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Socializing Children About Family Structure: Perspectives of Lesbian and Gay Adoptive Parents

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ABSTRACT

Despite increasing numbers of lesbian- and gay- (LG-) parent families, little research on LG-adoptive-parent families has examined parental beliefs and perceptions related to discussing their sexual minority status with their children. This study assessed 266 LG adoptive parents (160 lesbian mothers, 106 gay fathers) from the Modern Adoptive Families (MAF) study, a nationwide survey (2012–2013) of adoptive parents' pre- and post-placement experiences. A cultural socialization lens provided the framework for examining LG parenting beliefs and practices. Two measurement scales were developed to examine parents' perceptions and self-efficacy related to socializing their child about being in a sexual-minority-parent family. Results indicate that LG parents endorse the importance of unique socialization practices and generally feel confident engaging in these practices. Parent education, transracial adoption, endorsement of racial socialization, and socialization self-efficacy were positively associated with endorsement of socialization practices. Excellent reliability suggests the 2 scales have the potential of being psychometrically sound instruments with which to measure parental endorsement and related self-efficacy of socialization practices for families headed by sexual minority parents. Findings contribute to a deeper understanding of socialization and communication patterns in LG-headed families, especially those formed through adoption. Research, policy, and practice implications are discussed.

Introduction

Limited research has addressed how lesbian and gay (LG) parents talk with their children about being raised in LG-parent families (Goldberg, Sweeney, Black, & Moyer, 2016; Oakley, Farr, & Scherer, 2017), despite evidence indicating unique experiences for these children compared to those with heterosexual parents (Farr, Crain, Oakley, Cashen, & Garber, 2016). LG families formed through adoption

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contribute to the growing numbers of LG-headed families. LG couples are 4.5 times more likely to adopt than heterosexual couples and the number of LG-adoptive-parent families has doubled in the past 10 years (Gates, 2013). Yet, little is known about LG adoptive parents' perceptions of socializing their children regarding their family's sexual minority status.

Sexual minority parent families are especially vulnerable to implicit and explicit forms of discrimination (Brooks, Whitsett, & Goldbach, 2015; Goldberg, Black, Sweeney, & Moyer, 2017). At school, LG-parent families are not typically represented in books and other classroom materials. Children adopted by LG parents often contend with experiences of difference and microaggressions from peers (Farr, Crain, Oakley, Cashen, & Garber, 2016a). Some studies show children in LG-headed families, as compared to children in heterosexual-headed families, report higher rates of teasing and bullying, related to family structure, from peers at school (Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014). Despite encountering these negative experiences, children of LG parents report positive feelings about their families and display resilient characteristics in managing stigma (Farr et al., 2016a). Notably, extensive research demonstrates comparable adjustment of parents and children in both LG- and heterosexual-parent families, including adoptive families (e.g., Farr, 2017; Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013; Patterson, 2016). Favorable outcomes for children raised by sexual-minority parents suggest that LG parents are generally successful in preparing their children to navigate bias (Oakley et al., 2017).

Although an individual child may not possess a stigmatized identity, being raised by LG parents equates to membership within a minority group. As such, LG parents are tasked with socializing their children to understand how this potentially stigmatizing identity may impact them Goldberg et al., 2016). Parents are responsible for cultivating a positive family identity and providing strategies to hopefully counteract potential negative messages children raised by LG parents may experience. Several studies have explored family processes on a broader scale by family type (e.g., parent sexual orientation). In a longitudinal study of 106 lesbian-, gay-, and heterosexual-adoptive-parent families, Farr (2017) examined parenting factors and their impact on child adjustment. Results indicated that child wellbeing at the first ($M_{age} = 3$) and second waves ($M_{age} = 8$) was closely linked to family processes, such as parenting approaches and parenting stress, but not to parents' sexual orientation (Farr, 2017). Yet, little is known about the beliefs, perceptions, and approaches used by LG parents in raising their children. This study was designed to examine the factor structure of newly developed scales and to explore how LG parents intend to prepare or have prepared their child to manage potential bias and develop a positive sense of identity, while being raised in a family with sexual minority status.

Cultural socialization framework

A cultural socialization framework adapted from the racial socialization literature allows for examination of LG parenting practices that provide children with coping

skills to manage bias and discrimination and help instill pride in one's identity (Oakley et al., 2017). Although the comparison of race and sexual orientation to understand topics such as discrimination or identity development is not new, its application with parenting socialization strategies has only been addressed recently in several studies (e.g., Oakley et al., 2017). Racial socialization refers to the parenting tactics related to promoting positive racial identity, while also imparting tools to deal with potential discrimination (Lee, 2003). Previous literature has emphasized the importance for parents to undertake racial socialization practices with their adopted children (Lee, Crolley-Simic, & Vonk, 2016; Pinderhughes, Matthews, & Zhang, 2016); doing so contributes to children's development of self-esteem, adjustment, and positive racial identity (McRoy, 1994; Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2007). Accordingly, researchers have developed several measures to assess parental cultural competence and socialization such as the transracial adoption parenting scale (TAPS; Massatti, Vonk, & Gregoire, 2004). The components of parental cultural competence can vary, but often include themes such as teaching children how to develop a positive racial identity, participating in multicultural activities, and providing strategies for managing racial bias and discrimination (Massatti et al., 2004).

