

Coparenting Among Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Couples: Associations With Adopted Children's Outcomes

Rachel H. Farr

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Charlotte J. Patterson

University of Virginia

Coparenting is associated with child behavior in families with heterosexual parents, but less is known about coparenting among lesbian- and gay-parent families. Associations were studied among self-reported divisions of labor, coparenting observations, and child adjustment ($M_{\text{age}} = 3$ years) among 104 adoptive families headed by lesbian, gay, or heterosexual couples. Lesbian and gay couples reported sharing child care, whereas heterosexual couples reported specialization (i.e., mothers did more child care than fathers). Observations confirmed this pattern—lesbian and gay parents participated more equally than heterosexual parents during family interaction. Lesbian couples showed the most supportive and least undermining behavior, whereas gay couples showed the least supportive behavior, and heterosexual couples the most undermining behavior. Overall, supportive coparenting was associated with better child adjustment.

Family systems theory suggests that children's development cannot be fully understood without considering the network of relationships influencing them (Feinberg, 2003). It is well established that parent-child and marital relationships influence child outcomes, but researchers have more recently begun examining other family relationships (Bornstein & Sawyer, 2006). Coparenting, sometimes called "the family's executive subsystem," refers to the degree of coordination between two adults in their roles as parents (McHale & Irace, 2011), and it has been found to be more strongly tied to child adjustment than other aspects of the couple relationship (Feinberg, 2003). Coparenting has been studied among heterosexual couples and their biological children, but rarely among adoptive families or families with lesbian and gay parents (Patterson & Farr, 2011). As increasing numbers of families in the United States are not composed of a heterosexual mother and father rearing biological children (e.g., Patterson & Hastings, 2007), it is critical to understand child development in the context of other family systems.

Coparenting includes the ways in which couples carry out the tasks of parenting (e.g., divisions of child-care labor) and discrepancies in parental investment, as well as both overt and covert parental behaviors that could be supportive or undermining (McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, & Lauretti, 2001). Regardless of sexual orientation, two adults who parent together must manage the many tasks associated with rearing children. Thus, coparenting involves coordination between the two adults to complete such tasks. Associations between coparenting and child development are well documented in heterosexual-parent families with biological children (McHale & Irace, 2011), particularly young children (e.g., Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001; Stroud, Durbin, Wilson, & Mendelsohn, 2011). Variations in coparenting contribute uniquely to children's development, beyond the influence of marital quality and individual parent-child relationships (Teubert & Pinguart, 2010). As most research on coparenting has focused on heterosexual couples and their children, and generally on the biological children of these couples (McHale & Irace, 2011), more research is needed on coparenting and its associations with child outcomes in diverse families. In particular, the extent to which coparenting dynamics is influenced by parent gender, sexual orientation, and biological parent-child relationships

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rachel H. Farr, Department of Psychology, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 135 Hicks Way, Amherst, MA 01003. Electronic mail may be sent to rfarr@psych.umass.edu.

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has remained relatively unexamined. Thus, this study assessed coparenting and associations with child outcomes using a multimethod design among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples and their adopted children. As no single study on coparenting has included these three groups, the coparenting literature is reviewed in terms of research with heterosexual couples and biological children, lesbian and gay couples, and adoptive couples.

Coparenting and Child Adjustment

Studying the impact of coparenting on young children's behavioral adjustment is of particular interest. Externalizing behaviors such as aggression, noncompliance, inattention, and hyperactivity often begin during the preschool years and are relatively stable throughout childhood (e.g., Denham et al., 2000; Doctoroff & Arnold, 2004). Efforts to identify children at risk for behavioral and emotional difficulties are often made during early childhood (Phillips & Lonigan, 2010). Furthermore, coparenting has been established as a predictor of children's behavioral adjustment from preschool to school age (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). For example, Schoppe et al. (2001) found that supportive and undermining coparenting when children were 3 years old was predictive of 4-year-old children's externalizing behaviors. Thus, understanding factors within families that may ameliorate the emergence and developmental course of problem behaviors in preschool-age children is important (Denham et al., 2000), especially among families underrepresented in the literature on coparenting and child outcomes.

Coparenting Among Lesbian and Gay Couples

Coparenting among lesbian and gay couples has generally been studied only in terms of couples' divisions of family labor (Patterson & Farr, 2011), which researchers view as one aspect of coparenting (e.g., Feinberg, 2003). Existing research has shown that lesbian and gay couples often report dividing child-care labor relatively evenly, whereas heterosexual couples often report specialization (Goldberg, 2010). In addition, lesbian parents tend to report ideally wanting an equal distribution of child care between partners. In contrast, heterosexual mothers report ideally wanting to do somewhat more than half of the child care, and heterosexual fathers report ideally wanting to do somewhat less than half (Patterson, Sutfin, & Fulcher, 2004). Furthermore, less research about division of labor

has focused on gay fathers than lesbian mothers, and few studies have examined division of child care among adoptive couples (e.g., Bennett, 2003; Goldberg, 2010). Division of labor may be of particular interest among adoptive parents because biological parent-child relationships do not affect family labor decisions (e.g., mothers doing more child care across the transition to parenthood due to pregnancy or breastfeeding; Ward, 1998). Thus, research examining division of labor among a sample of parents where biological relatedness is not a confounding variable is of special interest.

Coparenting, Division of Labor, and Child Adjustment

The extent to which parental division of labor may be associated with children's development, however, remains unclear. Patterson (1995) explored division of labor among lesbian couples and adjustment among young children. When child care was evenly divided, lesbian mothers reported greater satisfaction with divisions of labor and fewer child behavior problems—raising the possibility that shared divisions of labor might, in themselves, be beneficial for children. It is worth noting, however, that since mothers reported that they shared and also that this was their ideal pattern, it was unclear which was more important, or whether other variables might be involved, such as couple relationship satisfaction, role of parental expectations, or parental education. Chan, Brooks, Raboy, and Patterson (1998) also examined division of labor among lesbian and heterosexual couples (who had used donor insemination) and young children's adjustment. Among lesbian nonbiological mothers, those who reported greater satisfaction with division of labor also reported greater couple relationship satisfaction and fewer child behavior problems. The effect of division of labor on children's adjustment was mediated by couple relationship satisfaction. Overall, then, existing research suggests it is parents' feelings about their arrangements rather than actual divisions of labor that are most closely associated with child outcomes (Patterson & Farr, 2011). Further research is needed, however, to clarify these associations, and to examine pathways through which they occur.

