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Not a “Mom Thing”: Predictors of Gatekeeping in Same-Sex and Heterosexual Parent Families

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Author Note

Some findings from this paper were presented in a poster titled *Parental Gatekeeping in Heterosexual, Lesbian, and Gay Parent Families with Young Children* by Sweeney, K. K., Goldberg, A. E., and Garcia, R. L. at the 123rd American Psychological Association Annual Convention (August, 2015) in Toronto, Canada. Some findings from this project were also presented in a poster titled *Gatekeeping Around Child Care Among Gay, Lesbian, and Heterosexual Parents* by Sweeney, K. K., Goldberg, A. E., and Garcia, R. at the National Council of Family Relations November, 2015 in Vancouver, Canada.

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Abstract

The current study is the first to examine parental gatekeeping in both same-sex (57 female, 51 male) and heterosexual ($n = 82$) couples, all of whom became parents via adoption. Aspects of the individual, the couple, and the work context, measured pre-adoption, were examined as predictors of gatekeeping. Gatekeeping refers to attitudes and behaviors aimed at regulating and limiting the involvement of the other parent in housework and child care and was measured two years post-adoption. Findings revealed that women in heterosexual relationships reported higher gatekeeping compared to all other groups, and men in same-sex relationships reported higher gatekeeping compared to women in same-sex relationships as well as men in heterosexual relationships. Across the full sample, lower job autonomy predicted higher gatekeeping in both housework and child care, whereas greater relationship ambivalence, greater perceived parenting skill, and lower perceived partner parenting skill predicted higher gatekeeping in child care. Findings provide insight into how gatekeeping behaviors and beliefs are enacted in diverse types of couples, and suggest that work factors should be taken into account when conducting research on, and seeking to improve, coparenting relationships.

Key words: child care, coparenting relationships, gatekeeping, gay, housework, lesbian

Not a “Mom Thing”: Predictors of Gatekeeping in Same-Sex and Heterosexual Parent Families

An equitable division of labor between cohabitating parents in housework and child care, along with spousal support in the coparenting relationship, have been linked to greater parental relationship satisfaction and better mental health (Ehrenberg, Gearing-Small, Hunter, & Small, 2001; Frisco & Williams, 2003). Although there is a trend toward increasing equality between heterosexual men and women in the contemporary U.S.¹, women still do the majority of housework and child care (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009), while same-sex couples tend to divide tasks more evenly (Goldberg, Smith, & Perry-Jenkins, 2012).

Gatekeeping may be an expression of the gendered nature of parenting that underlies unequal divisions of labor in some heterosexual couples (Hawkins, Marshall, & Allen, 1998). Allen and Hawkins (1999) define gatekeeping as “a collection of beliefs and behaviors that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work” (p. 200). Research suggests that mothers who report more of gatekeeping tend to view the housework and child care as their responsibility and maintain control over father involvement (Cannon, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown, & Sokolowski, 2008), thus reinforcing traditional gender norms (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). In the current study, gatekeeping refers to restrictive and controlling attitudes and behaviors in relation to housework and child care.

In the academic literature, gatekeeping has only been examined in mothers in heterosexual relationships. The current study aims to broaden understanding of gatekeeping in other contexts by examining predictors of gatekeeping in heterosexual and same-sex adoptive

¹ For brevity and clarity, we use the terms “heterosexual women” to refer to women partnered with men, “heterosexual men” to refer to men partnered with women, “gay men” to refer to men partnered with men, and “lesbian women” to refer to women partnered with women. We acknowledge the limitations of these terms, and encourage readers to remember that parents in these relationships may hold other identities (e.g., bisexual, queer).

parent couples. Studying gatekeeping in same-sex couples is important because they challenge traditional roles in the family (Goldberg et al., 2012; Perlesz et al., 2010), yet their divisions of labor may also reflect traditional masculine and feminine parenting roles. Thus, examining gatekeeping in these couples may reveal ways that they both disrupt and reify traditional gender roles in coparenting. Also, in addition to couple type and gender, we examine aspects of parents' personality, relationship quality, and work context as predictors of gatekeeping.

Studies examining gatekeeping by heterosexual mothers have identified intrapersonal predictors of gatekeeping, such as negative emotions (Cannon et al., 2008; Schoppe-Sullivan, Altenburger, Lee, Bower, & Dush, 2015) and lower self-esteem (Gaunt, 2008). Interpersonal factors, such as relationship conflict (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015; Stevenson et al., 2014), and lower partner parenting skill (Fagan & Barnett, 2003), also relate to more gatekeeping. Finally, work-related factors (i.e., lower income and lower perceived work importance; Gaunt, 2008) relate to more gatekeeping. Same-sex couples may differ from heterosexual couples in these domains (Goldberg, 2010); thus, of interest is exploring them in relation to gatekeeping in lesbian/gay (LG) and heterosexual parents. We next review gatekeeping literature in three areas: (a) gender norms in the division of labor, (b) intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics, and (c) the workplace context. All studies examined heterosexual couples unless noted.

Gender Norms Surrounding the Division of Labor

Our study is informed by a social constructionist perspective on gender, whereby sexuality, gender, and notions of family roles are not innate but socially constructed and vary by context (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). In the US, housework and child care contain gendered meanings, which reflect beliefs about parenting roles (i.e., the belief that the heterosexual nuclear

family is ideal and normative; the belief that wives should be responsible for unpaid work while husbands do paid work; Ferree, 1990; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Such beliefs have implications for families. For example, although many heterosexual mothers desire more father involvement (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009), they may also experience feelings of jealousy, anger, and exclusion when fathers take the lead in parenting (Ehrensaft, 1990). Mothers who hold traditional gendered parenting beliefs may be particularly vulnerable to these types of feelings, and engage in more gatekeeping (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Consistent with this notion, greater belief in traditional gender norms is associated with more maternal gatekeeping (Cannon et al., 2008; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Meteyer & Perry-Jenkins, 2010). Given that heterosexual parents arrange coparenting in a society that reinforces traditional gender norms (Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009), we expect that within heterosexual couples, women will report more gatekeeping over father involvement in child care and housework than men will report over mother involvement. Also, based on the theory that gatekeeping performed by mothers pushes fathers out of childcare (Fagan & Barnett, 2003) we expect a significant and negative correlation between the gatekeeping scores of parents in heterosexual couples, whereby the higher the level of gatekeeping reported by the mother, the lower the level of gatekeeping reported by the father.