Utilizing a cultural socialization framework from the racial socialization literature offers a systematic approach to analyze experiences within LG adoptive families. Just as transracial adoptive parents, including those who are LG, engage in various racial socialization practices with their children, LG parents also talk with their children about taking pride in one's identity and how to manage bias related to having LG parents, suggesting a similar linkage may exist with socialization and child adjustment. It is important to note that although many aspects of parenting a child of color are similar to that of raising a family parented by sexual minorities (e.g., child may encounter teasing from peers based on marginalized identity), the experiences of race and sexual orientation are not wholly comparable. Our study was designed to utilize the knowledge developed through the racial socialization literature to conceptualize how LG parents intend to socialize or have begun socializing their children about being raised by sexual minority parents.

LG parent socialization perceptions, beliefs, and practices

There are several studies to date about how LG parents socialize their children regarding their sexual minority family status. In a qualitative study of 41 same-sex and different-sex adoptive-parent families, Goldberg et al. (2016) found that most parents took a proactive approach (73%, 44 families) to socialization surrounding their children's (M_{age} = 5.81 years) same-sex-parent family statuses. Some parents described a cautious approach (27%, 16 families) in which they acknowledged their LG-parent family status, but were careful about not being overly focused on their differences.

Similarly, in their study of sexual-minority-parent socialization practices, Oakley et al. (2017) found the majority of parents in same-sex couples (N = 95)

endorsed behaviors designed to promote awareness of diverse family structures and prepare children ($M_{age} = 8.33$ years) for facing potential stigma (i.e., on the basis of being part of LG parent families). Outcomes suggested similarities in socialization practices for parenting children of color and differences for parenting in LG-headed households. Similar to racial and ethnic socialization, parenting practices related to the concepts of *preparation for bias* and *cultural socialization* were endorsed (Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Oakley et al., 2017). These concepts are underlying dimensions often found in racial socialization scales, such as the TAPS. However, a new dimension was endorsed by same-sex parents, who demonstrated a propensity toward *proactive parenting*, such as educating their children about different family structures, with a focus on celebrating lesbian and gay culture (e.g., attending gay pride parades; Oakley et al., 2017). Taken together, these findings suggest that LG parents participate in socialization practices related to their specific family structures. However, little is known about how parents value and prioritize socialization within their family. Moreover, further information is needed regarding possible associations between parent's endorsement of socialization and their level of comfort enacting socialization practices. Because high levels of confidence are found to translate into more frequent efforts regarding racial socialization (Berbery & O'Brien, 2011), self-efficacy is an important consideration in examining LG-parent socialization practices.

Parental self-efficacy

Parental self-efficacy is grounded in Bandura's social-cognitive theory (1977) and is defined as a parents' appraisal of their own parenting skills and competency. Self-efficacy considers both the knowledge and confidence levels related to the parenting task. Research has linked high parental self-efficacy levels with other positive parenting practices (e.g., positive discipline practices) and low self-efficacy levels with negative parenting practices (Carless, Melvin, Tonge, & Newman, 2015). In addition, high parental self-efficacy was positively associated with overall family functioning and positive youth development and inversely associated with youth behavior problems (Carless et al., 2015).

Considering how discrimination toward LG individuals can be pervasive and exist in multiple settings, parental confidence in their ability to effectively communicate about sexual orientation to their children can be quite impactful on their children. Parental self-efficacy can serve as a moderator to cushion adverse experiences and, thus, should be considered when researching family contexts (e.g., racial minority) and management of potentially unwelcome or hostile environments. Berbery and O'Brien (2011) originally developed the cultural and racial socialization scale based upon their findings that parents' ability to socialize their children about race was moderated by their confidence levels in their ability to effectively do so. Berbery and O'Brien (2011) attributed these findings to Bandura's (1977) earlier work regarding high levels of parental self-efficacy as a key

component in parents' ability to persevere and eventually achieve success, despite encountering adversity. However, research from the racial socialization literature indicates levels of parental self-efficacy are inconsistent (Vonk & Massatti, 2008). Goldberg et al. (2016) suggested that LG parents may be more open to engaging in racial socialization practices, compared with heterosexual parents, as their families live outside of the dominant narrative model and often hold multiple minority statuses, including forming families through adoption. In a similar vein, inquiry is needed to understand same-sex parents' ease of enacting socialization practices related to their sexual minority family status. To date, we are not aware of any such studies.

This study

The purpose of our exploratory study was to examine LG parents' endorsement of the value of socialization practices and self-efficacy regarding practices for socializing children about sexual-minority family issues. We were interested in exploring the factor structure of two newly developed scales measuring the broad constructs of LG parents' beliefs related to their socialization practices about sexual-minority family issues and their self-efficacy regarding such practices: the *sexual minority parent socialization beliefs scale* (SMP-SBS) and the *sexual minority parent socialization self-efficacy scale* (SMP-SES), respectively. Both the SMP-SBS and SMP-SES were adapted by Brodzinsky (2015) from scales used among transracial adoptive families: (a) the TAPS (Berbery & O'Brien, 2011; Massatti et al., 2004) and (b) the racial socialization self-efficacy subscale (RSSES; Berbery & O'Brien, 2011).

Accordingly, we developed the following research questions:

RQ1. What are LG parents' beliefs and perceptions about preparing children for bias and instilling a positive identity related to being part of a sexual minority parent family and is the scale measuring this concept reliable and valid? We hypothesized that the SMP-SBS would capture socialization constructs as a three-factor structure comparable to the 29-item TAPS (Berbery & O'Brien, 2011; Massatti et al., 2004) with acceptable reliability and validity. Based on prior research indicating that LG parents endorsed racial socialization practices Goldberg et al., 2016), we hypothesized that respondents would report high ratings across items on the SMP-SBS.