Coparenting and Parental Gender

Moreover, there are other important coparenting dynamics beyond division of labor that have not yet been studied in lesbian- and gay-parent families (Patterson & Farr, 2011). Among heterosexual-parent

families, it has been debated whether gender-based differences in coparenting by mothers and fathers are relevant to differentiated child outcomes (Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, & Neff, 2010; Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011). This question of whether differences in parenting exist on the basis of parental gender has been explored less among lesbian and gay couples, but this research would be informative in addressing the role of parental gender in child development (e.g., Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). While some observational research has included same-sex couples (e.g., Gottman et al., 2003; Julien, Chartrand, Simard, Bouthillier, & Bégin, 2003; Roisman, Clausell, Holland, Fortuna, & Elieff, 2008), no observational data about the relational and emotional dynamics among lesbian- or gay-parenting couples have been reported to date. Thus, questions remain about how coparenting functions among lesbian and gay couples, whether coparenting dynamics among lesbian and gay couples are similar to those among heterosexual couples, and about how coparenting is related to child outcomes in lesbian- and gay-parent families. Specifically, by comparing coparenting behaviors and their associations with child development among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parent families, the impact of parental gender, as well as differences in the gender composition of couples (i.e., same-sex female, same-sex male, and other-sex male and female) on key family processes can be assessed.

Coparenting Among Adoptive Couples

Few studies of coparenting include adoptive families (e.g., Hock & Mooradian, 2012). Some work has examined relationship dynamics of heterosexual adoptive couples (e.g., Brodzinsky & Huffman, 1988), but not in comparison with lesbian and gay adoptive couples. A few studies have investigated the impact of parental characteristics and parenting style on adoption outcomes (e.g., Palacios, Sanchez-Sandoval, & Leon, 2005). Little research, however, has addressed the associations between coparenting and adopted children's development (Patterson & Farr, 2011), despite a predominant focus in the adoptive families literature on the behavioral and psychological adjustment of adopted children (e.g., Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010). As adopted children demonstrate greater behavioral difficulties on average than nonadopted children, and because adoptees are overrepresented in clinical settings (e.g., Palacios & Brodzinsky, 2010), careful examination of coparenting relationships, family

interactions, and developmental processes among adoptive families could contribute to better understanding of outcomes for adopted children. Adoptive families are a diverse group, including substantial numbers of lesbian and gay parents. The overall numbers of adoptive families have increased in recent years, and the number of lesbian and gay adoptive parents has doubled in the last decade (Gates, 2011). Thus, it is critical for researchers to address the diversity of adoptive families.

The Present Study

Using multiple methods of assessment, we examined coparenting among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples with young adopted children. To accomplish three main aims, we studied observations of coparenting, reports of couples' division of child-care labor, perceptions of parent competence, and child outcomes. First, we compared reports about division of child-care labor among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples, including satisfaction with child-care arrangements and perceptions of parenting competence. Second, using observational data on family play interactions, we assessed similarities and differences in coparenting among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples. Lastly, we examined associations among observations of coparenting, division of child-care labor, parenting competence, and child adjustment across family types.

We had three main hypotheses. Our first hypothesis was that lesbian and gay adoptive parenting couples would be likely to report sharing of child-care tasks, whereas heterosexual adoptive parenting couples would be likely to report specializing, with mothers doing more child care than fathers. We expected observations of coparenting to reveal a similar pattern, with relatively equal involvement among lesbian and gay parents and greater discrepancies among heterosexual parents. Furthermore, on the basis of previous research we expected couples to be relatively satisfied in their divisions of labor, regardless of the way labor was divided. Our second hypothesis was that couples would demonstrate more supportive than undermining behaviors, on average, but that lesbian and gay couples would demonstrate higher levels of cooperation than heterosexual couples. Similarities, rather than differences, were expected in other observations of coparenting. Our third hypothesis was that greater satisfaction with division of child-care labor would be associated with more supportive coparenting

and less undermining coparenting, regardless of family type. We also expected that satisfaction with division of child-care labor, rather than actual divisions of labor, would be significantly associated with children's adjustment. Thus, greater parental satisfaction, as well as more supportive and less undermining coparenting were expected to be associated with positive child behavior.

Method

Participants

Data were collected as part of a larger project about child development, parenting, and family functioning in adoptive families with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents (e.g., Farr, Forssell, & Patterson, 2010). Participants were recruited through five cooperating adoption agencies in the United States, chosen based on several factors. Agencies had to have placed infants (through domestic adoption) with openly lesbian and gay couples, and agencies had to be situated in jurisdictions permitting same-sex couples to complete legal adoptions. All five agencies also provided options for openness in adoption (i.e., information sharing or contact between birth and adoptive families).

Families in which both parents were legally recognized and currently living with their adopted child between 1 and 5 years old were considered eligible. All were invited via letter or e-mail from the agency director to take part in a study about "child development, parenting, and family relationships in adoptive families." A researcher made follow-up phone calls requesting participation. Recruitment procedures were identical for all families. There were 117 eligible families (23 lesbian, 21 gay, 73 heterosexual couples) from the primary cooperating agency in the Mid-Atlantic United States. Of these, 63 (16 lesbian, 17 gay, and 30 heterosexual) couples participated. Heterosexual couples (41%) were less likely than lesbian and gay couples (75% response rate) to participate, $\chi^2(2, n = 117) = 12.72, p < .01$. Lack of time was the most common reason for nonparticipation. An additional 43 families (11 lesbian, 12 gay, and 20 heterosexual couples) were recruited from four other cooperating agencies in the Northeast, South, and along the West Coast of the United States. Participants contacted the researcher directly to participate after receiving a letter or e-mail of invitation from the agency director. The number of eligible families could not be disclosed due to confidentiality concerns by these agencies; participation rates for this

subsample could not be calculated. Two families in the initial sample did not provide sufficient observational data, so they were not included here. Thus, the final sample consisted of 104 families (208 parents, 104 children).

Demographic characteristics of the participating families (54 same-sex couples, 25 lesbian and 29 gay couples, and 50 heterosexual couples) are shown in Table 1. Parents' ages ranged from 30 to 60 years ($M = 42.25, SD = 5.83$). Children's ages ranged from 13 to 72 months ($M = 36.07, SD = 15.53$). Eighty-one percent of parents were White, 16% were Black or African American, and the remaining 3% were Asian, Latino, or multiracial. Most parents were well educated, worked full-time, and had family incomes above national averages. The sample included 14% interracial couples. Fifty-five families resided in Maryland or the District of Columbia, and others lived in 10 states along the East and West Coasts, or in the Southern United States.