Of particular interest to this study is examining gatekeeping in same-sex couples. In the absence of sex differences, is gatekeeping still enacted? While this is the first study to examine this question, some research suggests that power dynamics within same-sex couples may have implications for gatekeeping. Some same-sex couples enact patterns reflecting traditional gender roles of one parent as homemaker and the other as breadwinner (Carrington, 1999; Moore, 2008). And, like heterosexual couples, power differences between partners in same-sex couples

may affect divisions of labor, such that partners who have less prestigious jobs tend to do more labor at home (Goldberg et al., 2012; Sutphin, 2010).

On the other hand, there is also evidence that same-sex couples are aware of the gendered nature of household and child care tasks (Gabb, 2005; Oerton, 1997) and may exhibit lower levels and/or different patterns of gatekeeping in comparison with heterosexual couples. Two women or two men parenting together defy traditional gendered scripts (Goldberg, 2013; Perlesz et al., 2010) and same-sex couples tend to strive toward more equal divisions of labor (Goldberg et al., 2012; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 2009). Also, same-sex female couples report more positive communication (Gotta et al., 2011; Kurdek, 2004) than heterosexual couples, which may reduce gatekeeping (Stevenson et al., 2014). Given these conflicting findings, we predict that partners in same-sex couples engage in low levels of gatekeeping behavior, and the level of one parent's gatekeeping will be unrelated to the level of his/her partner's gatekeeping.

Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Characteristics

Research suggests that gatekeeping is not only related to gender and couple type, but also multiply determined by factors at different levels, including intrapersonal, interpersonal, and workplace contexts (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). Thus, in the following paragraphs, we review the literature in these domains, keeping in mind this research does not include same-sex couples. Some research indicates that mothers in heterosexual relationships engage in more gatekeeping when they experience more negative emotions (Cannon et al., 2008; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015) and lower self-worth (Gaunt, 2008), which may arise from dissatisfaction with an unequal division of labor and an inability to resolve conflict over household roles (Cannon et al., 2008). Although there is no research on negative

emotionality as a predictor of gatekeeping in same-sex couples, sexual minorities tend to have higher rates of negative emotions than heterosexual individuals, perhaps related to anti-LGB discrimination and internalization of stigma (Meyer, 1995). Such negative emotionality may affect their coparenting. In this study, we examine the relationship between neuroticism, defined as a tendency towards negative affect (McCrae & Costa, 1987), and gatekeeping. We expect a positive association between these two variables that is not qualified by the type of couple.

Aspects of relationship functioning, including relationship instability (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015) and more problematic marital behaviors (Stevenson et al., 2014), are associated with more gatekeeping in heterosexual couples. In this study, we examine two aspects of relationship functioning: conflict and ambivalence. Conflict is relevant inasmuch as mothers' dissatisfaction with fathers' level of involvement in housework and child care may lead to couple conflict (Frisco & Williams, 2003); in turn, if women may compensate by asserting power over the household through gatekeeping (Hawkins et al., 1998). Some prior qualitative work found that both male (Carrington, 1999) and female (Gartrell et al., 1999; Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2008) same-sex couples may experience conflict over the division of labor. For instance, lesbian couples have reported feelings of jealousy and competition when both mothers seek the role of primary caregiver (Goldberg et al., 2008). We predict that conflict will be positively associated with gatekeeping in housework and childcare regardless of couple type.

We also examine relationship ambivalence as it may be related to gatekeeping (Goldberg, Smith, & Kashy, 2010). Heterosexual mothers who feel ambivalent about their relationships and are in the process of, or have already, separated from their male partners have been found to compete for influence over children through gatekeeping (Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Moore, 2012).

Although parallel work on same-sex couples does not exist, it is reasonable to expect that relationship ambivalence may lead to gatekeeping around child care in these couples. We predict that ambivalence will be positively related to gatekeeping in child care only in all couple types.

Finally, perceptions of one's own, and one's partner's, parenting skill may affect gatekeeping. In both heterosexual and same-sex couples, mothers tend to view themselves as more skilled than fathers (Goldberg & Smith, 2009). Heterosexual mothers who view themselves as more skilled at parenting engage in more gatekeeping (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). Puhlman and Pasley (2013) suggest that gatekeeping can be motivated by fears that one's partner may hurt the child via poor parenting or neglect. We expect self-perceived parenting skill to be positively related, and perceived partner skill to be negatively related, to gatekeeping in child care and this relationship will not be qualified by parent gender or couple type.

Workplace Context

Many authors have argued that perceptions of power at work can affect parenting relationships (Perry-Jenkins, Goldberg, Smith, & Logan, 2011; Voydanoff, 2005). Allen and Hawkins (1999) argue that women who hold jobs that they experience as unfulfilling may compensate by finding personal meaning and power in their roles as mothers, and thus may engage in more gatekeeping than women who regard their careers as meaningful. Some research suggests that gay men too may compensate for lack of fulfillment in the workplace by focusing on fathering (Carrington, 1999; Goldberg, 2012). We predict that parents, regardless of gender or couple type, who report less autonomy at work will report more gatekeeping.

Similarly, having a lower income may lead parents to see their career as less important (Carrington, 1999) and to feel less valued at work (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2011). In turn, they may

shift their focus to the home and engage in more gatekeeping. For example, Gaunt (2008) found a negative correlation between personal income and gatekeeping in a sample of heterosexual mothers, and we predict the same pattern for all groups in our sample.