RQ2. What are LG parents' perceived levels of self-efficacy regarding enacting these sexual-minority-parent socialization practices with their children and is the scale measuring this construct reliable and valid? We hypothesized that the new scale, SMP-SES (8-item measure; Brodzinsky, 2015), modified for use among LG parents would load as a single factor, comparable to the findings reported by Berbery and O'Brien (2011) with acceptable reliability and validity. Based on previous research from the racial socialization literature (Berbery & O'Brien, 2011), we hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between parental self-efficacy and parental beliefs about socialization.

RQ3. What demographic child and/or parent characteristics are associated with endorsement of sexual minority socialization and related self-efficacy? Based on previous research (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2016; Oakley et al., 2017) we hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between endorsement and (a) sociodemographic factors such as parent education and household income, (b) endorsement of racial socialization, (c) parents' report of their child being teased about having an LGBT parent, and (d) child adjustment.

We did not anticipate any differences between lesbian mothers and gay fathers, but given previous research indicating that some differences do exist, such as gay fathers being more likely than lesbian mothers to be in interracial relationships, have a higher household income, and participate in open adoptions with birth families (e.g., Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016), and the dearth of literature on gay fathers, we explored how each research question varied by family type (lesbian mothers versus gay fathers).

Method

Sample

This study used a subsample from the Modern Adoptive Families (MAF) study, developed by Brodzinsky (2015) in collaboration with the Donaldson Adoption Institute. The MAF is an online, nationwide survey of the pre- and postadoption experiences of diverse adoptive families, with a particular emphasis on those headed by sexual minority parents (Brodzinsky, 2015). The MAF sample for this study included 266 sexual minority parents (160 lesbian mothers, 106 gay fathers; $M_{age} = 43$ years).

Procedure

Participants were recruited from 2012–2013 using convenience sampling through adoption agencies and adoption attorneys, who, at the request of the MAF project director (Brodzinsky, 2015), sent letters to previous clients describing the study (i.e., to examine the perceptions, experiences, and needs of different types of adoptive families). Efforts were made to oversample from agencies known to work with same-sex parent families to help meet one of the project goals of comparing experiences based upon the sexual orientation of the parent and to ensure a large sample size of sexual minority parents. Invitations to participate in the study were also sent to adoptive parent and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLBTQ) parent organizations, posted on GLBTQ parenting websites, and distributed by colleagues who had conducted research with adoptive families (see Brodzinsky, 2015 for details). The response rate is unknown due to the recruitment methods (Brodzinsky, 2015).

Parents who were interested after learning of the study responded to the researchers by email or telephone, and then received a letter by email describing

the study in more detail. The letter shared the three options for participating, which included completing the online questionnaire, receiving and returning the questionnaire by email, or receiving and returning by postal mail. Over 95% of respondents completed the questionnaire online via Survey Monkey. The instructions indicated only one parent per family should complete the survey. No compensation was offered for participation. Study procedures were reviewed and approved by the institutional review board of Illinois State University.

The MAF survey consisted of 203 open- and closed-ended questions spanning a variety of topics related to the family composition, including the demographics of family members. Questions covered a variety of adoption-related experiences (such as pre- and post-adoption training and support). Relevant to this study were questions regarding parents' sexual orientation socialization attitudes and beliefs (for sexual-minority parents only). Respondents' sexual orientation was categorized from their answers to two questions: (a) whether they self-identified as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or other (e.g., queer, pansexual) and (b) whether they self-identified as a sexual minority parent. Respondents were then further grouped as either lesbian or gay, according to their gender, even if this was not how they self-identified. Five women who self-identified as bisexual but not as a sexual-minority parent (i.e., married to a man) were classified as heterosexual. Four women who self-identified as queer or pansexual also identified as sexual minority parents and therefore were classified as lesbian for the purpose of this project. Participants were grouped together to maximize participant responses, but we acknowledge that this categorization of different identities may mask the heterogeneity within this sample of sexual-minority parents (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2016) and relying on monosexual labels (lesbian/gay) can contribute to bi-erasure (Hackl, Boyer, & Galupo, 2013). There were no participants who identified as transgender or gender non-conforming in the study.

Measures

Sexual minority parents' socialization beliefs and perceptions
Participants' self-reported socialization beliefs and perceptions were assessed with a new measure, the SMP-SBS, modified for LG parents from an established measure about racial socialization (the 29-item TAPS; Berbery & O'Brien, 2011; Massatti et al., 2004). The SMP-SBS consists of 29 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*, with higher scores indicating higher levels of agreement about the importance of particular socialization practices. Cronbach's alphas were measured to assess the reliability of our 29-item scale by family type (lesbian mothers: $a = .86$; gay fathers: $a = .87$) and with the total sample of LG parents ($a = .87$). An example item is "I believe it is very important that I prepare my child to recognize homophobia and other forms of discrimination." Changes such as replacing the word *racism* with *homophobia* were common modifications from the TAPS (Berbery & O'Brien, 2011).

Sexual minority parents' socialization self-efficacy

Participants' self-reported socialization self-efficacy was evaluated with a new measure, the SMP-SES, modified for LG parents from an established measure about racial self-efficacy socialization (the 7-item RSSES; Berbery & O'Brien, 2011). One item was added to the SMP-SES: "Explain the meaning of sexual orientation and sexual identity to my child." Thus, the SMP-SES consists of eight items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) *not at all confident* to (5) *highly confident*, with higher scores indicating greater parental confidence in their ability to do each of the items, such as "Teach my child adaptive ways of dealing with homophobia." Cronbach's alphas were excellent for lesbian mothers ($a = .93$), good for gay fathers ($a = .87$) and excellent for the total sample ($a = .91$).

