-sex parent socialization as a multidimensional construct made up of protective and proactive behaviors that promote children's awareness of their diverse family structure and prepare them for potential stigma-related barriers. By showing that gay and lesbian parents report socializing their school-age children around themes of Cultural Socialization, Preparation for Bias, and Proactive Parenting practices, our findings highlight the need for cultural socialization research to include this important aspect of family diversity. This study also represents a methodological shift from comparing gay and lesbian parents to their heterosexual counterparts in favor of an approach that emphasizes family process variables over family structure. Such findings have important conceptual and clinical implications that may open the door for future studies to examine the specific socialization strategies gay and lesbian parents use to help their children understand their family culture within the larger and ever-diversifying social fabric.

Note

1. Although we use the terms *same-sex parents* and *gay and lesbian parents* interchangeably, it should be noted that not all parents in our sample identified as gay and lesbian. These terms are consistent with the literature and are meant to reflect family structure and not necessarily sexual orientation or identity.

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Appendix A

Same-Sex Parent Socialization Scale

Please circle if you have *EVER* engaged in the following behaviors. If *YES*, indicate how often you have engaged in each behavior during the past *12 months*.

	Yes	No	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
1. Talked to your child about what it means to be gay	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
2. Told your child he/she may be treated badly because of his/her parents' sexuality	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
3. Explained something that your child saw on TV or social media that showed poor treatment of LGBT individuals	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
4. Told your child people may try to limit him/her because of his/her parents' sexuality	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
5. Talked to your child about the fight for equality among the LGBT community	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
6. Talked to your child about things they may learn in school that portray gay people unjustly? (i.e., heteronormative language)	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
7. Told your child he/she had to be better than other children to get the same rewards because of who his/ her parents are	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
8. Talked about being gay or lesbian with someone else when your child could hear	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
9. Exposed your child to media (music, books, television, Internet) about gay culture	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
10. Organized events for your child to play with other children of gay and lesbian parents	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
11. Taken your child to gay cultural events	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
12. Done things with your child to celebrate gay pride	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
13. Thought of your child as part of the gay community	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
14. Done or said things to show your child that all people are equal regardless of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
15. Talked to your child about important people or events in the history of cultures different from your own	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
16. Talked to your child about how your family is similar to families with heterosexual parents	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
17. Talked to your child about how your family is different from families with heterosexual parents	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
18. Said or done things to emphasize to your child that your family is "normal"	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5

(continued)

(Continued)

	Yes	No	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
19. Talked with your child about how to discuss your family structure with others (i.e., give them language)	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
20. Intentionally done things to control the openness of your child's environment (i.e., move to a specific region, choose a particular school, monitor social interactions with peers)	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5

Note. Measure adapted from Hughes and Chen, 1997; Hughes and Johnson, 2001.