Control Variables

Fewer maternal work hours and lower maternal education have been linked to more gatekeeping (Gaunt, 2008). Given that work hours and education are not normally distributed in our sample, we control for these variables but do not use them as predictors of gatekeeping. We also control for child age, given that mothers of younger children tend to see father involvement as more important than do mothers of older children (De Luccie, 1995).

The Current Study

The current study examines predictors of gatekeeping in housework and child care in both mothers and fathers in same-sex and heterosexual couples with adopted children, thus controlling for potential within-couple (between parent) differences in parent-child relationships related to biology and breastfeeding. We used data from two time points, enabling us to determine whether variables measured pre-adoption predict gatekeeping two years post-adoption.

We examine the role of intrapersonal characteristics (neuroticism, self-perceived parenting skill), interpersonal processes (conflict, ambivalence, perceived partner parenting skill), and work context (job autonomy, personal income) in predicting gatekeeping. To understand how the effects of these predictors might vary by relational context, we examined two-way and three-way interactions between gender, couple type, and all predictors. These interactions are exploratory because gatekeeping has not been examined in same-sex couples.

Method

Participant Recruitment

The data come from a larger longitudinal study on the transition to parenthood. To be included, couples had to be first time parents and adopting their first child. Adoption agencies across the US were asked to provide study information to clients seeking to adopt. Effort was made to contact agencies in states that had a high percentage of same-sex couples. Over 30 agencies provided information to clients; interested clients contacted the principal investigator for participation details. Both same-sex and heterosexual couples were targeted through these agencies to facilitate similarity on income and geographic location. Organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign, a gay political organization, also disseminated study information.

Procedure

Both members of each couple were informed of the risks and benefits of the study, gave consent, and participated in pre-adoptive placement (Time 1 or T1) and 2 years post-adoptive placement (T2) assessments. At each phase, they were sent a packet of questionnaires to complete and they were interviewed over the phone. Interviews lasted 1-1.5 hours.

Description of the Sample

The current study includes 190 couples: namely, 57 female same-sex, 51 male same-sex, and 82 heterosexual couples. Personal income differed significantly by gender, $b = 6.98$, $t(179) = 22.75$, $p < .001$, with men reporting higher incomes ($M = \$90,037$, $SD = \$75,972$, $Mdn = \$75,000$) than women ($M = \$51,249$, $SD = \$36,592$, $Mdn = \$48,000$). Income did not differ significantly by couple type and there was no interaction of gender and couple type.

The interaction of gender and sexual orientation was significant in predicting work hours, $b = 3.18$, $t(352) = -4.90$, $p < .001$, such that heterosexual men worked more hours per week ($M =$

46.07, $SD = 8.13$) than gay men ($M = 41.70$, $SD = 10.04$), $b = -2.19$, $t(318) = -2.40$, $p = .017$, lesbian women ($M = 38.44$, $SD = 12.88$), $b = -3.81$, $t(323) = -4.29$, $p < .001$, and heterosexual women ($M = 30.11$, $SD = 16.79$), $b = -7.98$, $t(187) = -7.92$, $p < .001$. Gay men and lesbians worked significantly more hours than did heterosexual women, $b = -5.79$, $t(319) = -6.30$, $p < .001$, and $b = 4.17$, $t(324) = 4.67$, $p < .001$, respectively. There was no significant difference in work hours between gay men and lesbians, $b = -1.62$, $t(185) = -1.97$, $p = .051$.

The sample as a whole was also well educated. Of the 366 participants, 23 (6.3%) had a high school diploma, 30 (8.2%) had an associate's degree or some college, 134 (36.6%) had a bachelor's degree, 124 (33.9%) had a master's degree, and 55 (15.0%) had a professional degree (Ph.D., J.D., or M.D.). There were no differences in education level by gender or couple type.

Across same-sex and heterosexual adoptive parent families, the parents were mostly White (86%). At T1 participants reported an average age of 39.43 years ($SD = 5.47$) and an average relationship length of 8.24 years ($SD = 3.77$). Average relationship length did not differ significantly by couple type, $F(2, 182) = 2.21$, $p = .113$.

Sixty percent of couples adopted children through private domestic adoption, 21% of couples adopted children through public domestic adoption, and 19% of couples adopted through international adoption.² Children's average age at placement was 16.99 months ($Mdn = 0.5$ months; range = 0-16 years; $SD = 37.02$ months). The majority of couples (60%) adopted young infants (i.e., 3 months old or younger), 26% adopted children in the age range of 3 months to 3 years, and the remaining couples adopted older children in the age range of 3 to 16 years. Fifty

² Additionally, several same-sex male couples ($n = 3$ couples) pursued surrogacy, not adoption, and several couples ($n = 3$) did not report the type of adoption they used.

percent of couples adopted a boy, 45% adopted a girl, and 5% adopted siblings (boy and girl).

Child age did not differ significantly by couple type, $F(2, 182) = .337, p = .714$.

Measures

Our outcome, gatekeeping in household and child care tasks (T2) was measured using 7 items pertaining to housework and 5 items pertaining to child care from the Orientation Toward Domestic Labor Questionnaire by Allen and Hawkins (1999) as modified and utilized by Meteyer & Perry-Jenkins (2010). Items were modified to be gender-neutral. Housework items included “I have higher standards than my [partner] for how the house should be kept” and “I frequently redo some household task that [partner] has not done well.” Child care items included “I have higher standards than [partner] about how the child should be cared for” and “I frequently redo some child care task (e.g., dressing our child) that [partner] has not done well.”

For both housework and child care subscales, participants answered on a 5-point scale to indicate how strongly they agreed with each statement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). For both subscales, the outcome score was calculated as the mean of all items on the scale, and higher scores indicate higher levels of gatekeeping. For the housework subscale, alphas for lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men were .71, .71, .61, and .69, respectively. For the child care subscale, alphas for lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men were .76, .66, .70, and .67, respectively.