Most families had one child living at home (see Table 1). All parents were the legal parents of their children, adopted domestically. Children (53 girls, 51 boys) had been placed as infants, at birth or within the first few weeks of life. The majority were reported to be healthy, with no special needs. Children were 42% White, 33% Black or African American, 21% multiracial, and 4% other. In the sample, 48% of families had adopted across race (i.e., transracial adoption). About one third of families had some type of direct contact or visitation with birth families a few times per year. All families were English speaking. Parents in seven families spoke an additional language at home (e.g., French, Spanish). The demographic characteristics of this sample closely resembled those of other adoptive families, particularly those completing private domestic infant adoptions (e.g., Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002).

There were several demographic differences among families. Lesbian mothers had more daughters, whereas gay fathers had more sons. Lesbian and heterosexual couples were less likely to be interracial than gay couples. Same-sex couples completed more transracial adoptions than did heterosexual couples. More details regarding demographic similarities and differences as a function of family type, as well as transracial adoption, are reported elsewhere (Farr & Patterson, 2009). Preliminary analyses revealed no significant associations with reports of division of labor, child adjustment, or coparenting observations; thus, child gender, interracial couple status, and transracial adoptive

Table 1
Demographic Information About Families Headed by Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Parents

| | Lesbian mothers (<i>n</i> = 50) | Gay fathers (<i>n</i> = 58) | Heterosexual parents (<i>n</i> = 100) | ANOVA or χ^2 test |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Parents (<i>n</i> = 208) | | | | <i>F</i> (1, 206) |
| Mean age at visit (in years) | 43 (5) | 41 (5) | 42 (6) | <i>F</i> = 2.78 |
| Race (% White) | 80% | 86% | 78% | $\chi^2 < 1$ |
| Education (% college degree) | 94% | 89% | 85% | $\chi^2 < 1$ |
| Work status (% full-time) | 72% | 81% | 77% | $\chi^2 < 1$ |
| Annual family income (\$K) | 168 (77) | 190 (130) | 150 (89) | <i>F</i> = 1.34 |
| Interracial relationship | 11% | 28% | 8% | $\chi^2 = 12.14^{**}$ |
| One child in household | 63% | 62% | 50% | $\chi^2 = 1.69$ |
| Transracial adoption | 48% | 55% | 30% | $\chi^2 = 13.27^{***}$ |
| Children (<i>n</i> = 104) | | | | <i>F</i> (1, 102) |
| Mean age at visit (in months) | 35 (20) | 35 (13) | 36 (16) | <i>F</i> < 1 |
| Sex (% girls) | 59% | 36% | 52% | $\chi^2 = 3.07^*$ |
| Race (% White) | 41% | 38% | 44% | $\chi^2 < 1$ |
| Developmental status (% special needs adoption) | 11% | 7% | 4% | $\chi^2 = 1.44$ |
| Any visits with birthparents? (% yes) | 28% | 24% | 28% | $\chi^2 = 2.79$ |

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses. ANOVA = analysis of variance.
p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

status were not included as covariates in further analyses.

There were also 74 teachers or caregivers of the children who provided data (71% response rate). All parents reported that their child was given outside care on a regular basis by some individual, such as a teacher, day-care provider, babysitter, or other relative or adult. Teachers or caregivers answered a few demographic questions and reported on children's behavioral adjustment. Response rates for teachers or caregivers of children with lesbian or gay (*n* = 42) and heterosexual parents (*n* = 32) were not different, $\chi^2(1, n = 76) = 2.40$, *ns*. Parents' reports of child behavior did not differ as a function of whether teachers provided data.

Most teachers or caregivers (94%) were female and had attended at least some college (90%). Their average length of experience in teaching or child care was 11.07 years (*SD* = 8.53). Thus, outside caregivers were generally women with ample experience in their teaching or caregiving roles. Most were preschool (*n* = 22; 30%) or elementary school (*n* = 4; 5%) teachers, or day-care center (*n* = 12; 16%) or home day-care (*n* = 20; 27%) providers. The other 22% were 11 babysitters and 5 relatives who regularly cared for the child. No significant demographic differences were found among outside caregivers as a function of parental sexual orientation.

Materials and Procedure

A researcher visited families in their homes. Parents responded to paper questionnaires, and families participated in a videotaped, unstructured play session. Families also asked their child's teacher or outside care provider to complete reports of children's behavior problems, mailed back to the researcher in a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Division of child-care labor. The Who Does What? (Cowan & Cowan, 1990) is designed to assess couples' reports about division of household, decision making, and child-care labor, and is appropriate for use with couples with young children. Child care was the focus here, including items such as feeding, dressing, bathing, choosing toys, and visiting playgrounds. Several minor wording adjustments were made for use with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples. On a scale ranging from 1 = *I do it all* to 9 = *my partner or spouse does it all*, parents reported the relative frequency with which they perform each of 20 child-care tasks ("real" involvement scale) or would ideally perform ("ideal" involvement scale). A score of 5 indicated "we do it equally" or "ideally, we would do it equally." Responses were averaged to create one "real" and "ideal" score for child-care tasks. The discrepancy between "real" and "ideal" scores represented the degree to which participants' were satisfied with their current division of labor arrangements. Higher

numbers represent greater dissatisfaction with division of labor for child care within the couple. The scales included in the Who Does What? demonstrated high levels of reliability. Both Cronbach's alpha and Spearman-Brown's split-half reliabilities for all subscales ranged from .92 to .99 (Cowan & Cowan, 1990).

One issue in using the Who Does What? with same-sex couples is that there is no simple way to distinguish between the two parents in the couple. With heterosexual couples, parent gender is used to distinguish between mothers and fathers. To address this issue, we created a continuous variable representing specialization. This was calculated by taking the absolute value of the difference between each of the two parents' reports on each of the 20 items, and then calculating the mean for all child-care items. With this new variable, higher values indicated greater specialization of child care within couples, and lower values indicated greater sharing.

