

Children's Descriptions of their Parents in Families with Same-Sex or Different-Sex
Parents

Heidi Martelin 35895
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Supervisor: Jan Antfolk
Faculty of Arts, Psychology and Theology
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Summary of Master's Thesis

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Author: Heidi Martelin	
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Supervisor: Jan Antfolk	
<p>Abstract: Children's perceptions about their parents are thought to partly mediate the link between parent behavior and child development. Previous research suggests children perceive mothers and fathers differently, but children's perceptions of same-sex parents have not previously been comprehensively investigated or compared to children's perceptions of different-sex parents. To investigate whether children's perceptions of their parents are formed by family type, parent gender or biological relatedness to child, we conducted a content analysis of interviews with 29 Finnish children in families co-parented by same-sex (female–female) or different-sex (female–male) parents. We also gathered information from parents about division of childcare responsibility, time spent with the child and six parenting dimensions. Our results suggest no systematic differences between children's descriptions of the four parent types. A clustering of parents based on similarity of descriptions indicated that family type, parent gender and biological relatedness to the child did not systematically explain the variation in children's descriptions of parents. While our results indicated no differences between parent types, the results need to be interpreted with caution due to small sample size.</p>	
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<p>Sammanfattning: Barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar anses delvis mediera den inverkan föräldrars beteende har på barnens utveckling. Resultat från tidigare studier har visat att barn uppfattar mammor och pappor olika, men barns uppfattningar om samkönade föräldrar har inte utforskats utförligt tidigare, och inte heller jämförts med barns uppfattningar om olikkönade föräldrar. För att utforska huruvida barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar formas av familjetyp, förälderns kön eller biologiskt släktskap till barnet, genomförde vi en innehållsanalys av intervjuer med 29 finska barn i familjer med samkönade föräldrar (kvinna–kvinna) eller olikkönade föräldrar (kvinna–man). Vi samlade även information av föräldrarna om fördelningen av ansvar för barnskötsel, tid med barnet och poäng på sex dimensioner av föräldraskap. Resultaten tydde inte på några systematiska skillnader mellan beskrivningarna av de fyra föräldratyperna. En klustrering av föräldrar med liknande beskrivningar till grupper indikerade att familjetyp, förälderns kön och biologiskt släktskap inte förklarade den variation som framkom i barnens beskrivningar av föräldrarna. Även om våra resultat inte tydde på några skillnader mellan föräldratyperna, bör resultaten tolkas med aktsamhet med tanke på urvalets begränsade storlek.</p>	
<p><i>Nyckelord:</i> innehållsanalys, barn, social kognition, samkönat föräldraskap, kön, biologiskt släktskap</p>	
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Children's Descriptions of their Parents in Families with Same-Sex or Different-Sex Parents

Studies of parent-child relationships show little agreement concerning how children and parents view parental behavior (Bögels & Melick, 2004; Gaylord, Kitzmann, & Coleman, 2003; Tein, Roosa & Michaels, 1994). Research on social cognition within the family has largely focused on parents' cognitions of children, leaving gaps in our understanding of children's perceptions of their parents (Bugental & Johnston, 2000). Consequently, studies on children's perceptions of their parents have been called for (e.g., Bugental & Johnston, 2000; Fincham, Beach, Arias & Brody, 1998).

One of the most influential contributions to our understanding of children's relationships with their parents has been provided by Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. This theory suggests that children develop stable internal working models of others and themselves based on social cognition of their parents. Children's perceptions of their parents and parental behavior are thus thought to serve as a mediator between parenting practices and child development (Bugental & Johnston, 2000).

An important factor in social cognition of other persons is gender schemas (Bem, 1981). The development of these schemas starts at a very young age. Empirical studies have showed that infants discriminate between female and male faces by seven months (Cornell, 1974; Fagan, 1976) and are able to combine female voices with female faces by nine months (Poulin-Dubois, Serbin, Kenyon & Derbyshire, 1994). Interestingly, already at three to four months, infants show a preference for faces that represent the same gender as their primary caregiver (Quinn, Yahr, Kuhn, Slater & Pascalis, 2002). Different attributes are often differentially applicable to men and women and therefore gender schemas are expected to affect how much of a specific trait a person is perceived to have. Furthermore, these schemas influence which traits are paid attention to primarily (Bem, 1981). Drawing on this view of gender as a social category, gender schemas would also be expected to relate to children's mental representations of their parents. Children's social categorization based on gender would be due to environmental differences in gender dichotomization and their parents' actual gender-typed behavior. In a robustly gender-typed context, children would be expected to selectively pay attention to different traits in men and women, possibly including their own parents.