Regarding our predictor variables, gender was effects coded (1 = female, -1 = male). Couple type was effects coded (1 = same-sex, -1 = heterosexual). Neuroticism (T1) was assessed using a 48-item subscale from McCrae and Costa (1987). Neuroticism refers to the tendency to experience more negative affect, and includes an array of negative emotions such as

embarrassment, anger, anxiety, and depression. Sample items include “I often feel tense and jittery.” Participants rated items on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*); higher scores indicate higher levels of neuroticism. Alphas for lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men, were .90, .88, .87, and .90, respectively.

For parenting skill (T1), participants rated their skill and their perceived partner skill at 15 child care tasks (1 = *not skilled* to 4 = *very skilled*; Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, & McHale, 1987) such as dressing a child and feeding a child. Alphas for self-perceived parenting skill (and perceived parenting skill of one’s partner) for lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men were .91 (.93), .92 (.94), .92 (.90), and .92 (.93), respectively.

Relationship conflict (T1) was assessed using the 5-item conflict subscale from the Relationship Questionnaire (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). Questions, such as “When you and your partner argue, how serious are the problems or arguments?”, are answered on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all/not very much* to 9 = *very much*). Alphas for lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men were .69, .55, .61, and .61, respectively.

Relationship ambivalence (T1) was assessed using the 5-item ambivalence subscale from the Relationship Questionnaire (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). Questions, such as “How ambivalent or unsure are you about continuing in the relationship with your partner?”, are answered on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all/not very much* to 9 = *very much*). Alphas for lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men were .69, .74, .61, and .79, respectively.

Regarding work variables, we defined personal income (T1) as each participant’s self-reported annual salary in units of \$10,000’s. Job autonomy (T1) was assessed using an 18-item scale that assesses the degree to which an employee feels challenged, self-directed, and

autonomous at work (Greenberger, O'Neil, & Nagel, 1994). Sample items included: "I feel like I have a great deal of influence in the decision-making process on my job." Participants rated each item on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Alphas for lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men were .85, .87, .84, and .87, respectively.

Regarding controls, participants reported on their average work hours (T1) per week. Participants rated the highest level of education (T1) they had achieved on a scale from 1-6 (1 = *less than a high school education*, 2 = *high school diploma*, 3 = *an associate's degree or some college*, 4 = *bachelor's degree*, 5 = *master's degree*, and 6 = *Ph.D./J.D./M.D.*). Participants reported their child's age (T2) in months at the time of placement.

Analytic Strategy

Due to parents (level 1) being nested in couples (level 2), we used multilevel modeling (MLM) treating dyads as indistinguishable to account for the shared variance (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Smith, Sayer, & Goldberg, 2013). Level 1 variables included gender (men = -1 and women = 1), neuroticism, self-perceived parenting skill, perceived partner parenting skill, relationship conflict, relationship ambivalence, job autonomy, personal income, work hours, education level, and child age. Couple type (same-sex = 1 and different sex = -1) was included as a level 2 variable. Continuous predictors were grand mean-centered.

For each model, we first estimated a full interaction model (Model 1) that included three-way interactions between couple type, gender, and each predictor as well as all lower order interactions. The results of these full models are included in the supplement. To arrive at a final model, we then trimmed three-way interactions, followed by two-way interactions that failed to reach at least marginal significance ($p < .10$).

Attrition and Missing Data

After the transition to parenthood, some couples (5 female same-sex, 5 male same-sex, and 11 heterosexual couples) dropped out of the study. Also, in 12 couples, data on the outcome measure were available from only one parent, in which case the single parent remained in the sample. We compared the group of parents who remained in the study with those who dropped out on race, education, and income and found no significant differences between groups. Our final sample included 112 women nested in 57 female couples, 96 men nested in 51 male couples, and 158 individuals nested in 82 heterosexual couples.

Results

Descriptives

Descriptive statistics for all predictor variables by couple type and gender, are shown in Table 1. Heterosexual women reported the highest levels of neuroticism, followed by gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual men. Self-perceived parenting skill differed by gender, such that women reported higher levels than did men. Perceived partner parenting skill differed by group such that parents who had female partners reported higher levels of perceived partner parenting skill than parents with male partners. Relationship ambivalence differed by group; heterosexual men reported the highest levels, followed by gay men, lesbians, and heterosexual women. No group differences were found in levels of relationship conflict or job autonomy.

Our subsample of heterosexual women reported similar mean scores in gatekeeping as compared to heterosexual women in prior studies that used versions of the Allen and Hawkins (1999) gatekeeping measure (e.g., see Gaunt, 2008; Meteyer & Perry-Jenkins, 2010). In supplemental material, we report all bivariate correlations between predictor, control, and

outcome variables, and the intraclass correlation (ICC) for each variable. The overall ICC for gatekeeping in housework was $-.32, p < .001$. ICC's for female, male, and heterosexual couples were $-.37 (p = .016)$, $-.17 (p = .014)$, and $-.15 (p = .004)$, respectively. These ICCs were not significantly different ($p = .990$), indicating that, contrary to expectation, the dynamic that exists in heterosexual couples, whereby one partner (usually the woman) engages in more gatekeeping in housework than the other, also exists in male and female couples. The ICC for gatekeeping in child care was not significant overall, $ICC = -.06, p = .433$, or for each group; p ranged from $.290$ to $.793$. Thus, contrary to expectation, one parent's reported level of gatekeeping in child care was not related to his/her partner's reported level of gatekeeping in child care.

Multilevel Models Predicting Gatekeeping in Housework

In Model 1, predictors included (1) gender (man or woman), (2) couple type (same-sex or heterosexual), (3) neuroticism, (4) relationship conflict, (5) relationship ambivalence, (6) personal income, and (7) job autonomy. Education, work hours, and child age were controls.