Observations of coparenting. As play is an important context for development in early childhood, family play is ideal for observing parent-child interaction, coparenting behavior, and family functioning (Lindsey & Mize, 2001). A number of researchers have developed coding systems of triadic family interaction based on observations of unstructured play in families with children from infancy to preschool; these play sessions were set up in the lab or home with toys provided (e.g., McHale et al., 2001). Thus, in this study, an unstructured family play session was used to observe coparenting interactions. A simple fleece blanket with dimensions of 54 in. \times 66 in. (137 cm \times 168 cm) was used to designate a play area in participants' homes, and a camcorder was set up on a tripod to record family play. To optimize the appropriateness of the session across the age range of children in this study, toys were provided in one of two sets—one designed for toddlers (1 to 2½ years old) and one for preschoolers (3 to 5 years old). Parents and children were invited to play for 10 min using the provided toys.

The Coparenting Behavior Coding scale (Cowan & Cowan, 1996; Schoppe et al., 2001) was designed to assess coparenting during everyday family interactions in two-parent families with young children. The scale includes supportive and undermining dimensions of coparenting on 5-point rating scales (1 = *very low*, 5 = *very high*). Trained coders were instructed to focus on interactions between parents with reference to the child or to parenting. A Supportive dimension score was created by computing

the mean of subscale scores for pleasure, cooperation, interactiveness, and warmth. An Undermining dimension score was created by computing the mean of subscale scores for displeasure, coldness, anger, and competition. Consistent with research on coparenting in earlier studies, Supportive and Undermining dimensions were not correlated, $r(104) = .16$, $p = .11$ (e.g., Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch, & McHale, 2004). In addition, individual parent participation was rated on a scale of 1 to 7, with higher numbers indicating greater participation in family interaction, adapted from the family problem solving code (Forbes, Vuchinich, & Kneedler, 2001).

Two students served as coders of the family interactions. Coders spent a minimum of 20 hr in training to learn the coding system, spending time viewing, rating, and discussing a set of pilot family play sessions. After achieving high reliability (alpha $\geq .80$), coders independently rated family interactions for 50% of families. Both coders rated an additional 25% of family interactions to establish reliability. For ratings of parent participation, separate coders observed each parent in a family. Coders were closely monitored, with ample opportunities for feedback. There were checkpoints for reliability at the 25%, 50%, and 75% completion marks. In the case of discrepancies, a third trained coder broke the tie. Reliabilities for the eight individual coparenting dimensions as well as parent participation ranged from .84 to .96 ($M = .91$).

Child adjustment. Children's behavioral adjustment was assessed using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and the Caregiver-Teacher Report Form (C-TRF) for 1½ to 5 year olds (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). Both include a total problem score, as well as internalizing and externalizing scores. All 100 behavior problem items are rated by parents and teachers from 0 to 2 (0 = *not true*, 1 = *somewhat or sometimes true*, 2 = *very true or often true*). The focus of this study was on the externalizing subscale, composed of 24 CBCL items and 34 C-TRF items assessing children's disruptive, aggressive, and delinquent behaviors (e.g., "Hits others"). Age- and sex-specific raw scores can be converted to standard T scores. Higher scores suggest greater behavior problems. The CBCL and C-TRF are widely used and have demonstrated high levels of reliability and validity (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). Cronbach's alphas for externalizing scores for the sample were .85 for the CBCL and .92 for the C-TRF. Alphas for CBCL and C-TRF externalizing scores were .89 and .95 in lesbian mother families, .90

and .87 in gay father families, and .81 and .90 in heterosexual parent families, respectively.

Preliminary Analyses

Power analyses ($\alpha = .05$) were conducted to determine power levels for the analyses of interest ($N = 104$ families). For bivariate correlations among all families, power reached .99 for large and medium effects, and .88 for small effects. For chi-square tests with 2 *df* among three family groups, power reached .99 for large, .79 for medium, and .13 for small effects. For multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) measuring global effects with two response variables (supportive and undermining coparenting) among three family groups, power reached .99 for large, .99 for medium, and .97 for small effects. For analyses of variance (ANOVAs) of main effects and interactions with three groups, power reached .96 for large, .61 for medium, and .14 for small effects. For multiple regression with three predictors, power reached .99 for large, .92 for medium, and .19 for small effects. We conclude that although not all of our analyses were sufficiently powered to detect small effects (e.g., $d = .20$, $f^2 = .10$), they were sufficiently powered to detect medium effects ($d = .50$, $f^2 = .25$) and more than adequately powered to detect large effects ($d = .80$, $f^2 = .40$).

To evaluate the role of children's age and gender, initial analyses explored associations among child age, gender, and variables of interest. Boys scored higher than girls on externalizing problems as reported by parents ($M_{\text{boys}} = 47.68$, $SD = 9.11$; $M_{\text{girls}} = 45.20$, $SD = 8.74$), $t(103) = 2.00$, $p = .047$. Teacher reports showed no significant differences in externalizing problems as a function of child gender. No coparenting observations or parent-report measures yielded significant associations with child age or gender. There were no interactions of child age or gender with variables of interest, including family type. Thus, child age and gender were excluded from further analysis.

Data Analytic Plan

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) was used to account for the nested structure of the data. The two parents in each family were not independent of one another in their individual reports of satisfaction with division of labor. In statistical terms, parents were nested within families. Thus, HLM was used to control for sources of shared variance and data dependency

within families. One challenge that arises in using HLM among a sample of same-sex and other-sex couples is that the models must account for both indistinguishable dyads (i.e., lesbian and gay couples) and distinguishable dyads (i.e., heterosexual couples; e.g., Goldberg, Smith, & Kashy, 2010). To examine hypotheses regarding associations of family-type and couple-level variables (i.e., satisfaction with division of labor), we followed the methods of previous researchers working with indistinguishable and distinguishable dyads, particularly lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples (Goldberg et al., 2010; Kurdek, 1998).

In analyses comparing by couple type, the conditional models included individual partners (Level 1) nested in couples (Level 2). The intercept at Level 1 represented the outcome variable explained at Level 2. The within-couples model at Level 1 used information from both partners to define one parameter (the intercept) for each couple. As Kurdek (1998) described, this intercept is regarded as a random variable because the couple-level intercepts obtained were derived from a larger population of couple-level intercepts. Level 2 represented the between-couples model comparing the effect of being "lesbian versus heterosexual" and "gay versus heterosexual" for the outcome variables included (i.e., satisfaction with division of child care and perceptions of parenting competence). The Level 2 intercept thus corresponded to the mean ratings for heterosexual parents. This conditional model can be described in Level 1: $Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + e_{ij}$ and Level 2: $\beta_{0i} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Lesbian}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{Gay}) + u_{0j}$. In the Level 1 equation, the outcome variable was Y_{ij} . The random intercepts were represented by β_{0j} coefficient. The error term was e_{ij} . Level 1 reflected the average calculated for each outcome variable. At Level 2, the $\gamma_{01}(\text{Lesbian})$ coefficient represented the "lesbian versus heterosexual effect" whereas $\gamma_{02}(\text{Gay})$ represented the "gay versus heterosexual effect." The u_{0j} coefficient controlled for the dependency of partners' data within couples. Level 2 reflected a comparison of averages for each of the outcome variables to examine differences by family type.