Parenting Practices of Mothers and Fathers

Because the actual behavior of parents is expected to affect children's mental representations of them, gender differences in parenting need to be considered. Some general differences between how mothers and fathers parent have been observed in different-sex couples. Mothers tend to spend more time with their children and have more overall responsibility for their children than fathers (Craig, 2006; Raley, Bianchi & Wang, 2012). This gendered division in responsibility and proximity seems to be cross-national and only to a small extent be affected by egalitarian ideological attitudes or the division of financial responsibilities (Craig & Mullan, 2011). Adult children also recall their mothers to have been more involved than their fathers on all measures of expressive and instrumental care (Antfolk & Sjölund, 2017), with the exception of earning income (Finley, Mira & Schwartz, 2008).

Regarding specific caretaking tasks, mothers provide more physical care than fathers and are also more engaged in interactive forms of care, such as reading, talking or playing (Craig, 2006). In relative terms, however, interactive forms of care only constitutes a small proportion of the total amount of time mothers spend with their children, whereas interactive forms of care constitutes the largest proportion of the time fathers spend with their children (Craig, 2006). Biblarz and Stacey (2010) reviewed studies on differences between mothers and fathers in different family constellations and suggested that mothers score higher on parenting awareness skills and develop closer relationships to their children compared to fathers. The authors conclude gender appears to be a stronger predictor of parent-child relationship quality than biological relatedness, with mothers outperforming fathers on most measures. However, the authors also note that single parents often take over parenting tasks typically performed by the other gender (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010).

Tasker (2010) has argued that research has disproportionally focused on differences between mothers and fathers, and that the many similarities suggested by the existing literature have been disregarded. Fagan, Day, Lamb and Cabrera (2014) also conclude that there is not sufficient evidence to conceptualize parenting as being different for mothers and fathers, and point out that mothers and fathers are becoming increasingly similar in terms of parenting roles. Alongside this, studies on willingness to invest in children have found that there are no differences between mothers and fathers in hypothetical forms of caretaking (Antfolk, Karlsson, Söderlund & Szala, 2017). Based on these findings, willingness and ability to parent

do not seem to be intrinsically gendered, but become gendered as the result of contextual factors.

Same-Sex Parenting by Two Mothers or Two Fathers

A lot of research efforts have been directed towards studying children with same-sex parents, but most of these studies have focused on the well-being of the children. The results have been reviewed in four meta-analyses (Allen & Burrell, 1996, 2002; Crowl, Ahn & Baker, 2008; Fedewa, Black & Ahn, 2015), and conclusively indicate that children with same-sex parents are doing at least as well as children with different-sex parents. An interesting finding from this research is that even though same-sex parents view their relationship with their children more positively than different-sex parents do, there is no difference in the quality of parent-child relationship between the family types from the children's perspective (Crowl et al., 2008).

In most families co-parented by two mothers, one of the mothers is biologically related to the child whereas the other mother is not, although joint adoption, where none of the parents are biologically related to the child, is more prevalent among this family type compared to families with different-sex parents (Lofquist, 2011). Comparisons between co-parenting mothers and different-sex parents show that co-parenting mothers tend to engage more in imaginative play with their children and use less corporal punishment (Golombok et al., 2003). In addition, co-parenting mothers seem to have a more even division of parenting and work responsibilities than different-sex couples, although, among co-parenting mothers, biological mothers still tend to have a greater caretaking responsibility compared to non-biological mothers (Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall & Golombok, 1997). However, non-biological mothers in same-sex couples spend more time with their children compared to fathers in different-sex couples (Brewaeys et al., 1997).

Co-parenting fathers have been studied less than co-parenting mothers. The few studies that have included co-parenting fathers suggest these fathers' parenting is more similar to the parenting of co-parenting mothers than the parenting of different-sex parents (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010). Again, this supports the idea of parenting abilities not being intrinsically dependent on gender.

Children's Perceptions of Mothers and Fathers

Few studies have investigated children's mental representations of same-sex parents. Braewaeyns and colleagues (1997) included child perspectives by analyzing

child responses in the Family Relations Test, where positive and negative feelings towards family members are assessed. Children with same-sex and different-sex parents displayed similar amounts of positive feelings towards their biological mothers. Biological mothers received more positive feelings than both biological fathers and non-biological mothers. Interestingly, the two latter parent types received similar amounts of positive feelings when compared to each other. Children might thus perceive non-biological mothers and biological fathers differently from biological mothers.