In Model 1 (see Supplementary Table 2), the interaction of gender and personal income was statistically significant, as was the three-way interaction of gender, couple type, and job autonomy. These interactions were retained in the final model as well as all relevant lower order interactions. The interaction of couple type and job autonomy was marginally significant, so it was retained. All other interactions were removed.

In the final model (Model 2, Table 2), the interaction between gender and couple type was statistically significant, ($p < .001$) such that, as expected, heterosexual women reported engaging in the highest levels of gatekeeping related to housework ($M = 3.01, SD = 0.58$)—significantly higher levels than heterosexual men ($M = 2.41, SD = 0.59$), $b = 0.26, t(228) = 4.25$,

$p < .001$, and lesbians ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.63$), $b = -0.22$, $t(362) = -5.08$, $p < .001$. Contrary to our expectation, gay men ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.66$) engaged in higher levels of gatekeeping than lesbians, $b = -0.15$, $t(186) = -4.24$, $p < .001$, and heterosexual men, $b = 0.19$, $t(359) = 4.45$, $p < .001$; although, there was no significant difference in gatekeeping between gay men and heterosexual women, $b = 0.07$, $t(355) = 1.48$, $p < .140$. There was no significant difference in gatekeeping between lesbians and heterosexual men, $b = 0.04$, $t(361) = 0.98$, $p = .330$.

As expected, there was a significant main effect of job autonomy on gatekeeping, ($p = .015$), such that parents with lower job autonomy reported engaging in more gatekeeping. Contrary to expectation, neuroticism, relationship conflict, relationship ambivalence, and personal income were not significantly associated with gatekeeping in housework. Additionally, none of the control variables were associated with gatekeeping in housework.

The interaction of gender and personal income was statistically significant ($p = .023$; see supplemental material). Examining this interaction revealed that a lower income was marginally associated with higher gatekeeping for women, $b = -0.02$, $t(296) = -1.89$, $p = .060$, but there was no relationship between income and gatekeeping for men, $b = 0.01$, $t(335) = 1.20$, $p = .231$. Also, the interaction of gender, couple type, and job autonomy was significant, $b = 0.16$, $t(333) = 2.98$, $p = .003$ (see Figure 1). Specifically, lower autonomy was related to more gatekeeping for heterosexual women, $b = -0.26$, $t(327) = -2.30$, $p = .022$, and gay men, $b = -0.33$, $t(326) = -3.13$, $p = .002$, but there was no relationship between job autonomy and gatekeeping for lesbians, $b = -0.11$, $t(321) = -1.03$, $p = .303$, or heterosexual men, $b = 0.15$, $t(322) = 1.34$, $p = .181$.

Multilevel Models Predicting Gatekeeping in Child Care

In Model 1, predictors included (1) gender, (2) couple type, (3) neuroticism, (4) conflict, (5) ambivalence, (6) self-perceived parenting skill, (7) perceived partner parenting skill, (8) personal income, and (9) job autonomy. Education, work hours, and child age were entered as controls. In Model 1 (see supplemental material), the interaction of couple type and conflict was significant, as was the three-way interaction of gender, couple type, and job autonomy. These interactions (and their relevant lower-order interactions) were retained in the final model, while all others were trimmed.³

In the final model (Model 2, Table 2), the interaction between gender and couple type was significant ($p = .001$)⁴. As expected, heterosexual women engaged in the highest levels of gatekeeping in child care ($M = 2.50, SD = 0.61$)—significantly more than heterosexual men ($M = 2.00, SD = 0.52$), $b = 0.16, t(235) = 2.84, p = .005$, and lesbians ($M = 2.12, SD = 0.69$), $b = -0.13, t(333) = -2.79, p = .006$. Contrary to expectation, there was no significant difference in gatekeeping between heterosexual women and gay men ($M = 2.28, SD = 0.62$), $b = 0.05, t(327) = 1.01, p = .315$, and among same-sex couples, there was a marginally significant difference between men and women, $b = -0.08, t(200) = -1.81, p = .072$, such that gay men reported higher gatekeeping scores than lesbians. Heterosexual men reported significantly less gatekeeping than did gay men, $b = 0.11, t(330) = 2.31, p = .022$, but there were no differences in gatekeeping between heterosexual men and lesbians, $b = 0.02, t(326) = 0.53, p = .599$.

As expected, there was a significant main effect of relationship ambivalence on gatekeeping ($p = .006$) such that parents who reported more ambivalence about their

³ The interaction of gender and perceived partner parenting skill was marginally significant in Model 1, but nonsignificant after removing nonsignificant higher order interactions—thus it was trimmed from the final model.

⁴ The following differences between groups are when relationship conflict and job autonomy are at their means.

relationships reported greater engagement in gatekeeping in child care. The interaction of couple type and relationship conflict was significant ($p = .012$; see supplemental material). Examining this interaction revealed that there was a marginally positive effect of conflict on gatekeeping for same-sex couples, $b = 0.08$, $t(329) = 1.92$, $p = .056$, such that same-sex couples who reported more conflict reported somewhat more gatekeeping; whereas, there was no relationship between conflict and gatekeeping in for heterosexual couples, $b = -0.07$, $t(327) = -1.47$, $p = .142$. There were significant main effects of self-perceived parenting skill ($p = .001$), and perceived partner parenting skill ($p = .005$) such that parents who perceived themselves as more skilled, and parents who perceived their partners as less skilled, reported greater engagement in gatekeeping.

Contrary to expectation, there were no significant main effects of neuroticism or personal income on gatekeeping in child care. The interaction of gender, couple type, and job autonomy was significant, $b = 0.19$, $t(365) = 3.51$, $p < .001$. Examining this interaction (see Figure 2) revealed that there was a negative effect of job autonomy on gatekeeping for heterosexual women, $b = -0.36$, $t(366) = -3.12$, $p = .002$, and for gay men, $b = -0.46$, $t(366) = -4.26$, $p < .001$, but there was no effect of job autonomy on gatekeeping for lesbians, $b = -0.06$, $t(365) = -.62$, $p = .535$, or for heterosexual men, $b = 0.01$, $t(365) = 0.05$, $p = .958$.