Racial socialization beliefs and perceptions

The TAPS (Berbery & O'Brien's three-factor solution, 2011; Massatti et al., 2004) was used to evaluate how parents value racial socialization practices. This 29-item scale included items such as "I believe it is very important that I prepare my child to recognize racism." Responses were on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree)*, with higher scores indicating a higher endorsement of racial socialization.

Racial socialization self-efficacy

The RSSES (Berbery & O'Brien, 2011) was used to assess parents' feelings of self-efficacy enacting racial socialization practices. The 7-item scale included items such as "Teach my child adaptive ways of dealing with racism." Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all confident* to 5 = *highly confident)*, with higher scores indicating a higher level of parental confidence in their ability to enact racial socialization practices.

Child teased for having LGBT parents

Parents responded (yes/no/not applicable) to the question "Have your children ever been teased, taunted, or bullied at school because they have parents who are LGBT?"

Emotional problems at placement

Parents responded (yes/no) to the question "Did your child have emotional problems at the time of placement?"

Current psychological functioning

Parents reported on current psychological functioning of their child (Likert-scale of 1–5; 1 = *poor*, 5 = *excellent)*.

Sociodemographic characteristics

Sociodemographic characteristics of the responding parent and oldest adopted child were collected including: parent age, parent gender, parent race, parent educational attainment, and total household income; child age, child gender, child age at adoption, number of years living in the family; transracial adoption status, and adoption type (private domestic infant placement, foster care placement, intercountry placement). Partnered status (yes/no) was grouped together with marital status because same-sex marriage was not legal in each state at the time of data collection.

Data analysis

We looked at possible covariates and descriptive information to address the study aims using Stata 14 (Stata, 2015). Exploratory factor analyses were conducted to determine if the factor structures from the original measures would emerge with both the SMP-SBS and SMP-SES. To identify differences by family type, measurement invariance and group comparisons were conducted.

Results

Participants reported that their oldest adopted children, on average, had been placed at a relatively early age (M_{age} = 1.87; SD = 2.69; 0–16 years), had been with their adoptive families an average of 5.90 years (SD = 3.97; .2–17), and were an average of 7.07 years of age during data collection (SD = 4.51; 0–17). These figures represented the respondent's oldest adopted child, who was the target for most of the child-focused questions on the survey, given that 51% of respondents had additional adopted and/or biological children, Most parent respondents were White (85%), married/partnered (84%), college-educated (90%), and middle-to upper middle class (69% reported family income >$100,000), and represented a two-parent family (82%). Transracial adoptions, defined as the child being of a different race than both parents, were completed by 59% of families. Types of adoption represented in this sample included public domestic (46%), private domestic (36%), and international (19%) adoptions. Families lived across the country, with the most respondents living in California (n = 45, 17%), Massachusetts (n = 23, 9%), and Washington (n = 23, 9%). Table 1 provides demographic information and descriptive statistics for respondents by family type.

Research question 1: SMP-SBS beliefs/intentions

Our first research question was to determine LG parents' beliefs and perceptions about preparing children for bias and instilling a positive identity related to being part of a sexual minority parent family. Before determining the factor structure, items on the scale were examined. The majority of parents endorsed the value of these socialization practices, supporting our hypothesis. Respondents reported

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Lesbian Mother and Gay Father Respondents+.

	Lesbian Mothers (n = 160) M(SD) or %	Gay Fathers (n = 106) M(SD) or %	Full sample (N = 266) M(SD) or %
Respondent Age (years)	43.46 (7.46) [29–64]	43.28 (6.82) [28–62]	43.38 (7.20) [28–64]
Respondent Race			
Caucasian	132 (90%)	82 (80%)	214 (86%)
African American	4 (3%)	8 (8%)	12 (5%)
Asian	2 (1%)	4 (4%)	6 (2%)
Hispanic	1 (1%)	7 (7%)	8 (3%)
Native American	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)
Biracial/Multiracial	6 (4%)	2 (2%)	8 (3%)
Other			
Respondent Education (≥ college completion)	134 (90%)	93 (90%)	227 (90%)
Length of time married/partnered (years)	13.07 (6.25) [2–35]	13.31 (5.79) [3–31]	13.17 (6.06) [2–35]
Household Income			
<$50,000	16 (11%)	2 (2%)	18 (7%)
$50,000–100,000	48(33%)	11 (11%)	59 (24%)
$100,000–150,000	58 (39%)	22 (22%)	80 (32%)
>$150,000	25 (17%)	67 (66%)	92 (37%)
Transracial adoption (yes)	102 68%	64 62%	178 67%
Child age at adoption (years)	1.97 (2.81) [0–16]	1.89 (2.61) [0–12]	1.87 (2.69) [0–16]
Child age at time of study (years)	8.21 (4.60) [.2–18]	7.30 (4.15) [.4–17]	7.70 (4.51) [.2–18]
Child years in family	6.33 (4.21) [.2–18]	5.44 (3.27) [.3–17]	5.90 (3.97) [.2–18]
Adoption type			
Foster care	60 40%	54 52%	130 (44%)
Private domestic	50 34%	42 41%	111 (37%)
International	39 26%	77%	57 (19%)
Child Race			
Caucasian	43 (29%)	26 (25%)	81 (27%)
African American	40 (27%)	29 (28%)	78 (26%)
Asian	18 (12%)	7(7%)	32 (11%)
Hispanic	13 (9%)	20(19%)	41 (14%)
Native American	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	2 (1%)
Biracial/Multiracial	33 (22%)	20 (19%)	62 (21%)
Other	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)
Child Sex (male)	65 (44%)	72 70%	164 55%

+demographic information for the respondent's oldest adopted child.

high ratings ($Ms = 3.11$–4.88 out of 5.00) across items. A t-test revealed there were no significant differences between the mean scores of lesbian mothers ($M = 4.41$) and gay fathers ($M = 4.37$) or factor scores by parent gender. To further compare mothers and fathers, tests of measurement invariance were conducted, suggesting acceptable model fit across parent gender, although differences in scale interpretation existed between mothers and fathers, $\chi^2 = 118.78$ ($p < .001$). See Table 2 for SMP-SBS descriptive information.