Studies on children's perceptions of different-sex parents show that children report receiving more affection and closeness from mothers than from fathers (Starrels, 1994). Children, however, also report being the recipient of more negative behaviors (e.g., privilege removal, command and ignoring) by mothers, which may be a consequence of mothers being more involved in parenting in general, and, therefore, also more often disciplining children (Hazzard et al., 1983). In conclusion, children seem to report both more positive and more negative traits and behaviors by their mothers compared to their fathers.

The aforementioned studies used inventories with closed ended questions to explore children's perceptions of their parents and children answered by choosing from options on Likert scales. While providing important information about children's perceptions, these methods for obtaining data are largely influenced by the perspectives of the adults creating them. Methods that include open-ended questions could provide better insight into the children's actual perspective.

Only a few studies have included these types of measures to explore children's perceptions of their mothers and fathers. Brannen, Heptinstall and Bhopal (2000) explored children's views about parenting and their own experiences with their parents through a combination of a questionnaires and interviews. In this study, children expressed egalitarian views of how tasks should be divided between mothers and fathers, despite differences in family constellation. For example, children with single mothers had similar views about such normative parenting roles as children from two-parent households. In the interviews, children expressed that both their parents were equally important to them, but upon further questioning, described differences between mothers and fathers. Children described mothers as being there for them, offering support and instrumental forms of care. Fathers were

also described as providing care, but were valued more for special qualities, skills and activities.

Children's perceptions of their parents have also been studied in focus group settings. Nixon, Greene and Hogan (2006) interviewed children about roles within families. Children's perceptions seemed to be affected by age, so that younger children conceptualized mothers as primary caretakers and fathers as breadwinners and playmates, whereas older children saw parental roles as more interchangeable and less gendered. Halpenny, Nixon and Watson (2010) also conducted focus group interviews, where children discussed parenting styles both in normative terms and their own experiences in their families. Again, many children endorsed an egalitarian view of what parents ought to do, while their own experiences of parenting reflected a more traditional gendered division of labor. Older children in particular described roles of mothers and fathers to be context dependent, and some children from all age groups described both mothers and fathers doing similar tasks and used genderless descriptions about parental roles. In sum, children describe differences between mothers and fathers but simultaneously seem to endorse an egalitarian view of parental roles. Interestingly, children's normative views about mothers and fathers do not seem to be formed by parenting practices of their own parents.

The aforementioned studies were conducted in a group setting, and it is thus possible that the answers of the children were affected by responses from other children, and in some cases, it was unclear whether children referred to general norms or their own families. Milkie, Simon and Powell (1997) used a different approach, in which they analyzed essays children had written about why they value their parents. Mothers were, more often than fathers, described in instrumental and emotional terms whereas fathers were valued for recreational activities. Mothers were also more often described as allowing the child to do something or providing something, whereas activities with fathers were described as being engaged in mutually.

These differences are in accordance with which childcare tasks mothers and fathers themselves report doing most. Compared to fathers, mothers nevertheless report engaging more in all types of care, including mutual activities such as playing (Craig, 2006). Hence, it might be that children notice and describe relative differences between parents rather than absolute ones. Milkie and colleagues (1997) also noted that children seemed to have somewhat differential standards for mothers

and fathers. Mothers were expected to be more involved with the children than fathers, and therefore fathers were appreciated for being different from other, less involved, fathers, whereas mothers were appreciated for doing what mothers are supposed to, but doing it more successfully than other mothers. That is, children were comparing their mothers and fathers to other parents, rather than to each other.

Cultural Context of the Current Study

For the purposes of the current study, it is important to address the cultural context in which it is conducted. This is because gender and parenting issues can be expected to vary between different cultures. The previously presented studies on child perspectives on parenting have been conducted in England (Brannen et al., 2000), Ireland (Halpenny et al. 2010; Nixon et al. 2006) and USA (Milkie et al. 1997). The current study was conducted in Finland, which is a Nordic country with relatively high gender equality compared to many European countries (European commission, 2016). Nevertheless, Finnish women spend more time doing household chores and taking care of children than men do (Official Statistics of Finland, 2014).