Discussion

This is the first study to examine gatekeeping in both fathers and mothers, in same-sex and heterosexual couples, across the transition to adoptive parenthood, and the first to examine the role of the work context in relation to gatekeeping. Given the findings, we assert that gatekeeping should not be considered a maternal behavior, inasmuch as men engage in gatekeeping behavior as well. These findings support a social constructionist view of gender,

whereby gendered behaviors such as gatekeeping are not innately tied to biological sex, but instead vary by context, including individuals' relational context.

We found that in heterosexual adoptive couples, women engaged in more gatekeeping on average. In that the participants were adoptive parents, our analysis was able to disaggregate social parenthood from biological aspects of parenthood (e.g., breastfeeding), thus underscoring the salience of gender and relational context (and, possibly, the role of gender socialization) in shaping coparenting relationships in general and gatekeeping specifically.

That men in same-sex relationships reported more gatekeeping than their women in same-sex relationships is surprising because contradicts traditional gender norms, whereby women are socialized to take responsibility over housework and childcare. In turn, it is clear that factors beyond sex and gender are operative in determining gatekeeping. A possible explanation is that lesbians tend to create more equal relationships than gay men (Farr & Patterson, 2013; Perlesz et al., 2010), possibly reducing their gatekeeping. Also, gay fathers face different (and possibly greater) pressures than lesbian mothers—for example, they encounter greater community invalidation of their parenting competence based on both their gender and sexual orientation (Goldberg et al., 2012, 2013), which reflects traditional gendered stereotypes of men as incompetent parents (Carrington, 1999; Goldberg, 2013). Although direct causal relationships cannot be assumed, it is possible that heterosexist discrimination leads gay fathers to experience more parenting insecurity and compensate by engaging in gatekeeping to bolster their parenting identity (Pedersen & Kilzer, 2014). These findings indicate that practitioners and researchers should consider not only maternal, but also paternal gatekeeping, in work with diverse families.

Within the couple, when one partner reported more gatekeeping in housework, the other partner typically reported less. Unexpectedly, this pattern was true for all couple types, indicating that in many families, one partner tends to seek more control over housework. On the other hand, and unexpectedly, one parents' gatekeeping in child care was not correlated with his/her partner's gatekeeping in child care. This was true in all couple types, indicating that patterns around gatekeeping in childcare may be diverse.

As expected, we found that parents who perceived themselves as more skilled at child care, and their partners as less skilled, reported more gatekeeping in child care. Our findings are somewhat consistent with past studies (Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015) and Puhlman and Pasley's (2013) suggestion that mothers may engage in more gatekeeping because they fear inadequate fathering may harm children. However, a unique contribution of this study is our finding that this pattern is also true in same-sex couples. We found that across all couple types, women reported higher parenting skill than did men, and parents with female partners reported higher perceived partner skill than those with male partners. Thus, participants' perceptions of parenting skill mirror traditional stereotypes of women as more nurturing than men (Pedersen, 2012) and, in turn, may indicate that members of same-sex couples are not immune to holding gender stereotypes – which may in turn shape coparenting behavior. Thus, interventions aimed at increasing coparenting satisfaction in diverse couples must consider how gender norms affect perceptions of parenting skill, which in turn may influence gatekeeping.

Turning to the findings for relationship predictors, consistent with prior work (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015), parents who reported higher relationship ambivalence engaged in more gatekeeping in child care. This pattern was true in all couple types, indicating that relationship

ambivalence may affect coparenting similarly in different types of families. It is possible that parents who are uncertain about the long-term viability of their relationships may monopolize child care. Perhaps they hope to retain stronger connections with the children in case the family separates and a custody battle ensues. Alternatively, perhaps they are seeking emotional connection from their children due to estrangement from their partner. Regarding conflict, higher conflict predicted more gatekeeping in child care only, and this was true only in same-sex couples. Perhaps the level of conflict simply matters less for heterosexual couples, who, regardless of the level of conflict, tend to organize themselves according to gendered roles whereby mothers engage in more gatekeeping than fathers. Whereas, in same-sex couples, who tend to value equality (Goldberg, 2010), gatekeeping is more apt to occur in response to deeper relationship difficulties. Unexpectedly, ambivalence and conflict did not predict more gatekeeping in housework. Perhaps gatekeeping in housework does not occur in response to relationship difficulties because housework does not provide as much of an emotional connection with others as does childcare and thus gatekeeping in housework is not experienced as a meaningful way to cope with relationship difficulties. These findings underscore the importance of targeting relationship difficulties when seeking to improve co-parenting.

Regarding the work context, we found that lower job autonomy was associated with higher gatekeeping in both housework and child care for parents with male partners, but not parents with female partners. Allen and Hawkins (1999) theorized that parents might engage in gatekeeping to compensate for disempowerment in low-prestige occupations by seeking power at home. This may explain the connection between low job autonomy and gatekeeping among parents with a male partner (i.e., heterosexual women and gay men), but the lack of connection

between these domains among parents with a female partner (i.e., lesbians and heterosexual men) was surprising. It is possible that these patterns reflect the influence of gender socialization. That is, when feeling disempowered at work, parents with female partners may turn to their spouses – who, as women, have been conditioned to do more “emotion work” in the relationship (Knudson & Mahoney, 2009). Thus, they may turn to their partner for emotional support to relieve stress, instead of engaging in gatekeeping to increase power in the home.