Results

Primary Analyses

Results are presented in three main sections: (a) parent reports of division of child-care labor, (b) similarities and differences in coparenting observations

among family types, and (c) associations among division of labor, observations of coparenting, and child adjustment.

Division of Child-Care Labor

As expected, lesbian and gay parents were more likely than heterosexual parents to report sharing child-care labor (see Table 2). Specialization was significantly greater among heterosexual couples than among lesbian and gay couples. On average, mothers reported doing significantly more child care than fathers in heterosexual couples. On average, parents reported being relatively satisfied with their current divisions of child-care labor ($M = 0.45$, $SD = 0.46$) with no differences by family type (see Table 2). Among heterosexual couples, however, mothers were significantly less satisfied with current child-care arrangements than fathers. HLM results were consistent with the ANOVA results regarding satisfaction of child-care labor divisions.

In sum, reports about division of labor varied across and within couples. Consistent with our expectations, lesbian and gay couples were more likely to report sharing child care, and heterosexual couples were more likely to report specialization. Regardless of their actual arrangements, most parents reported feeling satisfied with them.

Observations of Coparenting Behavior

On average, family interactions were characterized by higher levels of supportive coparenting

practices ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.59$) than undermining practices ($M = 1.55$, $SD = 0.44$). However, as expected, observations of coparenting varied by family type (see Table 3). MANOVAs revealed significant differences as a function of family type in both the composite scores for supportive and undermining coparenting dimensions. Lesbian couples showed the most supportive interactions, whereas gay couples showed the least. Heterosexual couples were intermediate between lesbian and gay couples in supportive behaviors. Regarding undermining interactions, lesbian couples were the least, and heterosexual couples were the most undermining. Gay couples were intermediate between lesbian and heterosexual couples.

Follow-up ANOVAs were conducted to explore group differences among individual coparenting dimensions (see Table 3), particularly because this was the first time this coding scheme had been utilized with same-sex couples and adoptive couples (S. J. Schoppe-Sullivan, personal communication, March 2011). There were significant differences in pleasure, warmth, and interactiveness by family type. Lesbian couples showed the most pleasure of interaction, gay couples the least, and heterosexual couples were intermediate between the two other couple types. Lesbian couples were also the most warm, gay couples the least, and heterosexual couples were intermediate. Interactiveness followed this pattern, with lesbian couples demonstrating the most interaction, gay couples the least, and heterosexual couples intermediate between the two. Cooperation between parents did not, however,

Table 2
Division of Child-Care Labor Reported Among Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Couples

| | Lesbian mothers ($n = 50$) | Gay fathers ($n = 58$) | Heterosexual parents ($n = 100$) | ANOVA $F(5, 202)$ |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| "How it is now" ^a | | | | |
| Parent A | 5.36 (0.95) | 5.38 (0.68) | 6.11 (0.85) _a | |
| Parent B | 4.80 (0.88) | 4.97 (0.70) | 4.13 (0.74) _b | 32.57*** $F(2, 101)$ |
| Specialization | 1.97 (1.05) _a | 1.88 (0.87) _a | 2.59 (1.14) _b | 5.27** $F(5, 202)$ |
| Dissatisfaction with arrangement ^a | | | | |
| Parent A | 0.51 (0.52) | 0.42 (0.49) | 0.66 (0.57) _a | |
| Parent B | 0.38 (0.45) | 0.38 (0.31) | 0.32 (0.28) _b | 3.25** |

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses. Means in a row with different subscripts were found to be significantly different using Tukey post hoc tests. Scores for "How it is now" range from 1 to 9, with 1 = *my partner does it all* and 9 = *I do it all*. Higher scores for Specialization reflect a greater degree of specialization in child-care labor within a couple (a score of 0 would reflect a perfectly shared division of child-care labor). Dissatisfaction scores represent a discrepancy between parents' reports of "real" and "ideal" division of child-care arrangements. Higher scores reflect greater dissatisfaction.

^aIn heterosexual couples, Parent A was always the mother and Parent B was always the father. In same-sex couples, Parent A was assigned to the first person who responded to participate in the study. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) compares the six groups of parents in this case (Parent A and Parent B in each of the three family types).

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

Table 3
Observations of Coparenting Among Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Parenting Couples

| | Lesbian couples (<i>n</i> = 25) | Gay couples (<i>n</i> = 29) | Heterosexual couples (<i>n</i> = 50) | Average (<i>N</i> = 104) | ANOVA <i>F</i> (2, 101) |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Supportive | 3.12 (0.61) _a | 2.56 (0.48) _b | 2.87 (0.56) _a | 2.84 (0.59) | 6.93** |
| Pleasure | 3.08 (0.70) _a | 2.55 (0.69) _b | 2.72 (0.67) | 2.76 (0.70) | 4.18* |
| Warmth | 3.12 (0.88) _a | 2.31 (0.66) _b | 2.64 (0.69) _b | 2.66 (0.78) | 8.22*** |
| Interactiveness | 3.20 (0.87) _a | 2.48 (0.83) _b | 3.02 (0.89) _a | 2.91 (0.90) | 5.30** |
| Cooperation | 3.08 (0.70) | 2.90 (0.62) | 3.10 (0.65) | 3.04 (0.65) | < 1 <i>ns</i> |
| Undermining | 1.38 (0.38) _a | 1.49 (0.37) | 1.67 (0.46) _b | 1.55 (0.44) | 4.33* |
| Displeasure | 1.04 (0.20) _a | 1.24 (0.64) _a | 1.60 (0.76) _b | 1.37 (0.67) | 7.33** |
| Coldness | 1.44 (0.65) | 1.38 (0.56) | 1.64 (0.69) | 1.52 (0.65) | < 1 <i>ns</i> |
| Anger | 1.04 (0.20) | 1.07 (0.37) | 1.24 (0.43) | 1.14 (0.38) | 3.34* |
| Competition | 2.00 (0.76) | 2.28 (0.84) | 2.20 (0.78) | 2.17 (0.79) | < 1 <i>ns</i> |
| Parent participation ^a | (<i>n</i> = 50) | (<i>n</i> = 58) | (<i>n</i> = 100) | (<i>N</i> = 208) | <i>F</i> (5, 202) |
| Parent A | 4.88 (1.01) _{a,c} | 4.28 (1.00) _{d,e} | 4.98 (0.96) _{a,c} | | |
| Parent B | 5.12 (0.97) _{a,c} | 4.48 (0.95) | 4.04 (1.23) _{b,d} | 4.59 (1.11) | 6.46*** |
| Discrepancy in participation | 1.04 (0.83) _a | 1.10 (0.85) _a | 1.46 (0.95) _b | 1.26 (0.91) | <i>F</i> (2, 101) 4.90** |

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses. Means in a row with different subscripts were found to be significantly different using Tukey post hoc tests.