In 2015, 0.11% (604 of 571 470) of all children living at home lived with same-sex parents in a registered partnership (Official Statistics of Finland, 2015). The Finnish Marriage Act became gender neutral in March 2017, when amendments to the Act entered into force. The Act now treats same-sex marriages the same as different-sex marriages (Law on Amendment to the Marriage Act, 2016). Despite an increasingly liberal attitude climate, the law proposition has also evoked protests against same-sex marriage. For example, a registered association was formed with the aim to repeal the amendments to the Act with a citizen's initiative. Compared to other Nordic countries (e.g. Sweden), Finns are somewhat less positive towards the rights of sexual minorities (European commission, 2016).

The Current Study

The aim of our study was to investigate children's perceptions of same-sex parents, and compare these to children's perceptions of different-sex parents. We were also interested in exploring whether the perceptions are different depending on the gender of the parent and the biological relatedness between the child and the parent, or if these perceptions are more malleable and allow the children to have qualitatively similar mental representations of their parents, irrespective of gender, biological relatedness and family type. If children's mental representations are malleable, it is plausible that children would describe their parents similarly

regardless of parent gender and biological relatedness. To our best knowledge, no study to date has comprehensively explored children's perceptions of same-sex parents with open-ended questions and qualitative methods. By interviewing children alone and asking them specifically to compare their parents to each other, we reduced effects of social influence from peers and comparisons to other parents, two factors that might have influenced the results of previous studies in the field.

Drawing on previous findings, the following hypotheses were made regarding the descriptions of children:

- 1) Within families, descriptions of parents will differ from each other.
 - i*) mothers will be described to spend more time with children and discipline children more than fathers in different-sex parent families;
 - ii*) fathers will be described to engage more in mutual activities as well as work more than mothers in different-sex parent families, and;
 - iii*) biological mothers in both family types will be described more positively and as engaging more in caretaking tasks than non-biological mothers and fathers.
- 2) Similarities between parent types will be in accordance with one of the following predictions:
 - i*) all types of mothers will be similar to each other and differ from fathers due to gender;
 - ii*) all biological parents will be similar to each other and differ from non-biological parents due to biological relatedness;
 - iii*) same-sex parents will be similar to each other and differ from different-sex parents due to family type;
 - iv*) biological mothers will be similar to each other, and different from both fathers and non-biological mothers due to gender and biological relatedness, or;
 - v*) all four parent types will be viewed as distinct from each other due to gender, biological relatedness and family type.

Methods

Participants

The final sample ($N = 29$) consisted of 19 children with different-sex parents and 10 children with female same-sex parents (see Tables 3 and 4 for descriptive

statistics of the sample). All participating children were the oldest child in the present relationship and currently 4–12 years old. We chose this age group with the aim to include young children with less exposure to cultural stereotypes of parenting and gender. In an initial pilot study, the tasks proved to be too difficult for children under four years old.

The participating children were recruited through convenience sampling by contacting support and interest groups and by using snowball sampling. We used this sampling method because the sampling frame was difficult to define and reach using randomized sampling strategies. The aim was to include children with two mothers and two fathers, as well as children with different-sex parents. To allow us to separate the effects of biological relatedness, we also aimed to include children with two biological parents as well as children with a biological mother and non-biological father and *vice versa*. Despite utilizing various forms of advertising (e.g., local newspaper, parenting forums and special interest groups), as well as prolonging the time schedule for participation, no different-sex families with only one biologically related parent signed up for the study. Since only one family with co-parenting fathers participated in the study, this family was excluded from the analyses.

Ethical Permission

Before the data collection started, the study had received ethical permission from the Board for Research Ethics at Åbo Akademi University.

Materials

Child interview. Data were collected through a structured interview by the first author. We also collected data not pertaining to the current study, and for these data we used other methods. The order of the tasks was counterbalanced across family type and child gender. We presented the interview to the child as consisting of a few questions about the child's parents. During the interview, the parents were referred to with the name or nickname the child most often used for them (the parents were asked to provide this information before the interview).

The interview consisted of five questions, and ranged from 2 to 11 minutes in duration. The child was first asked "What is [parent name] like, in your opinion?" followed by "What kinds of things do you usually do with [parent name]?". After this, the same two questions followed regarding the other parent. The order of presentation of the parents was counterbalanced across gender and biological

relatedness within all groups of children (i.e., girls and boys in different family types). The last question was worded “Do you think [parent name 1] and [parent name 2] are different in any way?”. After each question, we asked the child if they came to think of anything else in addition to what they had just mentioned.