Consistent with past work (Gaunt, 2008), lower personal income was related to more gatekeeping in housework for women. This association was true for women in both same-sex and heterosexual relationships. Gatekeeping over housework may be a strategy to gain more control over family decisions when a low-income partner feels a lack of power in the relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Moore, 2008). The fact that income was associated with gatekeeping in women but not men may reflect the impact of gender socialization, whereby women are socialized to gain personal meaning and power through housework, but men who focus on housework perceive a loss of personal power because they are stepping outside of socially constructed gender roles (Carrington, 1999; Knudson & Mahoney, 2009). Unexpectedly, income was unrelated to gatekeeping in child care. This may reflect the lower desirability of housework as a form of labor, compared to child care; that is, low-income parents may find that their partners put up less of a “fight” when they enact gatekeeping in housework than in child care (Goldberg, 2013). Finally, in contrast to prior work (e.g., Cannon et al., 2008; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015) we found no relationship between neuroticism and gatekeeping. Thus, relationship and work factors may better account for gatekeeping than individual traits.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current study is limited in several ways. First, our outcome measures did not assess behaviors that encourage the other parent's participation, as some studies have (e.g., Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). Our outcome measures were also based on self-report. Future research can examine gatekeeping behaviors, the consequences of these behaviors, and their frequency in different family types. In addition, we found low internal consistency on the housework subscale of gatekeeping for heterosexual women (below .65). Future work should examine whether our conceptualization of the two different domains of gatekeeping (housework and child care) are meaningful and valid among other samples of same-sex and heterosexual couples.

We did not assess several factors that may predict gatekeeping. Future research can measure traditional gender beliefs (Cannon et al., 2008; Kulik & Tsoref, 2010) and alternative gender norms in LGBTQ communities as predictors of gatekeeping. We also did not assess the effects of religiosity (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015; Gaunt, 2008), flexibility of work schedules (Radcliffe & Cassel, 2015), or family support (Kulik & Tsoref, 2010), all of which have been linked to gatekeeping. The small proportion of part-time working parents and non-employed participants in the current sample precluded us from exploring the relationship between work hours and gatekeeping. Future research could examine parental work status (e.g., full-time, part-time, or no paid work), partners' work status, and their interaction in relation to gatekeeping.

Finally, the longitudinal nature of this study, whereby we measured predictors of gatekeeping prior to adoption, and gatekeeping two years after adoption, may be both a strength and a limitation. Regarding the limitations of this design, changes could occur in the couple during the two year lapse that are not accounted for, such as job changes and increases in

conflict after adoption. On the other hand, the predictive nature of the study can assist practitioners in identifying couples that may need more support in coparenting prior to their adoption of children, opening doors for earlier interventions.

Conclusion

Our study generated several important insights. First, our finding that fathers in same-sex relationships engage in higher average levels of gatekeeping than mothers in same-sex relationships suggests that gatekeeping should not be conceptualized as maternal behavior, but instead, be recognized as a behavior that both men and women can engage in depending on their relational context. Second, our findings point to the importance of taking into account how the work environment affects gatekeeping. Parents who feel disempowered by working in low autonomy and low-paying jobs may be more likely to assert power at home than parents who feel empowered at work. Third, our findings about the relationships between self-perceived parenting skill, job autonomy and income and our outcome gatekeeping suggest that gender theory is a useful framework for theorizing about predictors of gatekeeping in same-sex and heterosexual couples—although future work should perhaps integrate gender theory with other relevant frameworks (e.g., feminist and ecological perspectives), particularly when examining coparenting in same-sex couples. Finally, our findings have implications for intervention efforts seeking to improve coparenting relationships. Practitioners who work with families to improve coparenting may find it useful to help parents cope with feelings of disempowerment at work.

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Table 1

Means and Standard deviations for Predictor Variables using MLM

Variable	Heterosexual Women (1) <i>M (SD)</i>	Heterosexual Men (2) <i>M (SD)</i>	SS Women (3) <i>M (SD)</i>	SS Men (4) <i>M (SD)</i>	Multilevel model analyses	Group differences
Neuroticism	2.684 (0.366)	2.541 (0.387)	2.633 (0.392)	2.676 (0.370)	^a <i>b</i> = -0.05, <i>t</i> (363) = -2.33, <i>p</i> = .020	2 < 1*, 2 < 4*
Parenting skill	3.126 (0.574)	2.858 (0.588)	3.098 (0.508)	2.908 (0.556)	^b <i>b</i> = 0.11, <i>t</i> (364) = 3.96, <i>p</i> < .001	
Partner skill	2.979 (0.546)	3.390 (0.496)	3.307 (0.501)	2.993 (0.639)	^a <i>b</i> = 0.18, <i>t</i> (365) = 2.58, <i>p</i> < .001	4 < 2***, 1 < 2*** 4 < 3***, 1 < 3***
Conflict	3.847 (1.071)	3.494 (1.043)	3.714 (1.173)	3.703 (0.974)		
Ambivalence	1.579 (0.647)	2.117 (1.104)	1.796 (0.819)	1.864 (0.856)	^a <i>b</i> = 0.12, <i>t</i> (365) = 2.58, <i>p</i> = .010	3 < 2*, 1 < 4* 1 < 2***
Personal income	\$45,487 (\$38,358)	\$82,609 (\$50,292)	\$55,210 (\$34,951)	\$96,026 (\$91,420)	^b <i>b</i> = 6.98, <i>t</i> (179) = 22.75, <i>p</i> < .001	
Job autonomy	3.792 (0.574)	3.903 (0.584)	3.940 (0.541)	3.917 (0.569)		

Note. The numbers in parentheses in column heads refer to the numbers used for illustrating significant differences in the last column

titled “Group differences,” which indicates significant group differences according to MLM. ^aLevels differed by the interaction of

gender and couple type. ^bLevels differed by only gender.