^aIn heterosexual couples, Parent A was always the mother and Parent B was always the father. In same-sex couples, Parent A was assigned to the first person who responded to participate in the study. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) compares the six groups of parents in this case (Parent A and Parent B in each of the three family types).

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

differ among family types, with an average score of 3.04 (*SD* = 0.65) across families. Family type was also a predictor of displeasure and anger. Lesbian couples showed the least displeasure, heterosexual couples the most, and gay couples were intermediate. Heterosexual couples showed significantly more anger during interaction than did lesbian or gay couples. Coldness and competition did not vary by family type.

Overall, and consistent with our expectations, parents showed moderately high levels of involvement during family play (*M* = 4.59, *SD* = 1.11). There were, however, significant differences among family groups (see Table 3). Post hoc Tukey analysis revealed that, as expected, heterosexual fathers participated significantly less ($M_{\text{Het. Fathers}} = 4.04$, *SD* = 1.23) than did heterosexual mothers ($M_{\text{Het. Mothers}} = 4.98$, *SD* = 0.96) or lesbian mothers ($M_{\text{Lesbian}} = 5.00$, *SD* = 0.99), $F(5, 202) = 6.46$, $p < .001$. In examining discrepancies in participation between parents in each couple, heterosexual couples had significantly greater discrepancies in participation than did lesbian and gay couples. Overall, fathers participated less during family interaction than mothers in heterosexual couples, consistent with parents' reports of divisions of child-care labor.

Associations Among Coparenting Observations, Division of Labor, and Child Adjustment

Parents and teachers described children as showing relatively few externalizing problems on average (CBCL: *M* = 46.41, *SD* = 8.99; C-TRF: *M* = 50.08, *SD* = 8.63), with no differences as a function of family type. For more details about children's behavioral adjustment and family structure using HLM in this sample, please see Farr et al. (2010). Associations among all variables related to coparenting observations, divisions of child-care labor, and child externalizing problems as reported by parents and teachers are presented in Table 4.

Data reduction. Data reduction was undertaken, similar to the methods of Schoppe et al. (2001), to facilitate comparisons of children's adjustment with coparenting observations and division of labor reports. Parents' scores within couples for child externalizing problems were significantly correlated, $r(208) = .48$, $p < .001$ (correlations were significant for all family types, ranging from .38 to .66), so the two-parent reports for each family were summed in a composite score. Teachers' and parents' reports were significantly associated, $r(74) = .19$, $p = .023$,

Table 4
Correlations Among Observations of Coparenting, Division of Labor, and Child Behavioral Adjustment

| Variable | 1 | a | b | c | d | 2 | e | f | g | h | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|--|--------|------------------|--------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|--------|------|-------|-----|------------------|---|
| 1. Supportive | — | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| a. Pleasure | .81*** | — | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| b. Warmth | .89*** | .73*** | — | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| c. Interaction | .77*** | .44*** | .58*** | — | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| d. Cooperation | .61*** | .35*** | .40*** | .24* | — | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Undermining | -.14 | -.07 | -.16 | -.01 | -.23* | — | | | | | | | | | | |
| e. Displeasure | .12 | .12 | .07 | .14 | .01 | .73*** | — | | | | | | | | | |
| f. Coldness | -.29** | -.25** | -.29** | -.14 | -.24* | .65*** | .20* | — | | | | | | | | |
| g. Anger | -.04 | -.03 | -.04 | .17 [†] | -.28** | .62*** | .58*** | .17 [†] | — | | | | | | | |
| h. Competition | -.14 | -.03 | -.15 | -.10 | -.19 [†] | .76*** | .31** | .36*** | .26** | — | | | | | | |
| 3. Dissatisfaction (DoL; mean) ^a | .07 | .18 [†] | .08 | -.03 | .00 | -.01 | .14 | -.07 | .01 | -.10 | — | | | | | |
| 4. Specialization | .08 | .08 | .03 | .04 | .09 | .06 | .18 [†] | .02 | .04 | -.06 | .54*** | — | | | | |
| 5. Participation (mean) ^a | .54*** | .46*** | .45*** | .34** | .44*** | -.01 | .07 | -.21* | .08 | .04 | .03 | .08 | — | | | |
| 6. Participation discrepancy | -.16 | -.05 | -.14 | -.10 | -.20* | -.17 [†] | -.04 | .22* | .10 | .18 [†] | .15 | .12 | -.23* | — | | |
| 7. CBCL Ext ^a | -.22* | -.19* | -.15 | -.24* | -.06 | .15 | .10 | .02 | .06 | .20* | .20* | .14 | -.08 | .15 | — | |
| 8. C-TRF Ext | -.03 | -.09 | .09 | -.04 | -.07 | -.10 | -.16 | -.17 | .06 | .00 | -.16 | -.16 | -.19 | .15 | .22 [†] | — |

Note. Pearson product moment correlations calculated for all variables. CBCL Ext represents parents' reports ($N = 104$ families) of child externalizing behavior problems, whereas C-TRF Ext represents teachers' reports ($N = 74$) of child externalizing behavior problems.
^aMean scores reflect the average scores of the two parents within each couple.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

but only moderately, so teachers' and parents' scores for child externalizing problems were examined separately in further analyses.

No significant association was found between children's adjustment and the degree to which couples specialized in child care. However, consistent with earlier findings, children's externalizing problems (as reported by parents) were significantly associated with couples' reported satisfaction with child-care arrangements, $r(104) = .20$, $p = .043$; parents who reported less satisfaction described their children as having more externalizing behaviors. Contrary to expectations, coparenting observations and parents' satisfaction with divisions of labor were not significantly associated.