Parent survey. We collected information about parenting and demographic variables through an online survey directed at the parents.

For demographic variables, both parents reported their own and their child’s age and gender, their biological relatedness to the child, annual income, degree of education, relationship status and duration of relationship.

For division of childcare responsibility, parents reported which one of the parents (*me* or *my partner*) that currently had a larger responsibility for childcare, if responsibility was not distributed equally between them. Parents also reported in percentages how much time each parent was involved in taking care of the child during the child’s first six months. Current time spent with child was reported separately for a regular weekday and a day off in hours using a drop-down menu ranging from 0–24.

Parents assessed how often they engage in the following activities together with their child: playing, doing homework, washing up, reading, watching TV, talking, doing sports, picking up from hobbies, picking up from school, putting to bed, doing household chores together, going to the grocery store, going to the movies or the theatre and playing games. All activities were assessed on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very seldom or never*) to 5 (*very often*). For the analyses, we combined some activities in order to correspond with the activities children reported. Playing and playing games were combined to *playing*, doing sports, going to the grocery store and going to the movies or the theatre were combined to *activities outside the home* and picking up from hobbies and picking up from school were combined to *transportation*. For the combined activities, averages were calculated.

We used Skinner, Johnson and Snyder’s (2005) 30-item adaptation of the Parents as Social Context Questionnaire (Skinner, Wellborn & Regan, 1986) to assess the following dimensions of parenting: warmth, rejection, structure, chaos, autonomy support and coercion. The statements were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 4 (*very true*).

Procedure

Before the experiment, we asked parents to fill in the survey online. When arriving to the test session, the parents received information about the study and descriptions of the tasks, after which they gave an informed consent for their child to participate in the study. All parents also gave permission to tape record an interview with the child. The test leader then explained the structure and contents of the test session to the child and the parents. During the experiment, the parents waited for their child in a separate room. During the test session, the test leader followed a structured protocol, starting with letting the child draw something if they wished so, and engaging the child in some rapport building conversation until the child was perceived to be comfortable for the tasks. Before the interview, the children were reminded that they could choose not to answer any question that was experienced as uncomfortable, and, in addition, school aged children were informed about the confidential nature of the interview. The test leader explained how the tape recorder worked and that the tape would help the test leader remember the discussion.

After the experiment, we offered the parents and the child a chance to discuss any questions they might have regarding the study. Parents received a detailed description of the tasks, and information of the purpose of the study both in writing and as explained by the test leader. Again, any concerns were discussed. We asked parents not to inquire about their child's responses, but encouraged them to listen to the child if the child wished to discuss their experience. Parents also received contact information to the family advising service in their community, with recommendation to direct any concerns regarding family issues or concerns for the psychological wellbeing of their child to healthcare professionals.

Content Analysis

Initial categorization. All interviews were tape recorded, and later transcribed verbatim by a research assistant. All references to parents were made anonymous to keep the gender of the parent unrecognizable. The content analysis consisted of two stages. In the first stage, the aim was to generate a list of categories that best reflected the content of the statements. The first author read the transcriptions and identified all relevant text, that is, any descriptions of the parents or the relationship between the child and the parent. In total 291 statements were identified. Next, these were organized into broader categories based on similarity of content. The categories formed 25 categories in six higher order domains. In each of

the six domains, a category named *other* was added to include also items not fitting in any of the categories. These 31 categories are presented in Table 1.

Interrater reliability. In the second stage of the content analysis, reliability estimates for the initial categorization were calculated. This stage was based on the methodological guidelines for content analysis by Neuendorf (2011). Two research assistants were familiarized to a visual representation of the categories (see Figure 1), a codebook (see Appendix A for Codebook) and a coding form (see Appendix B for Coding Form). The research assistants were blind to the gender of the parents and the parent types. The training consisted of separately coding an interview followed by a group discussion between the coders and the first author. After this, the coders separately coded a subsample of four interviews (Cohen's $\kappa = .70$). The coding instructions were again clarified and disagreements were resolved through discussion. This subsample was coded again some weeks after the discussion (Cohen's $\kappa = .95$). A second subsample, consisting of eight interviews evaluated as particularly difficult by the first author, was then coded separately by the assistants (Cohen's $\kappa = .81$). After this, all remaining interviews ($n = 17$) were coded. The final agreement was in the range of excellent agreement (Cohen's $\kappa = .79$) according to the guidelines of Banerjee, Capozzoli, McSweeney and Sinha (1999). Following the same guidelines, categories that did not reach a fair agreement beyond chance (Cohen's $\kappa = .40$) were excluded from the analyses ($n = 3$). Interrater reliabilities of all categories are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of Categories by Domains