Table 2

Relationship between Predictors and Gatekeeping Using Multilevel Modeling

	<u>Gatekeeping: Housework</u>		<u>Gatekeeping: Child care</u>	
	Model 2 (Final Model) <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Exploratory Model (SS-only) <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Model 2 (Final Model) <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Exploratory Model (SS-only) <i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Gender	0.06 (0.04)	-0.14 (0.03)***	0.04 (0.04)	-0.07 (0.04)
Type	-0.01 (0.03)	-	-0.01 (0.03)	-
Gender × Type	-0.20 (0.03)***	-	-0.12 (0.04)**	-
Neuroticism	0.12 (0.08)	0.12 (0.11)	0.04 (0.09)	0.12 (0.13)
Parenting skill	-	-	0.24 (0.07)**	0.24 (0.10)*
Partner skill	-	-	-0.20 (0.07)**	-0.19 (0.09)*
Conflict	0.02 (0.03)	0.06 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)	0.07 (0.04)
Ambivalence	0.06 (0.04)	0.04 (0.05)	0.11 (0.04)**	0.12 (0.06)*
Income	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Job autonomy	-0.14 (0.06)*	-0.21 (0.08)**	-0.22 (0.06)***	-0.24 (0.09)**
Work hours	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)
Education level	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)
Child age	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Type × Conflict	-	-	0.07 (0.03)*	-
Gender × Income	-0.02 (0.01)*	-0.02 (0.01)*	-	-
Gender × Job autonomy	-0.05 (0.06)	-	0.01 (0.05)	0.19 (0.07)*
Type × Job autonomy	-0.08 (0.05)	-	-0.04 (0.06)	-
Gender × Type × Job autonomy	0.16 (0.05)**	-	0.19 (0.05)***	-

Note. Type = Couple type (SS or heterosexual). Partner skill = perceived partner parenting skill.

Income = personal annual income in increments of \$1000. SS = same-sex couples. * $p < .05$. ** p

< .01. *** $p < .001$. Model 1 is displayed in the supplemental material.

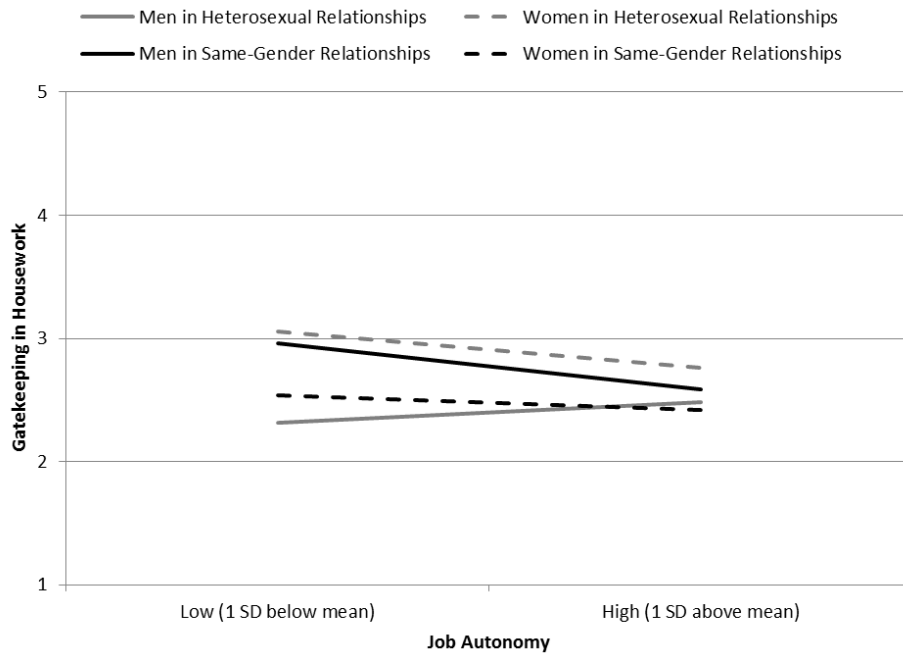


Figure 1. This figure shows the interaction of gender, relationship type, and job autonomy predicting gatekeeping in housework.

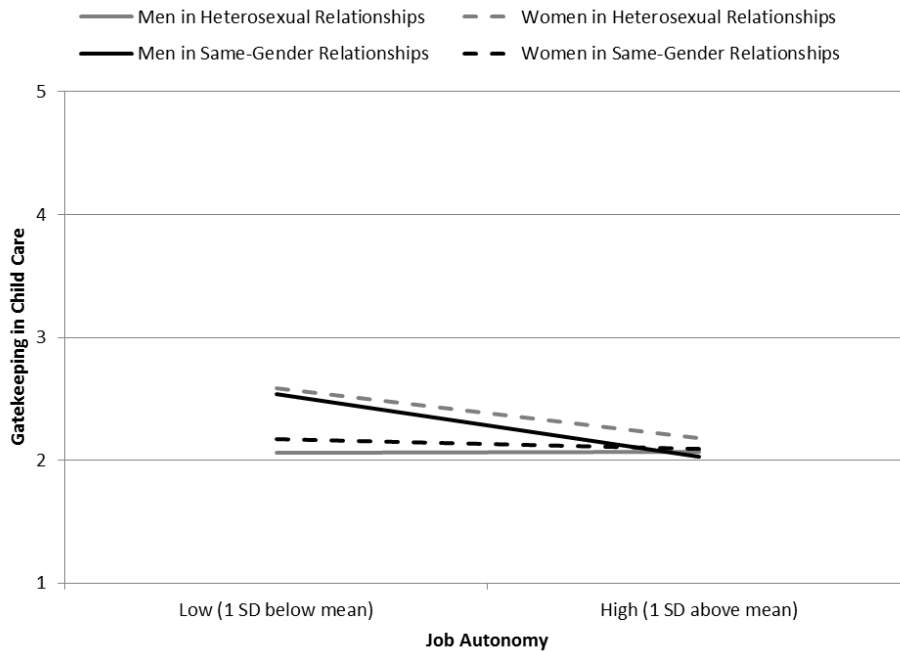


Figure 2. This figure shows the interaction of gender, relationship type, and job autonomy predicting gatekeeping in child care.