Some observations of coparenting among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents were associated with parent and teacher reports of children's behavioral adjustment. The composite supportive coparenting score was associated with parents' reports of child externalizing problems, $r(104) = -.21$, $p = .034$. Fewer externalizing problems, as reported by parents, were also associated with two subscales of supportive coparenting: pleasure of interaction, $r(104) = -.20$, $p = .044$, and greater interaction

between parents, $r(104) = -.23$, $p = .020$. Undermining coparenting behavior was significantly associated with parent reports of child behavior problems such that greater competition was associated with greater externalizing problems, $r(104) = .22$, $p = .027$. Teachers' reports of child externalizing problems were, however, not associated with coparenting observations. Overall, it appeared that aspects of both supportive and undermining coparenting were relevant to children's externalizing behaviors, as reported by parents.

Next, we conducted hierarchical multiple regression analyses predicting child externalizing behaviors from coparenting observations and division of labor variables that were significantly associated with parent reports of children's behavioral adjustment (see Table 5). Simple linear regressions revealed that fewer child externalizing problems were significantly predicted by observations of coparenting: greater supportive coparenting, $F(1, 102) = 4.61$, $p = .034$, greater interactiveness; $F(1, 102) = 5.61$, $p = .020$; greater pleasure of interaction, $F(1, 102) = 4.15$, $p = .044$; and less competition between parents, $F(1, 102) = 5.04$, $p = .027$. Fewer child externalizing problems, as reported by parents, were also predicted by greater satisfaction

Table 5
Simultaneous Multiple Linear Regression of Coparenting and Division of Labor Variables Onto Summed Parent Reports of Child Externalizing Problems

| Variable | Child externalizing problems | | | |
|---|------------------------------|---------------|---------|--------------------|
| | <i>B</i> | <i>SE (B)</i> | β | <i>t</i> |
| Supportive | -2.85 | 1.47 | -.18 | -1.94 [†] |
| Competition | 3.11 | 1.47 | .20 | 2.11* |
| Dissatisfaction (child-care divisions) | 3.48 | 1.45 | .23 | 2.40* |
| <i>R</i> ² | .13 | | | |
| <i>F</i> (3, 100) | 4.84** | | | |

Note. All predictor variables were centered. Satisfaction with child-care divisions represents an average satisfaction score for each couple. [†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

with division of child-care labor, $F(1, 102) = 4.20$, $p = .043$.

To examine whether these associations differed as a function of family type, we recalculated all simple linear regressions that were significant in the previous step with family type as a moderator. Family type was dummy coded to evaluate “lesbian versus heterosexual” and “gay versus heterosexual” effects with heterosexual parents as the reference group. All independent variables were centered. In no case was the moderation by family type significant, indicating that the associations among observations of coparenting, division of labor variables, and child externalizing problems did not differ by parental sexual orientation.

Next, the variables that were significant in predicting child externalizing problems in the simple linear regressions were entered into a multiple regression model. Dissatisfaction with child-care division of labor, as well as competition between parents, emerged as significant (see Table 5). The model explained 13% of the variance in child externalizing problems.

Thus, as expected, parents’ satisfaction with division of child-care labor, not their actual division of labor, was significantly associated with children’s behavior problems. As anticipated, supportive coparenting interactions, such as those characterized by greater pleasure and engagement between parents, were associated with positive child behavior. Undermining coparenting, particularly competition, was associated with child conduct problems. These results held for all three types of families. Parental division of labor as such (whether assessed via parental reports or behavioral observations) was not, however, associated with child outcomes.

Discussion

The current study provided the first empirical examination of differences and similarities in coparenting among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples, as well as an evaluation of their associations with outcomes among adopted children. Results showed that lesbian and gay couples were more likely than heterosexual couples to share parenting tasks evenly, and that heterosexual couples were more likely to specialize. Whether parents shared child care or showed a more specialized pattern was, however, unrelated to children’s adjustment. The best predictors of child behavior problems were observed competition between parents, and dissatisfaction with child-care labor divisions, which were not associated with parental sexual orientation. Our results thus revealed both similarities and differences among the coparenting interactions of lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples, and they suggested that group differences in coparenting as such were unrelated to child adjustment.

As expected, both lesbian and gay couples were likely to report sharing child-care tasks and heterosexual couples were likely to report specialization. These findings expand on earlier findings that lesbian parents are more likely to report sharing labor than are heterosexual parents (Goldberg, 2010). These data are among the first to reveal that gay fathers divide child-care tasks relatively evenly (see also Johnson & O’Connor, 2002).

Despite differences in their reported patterns of dividing child-care labor, most parents reported feeling equally satisfied with their current divisions of labor. Couples were more likely to express dissatisfaction with divisions of labor when they reported greater specialization—suggesting a possible disadvantage of dividing labor according to traditional gender roles. Mothers in heterosexual couples, who reported doing more child care than fathers, were also more likely than fathers to report dissatisfaction with current child-care arrangements. Similarly, previous research indicates that inequities in divisions of child-care labor are often associated with dissatisfaction and lower relationship quality, particularly among heterosexual women (e.g., Coltrane, 2000). Thus, advantages of sharing child-care tasks may stem from greater satisfaction with division of labor. Indeed, more egalitarian (less “traditional”) divisions of labor in heterosexual couples have been associated with higher marital satisfaction (e.g., Coltrane, 2000).

Consistent with coparenting observations of heterosexual couples with young biological children

(Jia & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2011), adoptive couples demonstrated relatively high levels of supportive coparenting and low levels of undermining coparenting behaviors during family play. Supportive behaviors were observed in the degree of warmth, enjoyment of interaction, and level of interactiveness between parents. An example of warmth was expressed during a family's "tea party" when one gay father handed the other a tea cup, and the partners smiled at one another, maintained eye contact, and laughed together. Interactiveness and enjoyment of interaction were observed with one lesbian couple when they discussed what the child had done earlier that day while smiling and laughing together. Undermining behaviors were also observed. For example, one heterosexual couple, rated high in competition, was observed talking over one another, with each parent suggesting different toys to their child. Across all families, however, supportive behaviors were significantly more likely than undermining behaviors. These results mirror those of other studies using the same observational coding scheme (Jia & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2011) and extend earlier findings for the first time to lesbian, gay, and heterosexual adoptive couples.