Category	%	κ	Description	Example statements
<u>Parent positive traits</u>				
Kind	32.8	.86	Kind, good or helpful.	“Well, kind and doesn’t try to do anything bad to me.” “Helps really well in everything.”
Nice	13.8	.47	Nice or likeable.	“Nice.” “That’s what my dad is like, mostly nice.”
Funny	24.1	.95	Funny, goofy, silly or making jokes.	“Hilarious.” “Mom always goofs around.”
Calm	5.2	1.00	Calm, patient or not getting angry.	“Calm.” “Mom has lots of patience.”
Other positive trait	19.0	.68	Other trait descriptions of positive qualities or affects.	“He for sure likes us, you know.” “He is bold.”
<u>Parent negative traits</u>				
Angry	17.2	.79	Angry, irritated or impatient.	“Sounds irritated [...] sometimes.” “Well, dad gets angry really easily.”
Other negative trait	5.2	1.00	Other trait descriptions of negative qualities or affects.	“Then mom has gotten sad.” “She is...lazy, for instance.”
<u>Parent behaviors excluding child</u>				
Absent	13.8	.71	Any references to the parent being away from home for work, travel or other cause.	“She is always at work.” “He often goes traveling.”
Household chores	15.6	.93	Cooking, cleaning or doing other tasks without the child.	“He usually cooks dinner for us.” “Usually...she goes to the grocery store.”
Habits and activities	10.3	.64	Habits and activities parent does without the child.	“Mom is more [...] on the computer.” “He also likes to wake up early.”
Other behavior excluding child*	6.9	.31	Other behavior the parent does without the child.	“Sometimes he argues with mom.” “Dad was helping his sister move.”

<u>Parenting behaviors</u>				
Putting to bed	1.7	1.00	All behaviors related to putting the child to sleep, such as tucking in the child and brushing teeth.	“Then put us to bed.”
Transportation	8.6	.88	Picking up or taking the child from/ to school/ kindergarten/ hobbies.	“Takes us to school in the morning.” “He picks us up at daycare sometimes.”
Directive parenting	15.6	.57	Parent tells child how to behave and what to do, sets limits or disciplines the child.	“Sometimes she says I have to clean my room.” “She tells me how I should be at parties [...]”
Gifts	5.2	1.00	Parent gives gifts or buys the child things.	“He buys presents [...] more often than mom.” “He always buys me my favorite movies”
Other parenting behavior	5.2	.79	Other descriptions of parent providing the child with something.	“Mom doesn’t work because she has to take care of us.” “She just has to wake me up.”
<u>Mutual activities</u>				
Homework	5.2	.49	Helping out with homework or other related tasks.	“I do speech therapy tasks.” “Things like homework.”
Household chores	10.3	.78	Parent and child do household chores, such as cooking dinner, cleaning, or other tasks, together.	“I clean with her.” “Eh..I collect trees.”
Tasks outside home	8.6	.82	Parent and child go to the grocery store or do other related task outside the home together.	“We always go to the store.” “We went to buy things for school.”
Playing	51.7	.90	Parent and child play together.	“Sometimes I play Harry Potter.” “Usually I build with some small Legos.”
Drawing	13.8	.93	Parent and child draw, paint or do crafting together.	“Dad usually guesses what I’m drawing.” “Or do crafting and so on.”
Reading	5.2	1.00	Parent and child read together or parent reads to the child.	“Sometimes mom reads a book to me.” “We usually read books.”
Watching TV	13.8	1.00	Parent and child watch TV or movies together at home.	“I watch TV.” “We watch my My Little Pony DVD.”
Activities outside the home	31.0	.92	Parent and child do activities, such as doing sports or going to the movies, outside the home together.	“We go to McDonalds for lunch.” “We even go out for a run in the nearby forest.”
Other mutual activities	31.0	.59	Explicit statement indicating that one parent generally spends more time with the child than the other does, or examples of other mutual activities.	“Mommy is um..a bit more with me.” “With her you always get to do fun stuff.”

