



# Socialization Practices Among Gay and Lesbian Adoptive Parents

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## Introduction

- To date, most research on cultural socialization focuses on race and ethnicity within biological families (Hughes et al., 2006).
- Given the growth of adoption, particularly among gay and lesbian parents, there is reason to believe these parents may be engaging in unique socialization practices.
- This study examined whether and how gay and lesbian parents socialize their adopted children around being a same-sex parent family.

## Method

- Participants were 31 lesbian mothers and 46 gay fathers of preschool-aged children who had been adopted as infants via 5 private, domestic adoption agencies.
- Parents completed a 20-item, online parent measure of diverse family socialization.
- Analogous to racial socialization measures, our socialization scale assessed four underlying dimensions: Preparation for Bias (8 items), Cultural Socialization (4 items), Egalitarianism (5 items), and Proactive Parenting (3 items).
- Eleven of these items were adapted from items from the Racial Socialization scale (Hughes & Chen, 1997).
- For each item, parents reported whether or not they had ever engaged in a behavior with their child (Yes/No) and if so, how often in the past 12 months (0 = Never; 5 = Very Often).
- Higher scores indicated parents engaged more frequently in the behavior.

## References

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Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation Ratings of Same-sex Parent Socialization

Item	N	M	SD
1. Talked to your child about what it means to be gay <sup>a</sup>	80	2.61	0.948
2. Told your child he/she may be treated badly because of his/her parents' sexuality <sup>a</sup>	80	1.68	0.883
3. Explained something that your child saw on TV or social media that showed poor treatment of LGBT individuals <sup>a</sup>	78	1.54	0.863
4. Told your child people may try to limit him/her because of his/her parents' sexuality <sup>a</sup>	80	1.26	0.631
5. Talked to your child about the fight for equality among the LGBT community <sup>a</sup>	79	2.49	1.096
6. Talked to your child about things they may learn in school that portray gay people unjustly (i.e., heteronormative language) <sup>a</sup>	80	1.48	0.856
7. Told your child he/she had to be better than other children to get the same rewards because of who his/her parents are <sup>a</sup>	80	1.02	0.157
8. Talked about being gay or lesbian with someone else when your child could hear <sup>a</sup>	80	2.66	1.09
9. Exposed your child to media (music, books, television, internet) about gay culture <sup>b</sup>	80	2.63	1.151
10. Organized events for your child to play with other children <sup>d</sup>	78	3.79	0.945
11. Taken your child to gay cultural events <sup>b</sup>	79	2.19	0.878
12. Done things with your child to celebrate gay pride <sup>b</sup>	79	2.23	1.097
13. Thought of your child as part of the gay community <sup>b</sup>	79	2.28	1.29
14. Done or said things to show your child that all people are equal regardless of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation <sup>c</sup>	78	4.22	0.816
15. Talked to your child about important people or events in the history of cultures different from your own <sup>c</sup>	78	3.60	1.073
16. Talked to your child about important people or events in the history of cultures different from your own <sup>c</sup>	77	3.53	1.071
17. Talked to your child about how your family is different from families with heterosexual parents <sup>c</sup>	78	2.82	0.977
18. Said or done things to emphasize to your child that your family is "normal" <sup>c</sup>	78	2.81	1.349
19. Talked with your child about how to discuss your family structure with others (i.e., give them language) <sup>d</sup>	79	2.89	1.311
20. Intentionally done things to control the openness of your child's environment (i.e., move to a specific region, choose a particular school, monitor social interactions with peers) <sup>d</sup>	79	2.46	1.394
Total Socialization	77	50.155	10.277

Note. Socialization Subscales: Preparation for Bias<sup>a</sup>, Cultural Socialization<sup>b</sup>, Egalitarianism<sup>c</sup>, and Proactive Parenting<sup>d</sup>.

## Results

- Total socialization scores were calculated by summing parent ratings on each item, with higher scores indicating greater socialization. Endorsement frequencies are displayed in Table 1.
- To examine differences in family structure, total socialization scores for lesbian mothers and gay fathers were also examined. Results suggest that gay and lesbian parents are indeed socializing their adoptive children specifically around being a same-sex parent family ( $M = 50.16$ ,  $SD = 10.28$ ). In particular, parents seem to be particularly attuned to promoting egalitarianism.
- However, there does not appear to be a significant difference in the ways in which gay fathers and lesbian mothers socialize their children around family structure ( $F(1,75) = .13$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

## Discussion

- Scholars who have studied ethnic and racial socialization have cited the need to examine parental socialization across diverse groups.
- Among gay and lesbian parents, it appears that socialization practices specifically around being a same-sex parent family are occurring, though perhaps not as frequently as originally expected.
- Nonetheless, these findings highlight a need for post-adoption education about socializing children specifically around having two moms or two dads.
- As we examine how these socialization behaviors affect child outcome, these findings will also have important clinical applications.

## Future Directions

This data represents preliminary findings. Next steps will address the need to look at child perceptions and child outcomes. Research questions and hypotheses for the ongoing study are:

1. Do children of gay and lesbian parents perceive socialization behaviors related to having same-sex parents? Specifically, we hypothesize there will be a positive correlation between parent socialization practices and children's perceptions of these practices.
2. How does parent engagement in diverse family socialization, as well as children's perceptions of these processes, predict child adjustment? We hypothesize that parent engagement in diverse family socialization and child perception of diverse family socialization will be positively associated with child behavioral adjustment.