Preliminary analysis indicated high factorability; Bartlett's test was significant at $p < .001$ and the overall value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test was .85. A two-factor solution was obtained, explaining 73% of the variance. Of the 29 items, 26 loaded substantially ($> .30$) and the remaining three were dropped. The resulting total scale reliability was strong ($a = .87$) and for each of the factors (factor 1: $a = .84$, factor 2: $a = .80$). There was a very weak positive correlation between the factors, r (250) $= .06$, $p < .001$. Factor 1 reflected items that recognize and value socialization because of the unique experience of being raised in an LG-headed family and items that prioritize positive peer interactions with children also raised in LG-

Table 2. Final Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Sexual Minority Parent Socialization Beliefs Scale (SMP-SBS) and the Sexual Minority Parent Socialization Self-Efficacy Scale (SMP-SES) ($N = 266$).

	Factors		
	F1	F2	h^2
Scale/Items			
Sexual Minority Parent Socialization Beliefs Scale (SMP-SBS)			
1. I know that homophobia exists, but I don't believe it is important to teach my child about it. (R)		0.47	0.21
2. I believe that LGBT parents have additional parenting challenges, over and above those experienced by heterosexual parents.			0.12
3. I believe that discussions with my child about sexual orientation and homophobia may do more harm than good. (R)		0.45	0.28
4. I think it is very important to educate my child about the realities of prejudice, bias, and discrimination in relation to homosexuality.		0.53	0.36
5. If it appears that my child is uncomfortable with my sexual orientation, it is important to wait for him or her to raise the topic rather than initiating it on my own. (R)		0.43	0.19
6. I believe it is very important that I prepare my child to recognize homophobia and other forms of discrimination.		0.53	0.32
7. When others make insensitive remarks about homosexuality in the presence of my child, it is best to simply ignore their comments unless my child appears upset about them. (R)		0.42	0.12
8. I think it is important that my child meets other children who have LGBT parents.	0.77		0.54
9. If my child is teased about having a LGBT parent, it is best to allow him or her to figure out how to cope with the issue on their own. (R)			0.08
10. In helping my child learn about discrimination and bias, it is important to include examples related to people's prejudice about homosexuality.		0.56	0.31
11. I believe it is important to talk with my child about my sexual orientation.	0.46		0.37
12. I believe that coping with homophobia for my child, including having a LGBT parent, will be much the same as coping with other problems he or she will face. (R)		0.34	0.11
13. I think it matters little what others say to my child about my sexual orientation as long as I love him or her. (R)		0.66	0.35
14. Providing my child with opportunities to learn about discrimination, bias, homophobia, and heterosexism, and how to handle them, is a high priority for me.	0.52		0.37
15. It is important to include my child in community events that celebrate all kinds of diversity, including differences in sexual identity and sexual orientation.	0.82		0.57
16. I believe that my child will make too much of homophobia if we develop a sensitivity to it. (R)		0.69	0.52
17. Taking my child to LGBT pride events may do him more harm than good. (R)	0.41		0.21
18. It is a priority for me that my child be comfortable with people of all sexual orientations and identities.	0.36		0.16
19. Sharing my coming out story with my child is (or will be) an important parenting responsibility.	0.47		0.30
20. It is important that my child not share information about my sexual orientation with his or her friends or with teachers. (R)	0.46		0.20
21. Providing my child with opportunities to have experiences with other LGBT-headed families is important to me.	0.79		0.63
22. When others tease my child about having a LGBT parent, it is important that he or she be prepared to cope with this problem.	0.38		0.30
23. By normalizing diversity among people, including those with different sexual orientations and identities, I can help my child develop greater tolerance and acceptance of others.	0.34		0.12
24. It is important for me to remember that others may view my family as different.		0.32	0.14
25. Paying little attention to the fact that my child is being raised by a sexual-minority individual(s) makes me a better parent. (R)		0.65	0.37
		0.47	0.43

Table 2. (*Continued*).

	Factors		
	F1	F2	h^2
26. I need to teach my child a variety of coping strategies from which to choose when faced with homophobia and other forms of prejudice.			
27. Seeking support and advice from other adults or parents about raising a child in a LGBT-headed home is a priority for me.	0.44		0.31
28. Helping my child feel pride in his or her family is a high priority.	0.56		0.27
29. It is important that my child not feel that his or her family is different from others. (R)		0.30	0.07
Eigenvalue	6.76	1.54	
% Explained variance	59.47	13.54	
Internal reliability	.870		
Sexual Minority Parent Socialization Self-Efficacy Scale (SMP-SES)	F1		h^2
Speak out against any homophobic remarks made in my child's presence.	0.73		0.53
Teach my child how to confront the stereotypes that people may have about LGBT individuals and their families.	0.80		0.63
Talk about my feelings about sexual orientation and homophobia with my child.	0.78		0.61
Talk with my child about the differences in our family compared to other families.	0.77		0.59
Role-play techniques with my child to use in the case of homophobic teasing or comments at school.	0.69		0.48
Talk with my child about his or her feelings regarding have a LGBT parent(s).	0.81		0.65
Teach my child adaptive ways of coping with homophobia.	0.79		0.63
Explain the meaning of sexual orientation and sexual identity to my child.	0.68		0.46
Eigenvalue	4.59		
% Explained variance	99.62		
Internal reliability	.911		

parent families, whereas Factor 2 emphasized preparation for bias. See Table 2 for items and factor loadings.