Significant differences were, however, found in coparenting such that a unique profile of coparenting dynamics emerged for each family type. Lesbian couples were rated as the most supportive and the least undermining. Gay couples were rated as the least supportive, but were intermediate to lesbian and heterosexual couples in undermining behaviors. Heterosexual couples were intermediate in supportive behaviors, but showed the most undermining behaviors.

These findings about differences in coparenting behavior indicate how parental sexual orientation, as well as parent gender, may be linked with important qualitative differences in the experiences of adoptive families. For example, results showed that the more women in the couple, the more supportive the interactions were rated as being. This finding could be related to the ways in which women are typically socialized to be warm, nurturing, and relational in their interactions with others (Patterson & Hastings, 2007). It also may be that men demonstrate supportive behaviors in ways that differ from the ways that women typically do. We found that heterosexual couples demonstrated significantly more undermining behaviors than did lesbian or gay couples. This could be related to societal power differentials between women and men in heterosexual couples as compared to lesbian and gay couples (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007)

or to differences in power and influence among heterosexual couples in the coparenting and couple relationship (McHale & Irace, 2011). Alternatively, this result could reflect the greater value that lesbian and gay couples may place on egalitarian relationship behavior as compared to heterosexual couples (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007). Overall, these results reflect a complex interplay of gender and sexual orientation among adoptive couples.

Contrary to our hypotheses, cooperation and competition were not observed to differ by family type. One of the reasons for this may be the relative homogeneity of this sample, with regard to low ratings of undermining behavior and high ratings of supportive behavior overall. These findings are perhaps not surprising given that these were all adoptive parenting couples. Earlier research clearly demonstrates that adoptive parents have similar, or sometimes more favorable, psychological adjustment than do other parents—for instance, adoptive parents often report less parenting stress than do biological parents (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). This may reflect the fact that adoptive parents complete a rigorous screening process before completing an adoption, in which prospective parents are evaluated particularly in terms of having positive mental health and high couple relationship quality (Brodzinsky & Pinderhughes, 2002). More recently, Hock and Mooradian (2012) note that coparenting among adoptive couples may be more stable than that for other couples. Thus, it is not surprising that most couples conveyed supportive, rather than undermining, coparenting interactions.

All parents, on average, were involved in family interaction. Consistent with division of labor reports, however, heterosexual couples had greater discrepancies in participation than did lesbian and gay couples. Heterosexual mothers were observed to participate more than did heterosexual fathers, in contrast to same-sex couples, who tended to participate more equally. The results support the validity of Cowan and Cowan's (1990) widely used self-report measure.

Parents' subjective evaluations of how child-care labor was divided were significantly associated with children's behavior problems, such that parents who reported greater satisfaction with child-care arrangements also reported that their children were more well adjusted. The degree to which couples specialized in child-care labor, however, was not associated with children's adjustment. Thus, consistent with the findings of Chan et al. (1998), couples' satisfaction with division of labor

was more clearly linked with child outcomes than was their actual division of labor.

Consistent with earlier research on heterosexual couples with young biological children (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010), observations of coparenting were significantly related to parents' reports of children's adjustment. These associations did not differ by family type, suggesting that some family processes are related to child outcomes regardless of family structure. In particular, competition between parents was related to more child externalizing problems as reported by parents. It may be that different predictors emerged as significant based from parent reports, but not from teacher reports, due to the different contexts in which parents and teachers observe children's behaviors. Parents may be observing behaviors relevant to parenting and family contexts, whereas teachers may be capturing behaviors related to group and social settings in their ratings (Mangelsdorf, Schoppe, & Buur, 2000).

Contrary to expectations, supportive and undermining coparenting behaviors were not significantly associated with reported divisions of labor or with parents' satisfaction with these arrangements. Family systems researchers have argued that the coparenting relationship should be examined separately from the couple relationship (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004), and these results appear consistent with that view. Although Feinberg (2003) has discussed division of family labor as one aspect of coparenting, he acknowledged that different components of coparenting are likely to be partly associated and partly distinct. In this study, measurements of division of labor may have captured dynamics of the couple's relationship as partners, whereas observations of coparenting may have captured the dynamics of the partners' relationships specific to their parenting roles. This divergence has been observed in families with infants (Van Egeren, 2004), and the current results extend these findings to families with young children. Thus, it appears important to examine division of labor and other coparenting dynamics as separate constructs.

Strengths and Limitations

This study had a number of strengths. It was the first to address coparenting dynamics and children's development in a sample of adoptive families headed by lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. These are among the first observational data on coparenting to be collected from lesbian-

and gay-parent families, as well as from adoptive families (Hock & Mooradian, 2012). Thus, the findings contribute to the literatures on developmental psychology and family systems, and also to the limited knowledge base regarding gay father families and adoptive families with lesbian and gay parents (Goldberg, 2010). Because aggregating data from multiple informants is likely to yield a more complete picture of children's adjustment (e.g., Doctoroff & Arnold, 2004), child outcomes were assessed not only from parent reports but also from teacher reports. The sample was systematically recruited from a variety of geographical locations and assessed using multiple methods, likely enhancing the capacity for generalizing the findings.

Some limitations of the study should be noted. At the time of data collection, children were young ($M = 3$ years) and thus this study was not likely to have captured complex dynamics of parenting and child development that emerge as children grow older. Longitudinal data would be valuable. Our observational play sessions were limited in length, and additional data about family interaction at multiple time points, across multiple settings, and from multiple informants would be helpful. Families in which both parents had been awarded legal recognition as parents participated, so it remains to be seen whether the findings would hold true in jurisdictions in which only one partner in a same-sex couple is the legal parent. Participation rates among heterosexual couples were lower than those among lesbian and gay couples, making generalization beyond this sample uncertain. Broadly, future research about how contexts within and outside families (e.g., sibling relationships, contact with birth families, transracial adoption, peer relationships, and school experiences) affect child development and family dynamics in adoptive families with lesbian and gay parents would be valuable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results revealed both similarities and differences in coparenting styles among lesbian, gay, and heterosexual couples. Although couples differed in their reports of divisions of child-care labor and in observational assessments of coparenting behaviors, their young adopted children were reported to have few behavioral adjustment problems. Overall, coparenting behaviors emerged as more important correlates of child outcomes than did family structure, regardless of differences in couples' divisions of labor or

interactions during family play. Thus, results suggested that parental sexual orientation was linked more with qualitative differences in family experiences than with differences in outcomes for children.

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