Research question 2: SMP-SES self-efficacy

Our second research question examined LG parents' perceived levels of parental self-efficacy regarding enacting sexual-minority-parent socialization practices with their children; respondents generally reported high self-efficacy ($Ms = 3.93–4.65$ out of 5.00). A *t*-test showed no significant differences in the total mean score between lesbian mothers ($M = 4.41$) and gay fathers ($M = 4.28$) or the factor score, but tests of measurement invariance showed differences in scale interpretation may exist between mothers and fathers $\chi2 = 32.76$ ($p < .001$). See Table 2 for SMP-SES descriptive information.

Preliminary analysis indicated moderately high factorability; Bartlett's test was significant at $p < .001$ and the overall value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test was .91. Further supporting our hypothesis, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted and the 8-item SMP-SES revealed a single-factor solution explaining 99% of the variance. The first factor was very strong with an eigenvalue of 4.60, large enough to be confident that all the items tapped a single dimension (Acock, 2013). All of the loadings were substantial, ranging from .67 to .81. See Table 3 for SMP-SES items and factor loadings.

Research question 3: Factors associated with socialization and self-efficacy endorsement

Associations among parental socialization beliefs (SMP-SBS); socialization self-efficacy (SMP-SES); and various child, parent, and family demographic variables were next analyzed using chi-square, ANOVA, and t-tests. Both the total mean scores of each scale and the factor scores were compared with each association.

Associations between socialization beliefs and self-efficacy

A small positive correlation between endorsement of socialization and related self-efficacy was found, $r(250) = .277, p < .001$, indicating that parents who more often endorsed the value of sexual-orientation socialization for their children also felt more confident in their ability to engage in these socialization practices. When correlations were conducted by factor score, only the first factor of the socialization scale was associated with self-efficacy, $r(250) = .277, p < .001$).

Associations among socialization beliefs and self-efficacy and child, parent, and family demographics

Parent education, $\chi^2(53) = 59.90, p < .03$, and a transracial placement, $\chi^2(86) = 112.70, p < .05$, were positively associated with the mean score of higher endorsement of socialization beliefs. Child race was positively associated with the mean score of higher endorsement of self-efficacy, $\chi^2(120) = 146.71, p < .05$, with parents of children of color more likely to endorse self-efficacy of sexual-minority-parent socialization. No other significant associations were found.

Associations among socialization beliefs and self-efficacy and racial socialization beliefs/self-efficacy

Correlations with socialization and the mean scores on the racial socialization scale were largely correlated, $r(166) = .728, p < .001$, and the self-efficacy and the mean scores on the racial efficacy scale were moderately correlated, $r(166) = .533, p < .001$, meaning that parents who endorsed racial socialization and self-efficacy were more likely to endorse LG parent socialization and self-efficacy. Correlations with each of the two socialization factors were also positively correlated (F1: $r(166) = .687, p < .001$; F2: $r(166) = .270, p < .001$). There were no differences by parent gender.

Associations among socialization beliefs and self-efficacy and child teasing

There was no significant association between children's experiences being teased about having an LGBT parent and parent socialization beliefs nor self-efficacy, although 33% of parents reported that their child had experienced this type of bullying. There was an association between adoption type and child teasing, with children adopted from foster care more likely to have experienced teasing about having an LGBT parent, $\chi^2(4) = 12.83, p < .01$.

Associations among socialization beliefs and self-efficacy and child adjustment

A statistically significant effect for parent gender was observed, $t(-2.81) = 4.02$, $p < .003$, with mothers ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.08$) rating their child's psychological adjustment lower than fathers ($M = 4.23$, $SD = .83$). An ordered logistic regression was conducted to examine the effect of parents' endorsement of, and self-efficacy with, socialization practices on current child psychological functioning, controlling for child current age and a lagged indicator of emotional problems at placement. Higher endorsement of socialization practices was associated with decreased odds of excellent adjustment ($OR = .10$, $p < .001$). However, there was a significant interaction between emotional problems and parents' socialization scores ($OR = 13.9$, $p < .001$) meaning that for children with emotional problems at placement, parents' endorsement of socialization practices *were* associated with higher levels of psychological adjustment, especially for younger children 2–5.9 years ($OR = 0.26$, $p < .003$).

Discussion

This study drew upon cultural socialization theory and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) to better understand parenting beliefs and self-efficacy about socialization practices in LG-adoptive-parent families. Understanding family processes within LG-parent families is a relatively new field of research (Goldberg et al., 2014), and thus we drew from the racial socialization literature to provide a theoretical framework for understanding beliefs and perceptions of sexual-minority-parent socialization.

Socialization beliefs

Our hypothesis that LG-parent families would value socialization practices based on their minority status related to sexual orientation was supported. These findings extend earlier research (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2016; Oakley et al., 2017) showing that LG adoptive parents strongly endorse beliefs and practices related to uniquely socializing their children. The average score on the SMP-SBS ($M = 4.19$ of 5.00) indicated parents frequently report they *agree* (4) or *strongly agree* (5) about the value of socialization practices. Factor analyses supported a two-factor solution, with a high alpha coefficient, suggesting this is a reliable measure (Acock, 2013) that future researchers interested in sexual orientation socialization practices and outcomes may consider a useful tool in their assessment of families. The first factor emphasized cultural socialization items reflecting general acknowledgment that being raised in an LG-headed family is a unique and distinct experience, and that there is value for their child in having positive experiences in socializing with other LG-parent families. The second factor focused on preparation for bias.

Items related to preparing children for how to handle potentially challenging peer interactions related to being part of an LG-headed family were endorsed particularly strongly among respondents. Although we found no association with

endorsement and parent report of teasing, this may be due to parents' desires to protect their children from unwanted teasing and concerns about the impact of discrimination from peers on their children's wellbeing (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Parents' own experience of discrimination and marginalization as a sexual-minority person and anticipation that their children may encounter it too can create stress, leading them to consider different ways to prepare for and manage bias with their children. Comparatively, racial socialization literature suggests a key component of socialization (preparation for bias) happens in more direct association with experiences of discrimination. More research is needed to fully capture the motivation behind parent endorsement of socialization and understand the influence of direct versus anticipated discrimination.

Although Berbery and O'Brien (2011) revealed a three-, rather than two-, factor solution for racial socialization beliefs and intentions, some cultural socialization practices are likely unique for sexual versus racial minority parent families— aligned with earlier research (Oakley et al., 2017). In adapting a racial socialization measure, Oakley et al. (2017) also found a factor structure that was in some ways similar, but in other ways different, among LG versus racial-minority parents. For instance, Oakley et al. (2017) identified the specific practices that same-sex parents used as a dimension called *proactive parenting*. The researchers' addition of items measuring this construct included questions related to moving to a gay-friendly neighborhood, talking about family structure, and comparing their family to heterosexual-parent families (Oakley et al., 2017). Even though there were only minor wording changes in the development of the modified scale, major differences emerged in our study when sexual orientation variables replaced race-related variables. Our findings echoed the salience of proactive parenting as an important theme among LG adoptive parents' socialization.

Respondents highly rated items related to instilling pride in one's own family. Transracial adoptive parents of children of color have identified cultural events as a way to instill a sense of pride in their family heritage to help counteract feelings of marginality (Mohanty et al., 2007). Similarly, LG-parent families also face stigma (Farr, 2017) and indicate they view developing a positive sense of pride in their sexual minority identities as important. LG parents may consider affirming family diversity as a valuable way to counteract potential messages of bias and discrimination. Pride parades and other events have increased LG visibility and may contribute to parents' expectations that their family will have an opportunity to be involved and participate in these types of activities as means to help their children develop an appreciation for diversity and feel pride in their family's identity. In many respects, considering parallels between racial discrimination and sexual orientation discrimination can be helpful in developing approaches for working with LG-headed families. Similar to components of racial socialization approaches (Pinderhughes et al., 2016), LG parents affirm their support of the importance of preparing their children for dealing with potential bias related to being raised in an LG-parent family, while simultaneously nurturing a sense of positive pride and

identity related to their family status. Although the SMP-SBS assessing LG-parent socialization beliefs was adapted from the TAPS (Berbery & O'Brien, 2011), the items loaded differently, which is not surprising given that the constructs of race and sexual orientation differ and there are differences between racial- and sexual-minority-parent socialization (Goldberg et al., 2016).

Self-efficacy scale

Our hypothesis was supported with the SMP-SES capturing a single dimension of parental self-efficacy related to socializing children about being raised in a same-sex household, with high internal reliability ($a = .91$). Respondents strongly endorsed feelings of self-efficacy suggesting confidence and perceived skills in their abilities to enact socialization practices with their children. Parents' confidence regarding these socialization practices is especially important because parental self-efficacy can increase parents' capacity to manage hardships (Bandura, 1977). As we consider the adverse conditions LG parent families may face (e.g., less support from family and places of employment, adverse legal conditions; Goldberg et al., 2014), it is important to evaluate the protective qualities of high parental self-efficacy related to LG parent socialization. Indeed, high parental self-efficacy should be acknowledged as a trait that LG adoptive parents might draw upon as they navigate creating a healthy home environment.

Child race and mean scores on the racial socialization self-efficacy scale were positively associated with the mean scores on the SMP-SES, suggesting that self-efficacy may be especially crucial for interracial families, and thus underscoring why assessing competence as a distinct concept could be important. It is important to consider how sexual-minority status and race may intersect to create unique concerns for LG parents of color or LG parents with children of color. For some families, race may be the presenting identity depending on the environment or the intersection of two marginalized identities may make the child especially vulnerable to discrimination. Additionally, parental self-efficacy could be considered as a contributor to children raised in same-sex-headed households having comparable outcomes to peers raised in heterosexual-headed households, despite potentially increased experiences of adversity.

Factors associated with socialization endorsement

No significant differences in mean scores emerged in socialization beliefs and practices, nor in self-efficacy, between lesbian and gay parents, aligned with some earlier research (Oakley et al., 2017). Although additional analyses validated both scales across parent gender, significant differences within model fit suggest that the overall meaning of the constructs being measured are similar, but there may be some variation based on parental sexual orientation (gender). Overall, the similarity between lesbian and gay adoptive parents is notable. Gender expectations and stereotypes suggest that women (lesbian mothers) might have been more open

about dealing with sexual orientation socialization with their children, based on research that women are more involved in family rituals than men (Stein, 1992). However, as Oswald (2002) noted, gender and family research has historically presumed heterosexuality, thus obscuring the intersection of sexuality with gender norms and its contribution to family dynamics. From a practice perspective, the lack of differences found by gender suggests that professionals should be aware that both lesbian and gay parents endorse the importance of sexual orientation socialization and are confident in their ability to engage in this process.

Aligning with earlier research (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2016), our results indicate a positive association between child's race/transracial placement and socialization practices, suggesting that LG parents participating in racial socialization may be more likely to participate in LG family socialization and vice versa, based on the idea that their child may be susceptible to encountering multiple forms of stigma, such as based on race, family, structure, or adoptive status. Also consistent with previous socialization research, parents' education was positively associated with endorsement, and thus practitioners may benefit from mindfulness around working with parents across a range of educational backgrounds, because the concept of socialization may not have been previously introduced.

Socialization practices among LG parents were positively associated with psychological functioning for children who had emotional problems at the time of adoption placement, suggesting a positive association between these socialization practices and children's wellbeing.

These findings suggest that socialization practices among LG parents may be particularly important for children placed with emotional problems, especially for parents of preschool-aged children. Children with a history of emotional problems may be particularly vulnerable to peer teasing and need additional support to prevent internalizing negative peer behavior and discrimination. Julian and McCall (2016) found the association between emotional problems at placement and poor social skills to be particularly strong for children adopted from an institution, especially for children adopted beyond infancy. Importantly, since these data are correlational, it is possible that high endorsement of socialization practices is a response to children's lower adjustment.

Implications

The results of our factor analyses indicate that our measures of SMP-SBS and SMP-SES can be used as assessment tools with LG adoptive parents. Although future research should examine socialization and parental self-efficacy in nonadoptive LG-parent families, these findings may be informative to practitioners in supporting socialization practices and their potentially positive ramifications among LG parent families. Moreover, adoption agencies do not have standardized protocols for preparing parents to culturally socialize their children in transracial adoptions (Huh & Reid, 2000) or for LG adoptive parents. Our findings provide tools to

potentially aid in these processes. These standardized measures provide adoption and mental health professionals with information that LG adoptive parents recognize the need for and are open to input regarding more effective sexual orientation socialization. These scales may be especially useful for practitioners who would like to be addressing the unique needs of LG-headed families, but who have not received training. Implementing the use of these scales in practice settings could serve as a potential starting point to discuss current or future issues that LG-headed families may face.

Limitations

The dataset contains a relatively large sample of LG families from across the country, but cannot be considered representative of all LG or adoptive families. Respondents were predominantly White, middle- to upper-middle-class, and well educated. It is unclear whether the findings of the study would generalize to LG parents who are racial minority members and those who are less affluent, as previous research suggests that education and income are positively associated with racial socialization. As mentioned, a few mothers who identified as bisexual women were collapsed with lesbian mothers based on partner gender (e.g., if partnered with another woman). Additionally, there were no parents who identified as transgender in this sample. As diversity within adoptive families continues to grow (Goldberg et al., 2014), future research is needed to explore the nuances and distinct experiences that arise within variations of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Similar to prior research on socialization, our study relies on parent self-report. This can be problematic because of social desirability bias, as respondents may over-report what they think researchers would like to hear (Nederhof, 1985). Reports from adopted children and/or others who know the family (e.g., family friends, providers) could provide further information and perspective about whether and in what ways these practices and related experiences occur. Additionally, our data are based on how parents' value socialization practices, and not a report of their actual behaviors. We relied upon several single-item measures, including emotional problems at placement, psychological functioning, and reported experiences of teasing. Although a single-item measure can be beneficial ,as it is short and can be completed quickly, it can also be problematic for measuring a complex concept such as psychological functioning which is multi-dimensional (Gardner, Cummings, Dunham, & Pierce, 1998).

Future research should consider a deeper exploration of what specific practices (e.g., conversations and activities) are happening within the family and its relation to child adjustment, based on research from racial socialization, which found a positive association. Despite these limitations, this study extends our knowledge about family processes within LG parent families formed through adoption.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on unique LG parenting processes, underscoring that LG adoptive parents agree with the importance of, and feel confident in, engaging with their children in conversations and behaviors related to being part of a sexual minority parent family. Our findings contribute insight about LG parents' self-efficacy with socialization practices, which could have important implications given that racial socialization research has revealed associations among these practices and positive child outcomes (Huh & Reid, 2000; Lee, 2003). Given possible implications for positive child outcomes, more research about beliefs and self-efficacy related to specific cultural socialization practices among LG parents is needed.

Analogous in some ways to raising children of color, distinctive parenting strategies among LG parents are necessitated, given the likelihood of encountering prejudice (Brooks et al., 2015). Parenting strategies that focus on a two-pronged approach of (a) instilling pride and (b) preparing for possible bias are practices that LG parents appear to deem important. Overall, they also appear to feel confident in their abilities to enact these practices. LG parents indicate they plan to talk directly with their children about sexual orientation and how it impacts their family, socialize with other LG-headed families, and participate in events related to increasing LG pride. Yet, not all parents report feeling confident and may be seeking additional guidance. Findings may be informative to practitioners in supporting socialization practices and their potentially positive benefits among LG parent families. Adoption agencies are positioned to help prepare prospective LG parents and should consider incorporating socialization practices into pre- and postadoption training and support.

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