<u>Parent facts</u>				
Parent physical attributes	31.0	.92	Descriptions of physical attributes, such as appearance or voice.	“Mommy has brown hair.”
Parent interests	20.7	.83	Descriptions of preferences of the parent, such as favorite food.	“Mom has a different voice than dad.” “Well..the kind that likes drawings!” “Mom likes other dishes.”
Giving birth	3.4	1.00	References to that the parent has given birth to the child.	“Well, the kind of mom who has given birth to me.” “Um.. She has given birth to me[...].”
Gender	10.3	.91	References to the gender of the parent.	“Dad is a boy and mom is a girl!” “Two women have gone married and had two kids.”
Other parent facts*	5.2	.25	Information about the parent that is not related to parenting and does not fit the trait categories.	“When one makes food she always experiments.” “He is gifted in music.”
<u>Other</u>				
Relationship*	10.3	.22	Descriptions of the parent or the relationship to the parent that does not fit the trait descriptions.	“Well, sometimes she growls at me.” “More careful.”

Note. % = percentage of parents described with category in the entire sample ($N=58$), κ = Cohen’s κ interrater reliability of coding for each category. Categories marked with * were removed from analyses due to poor interrater reliability. The example statements are translations from Finnish or Swedish, [...] indicates the original statement has been shortened. Domains are centered and underlined.

Re-coding of statements. The *relationship* category included all statements that described the parent or the parent-child relationship, but did not fit the other categories. After the coding process, this category included 27 statements, which the first author analyzed further for patterns. The following themes were identified: Hugging ($n = 2$), helping ($n = 6$), mutual interests between child and parent ($n = 3$), descriptions of directed emotional responses in parent ($n = 2$) and fondness between child and parent ($n = 3$). Because these statements did not seem form any new meaningful categories, but instead were similar to some of the existing ones, the first author re-coded these statements into existing categories. Hugging and mutual interests were re-coded as *other mutual activities*, because both referred to activities engaged in together. Helping was re-coded as the trait category *kind*, due to similarity with the trait description of helpfulness. In the directed emotional response theme, the parent's reaction was dependent on the behavior of the child (e.g. "very calm towards the one that gets hurt and angry with the one that hurts someone") and was coded as *directive parenting*. Fondness between child and parent was coded as *other positive trait*, as it was associated with a shared positive affect. Two children expressed that one parent was almost like the one described earlier in the interview. Due to uncertainty of which descriptions the children were referring to, these two statements were removed from the final scoring. Finally, six descriptions, that did not fit any of the existing categories, remained in the *relationship* category (for examples, see Table 1).

Statistical Analyses

All analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (Version 24.0; IBM Corp., 2016). The statistical analyses of the results from the content analysis were conducted using t-tests, analyses of variance and Chi-square tests to compare frequencies of categories in the parent groups. Values 1 and 0 were used to indicate if a category was used (1) or not (0). Because expected values below 5 in more than 20% of cells gives unreliable results in Chi-square tests (Yates, 1934), we used values 2 and 1 in the Chi-square analyses.

K-means cluster analyses were used to group parents with similar descriptions into clusters. Due to small sample size and high prevalence of zero values in our data, clustering on the category-level was not possible. The clustering was therefore based on parents' values on the six higher order domains. The cluster analysis was first conducted with a two-cluster solution, followed by a three- and

four-cluster solution. We chose these solutions in order to enable an investigation of whether parents were described differently depending on gender (mothers and fathers), biological relatedness (related and not related), gender and biological relatedness (biological mothers, non-biological mothers and biological fathers) and finally on gender, biological relatedness and family type (biological mothers in different-sex families, biological mothers in same-sex families, non-biological mothers and biological fathers). See table 2 for predicted clustering based on possible combinations of variables. Finally, we conducted Chi-square tests to calculate differences in the distributions between parent gender, degree of biological relatedness and family type in the clusters.

Table 2

<i>Hypothetical Cluster Memberships of Parent Types in Various Clustering Solutions</i>					
Parent variables	Cluster solution	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
Parent gender	2 clusters	BMS, BMD, NBM	BF		
Biological relatedness	2 clusters	BMS, BMD, BF	NBM		
Family type	2 clusters	BMD, BF	BMS, NBM		
Parent gender + Biological relatedness	3 clusters	BMS, BMD	NBM	BF	
Parent gender + Biological relatedness + Family type	4 clusters	BMS	BMD	NBM	BF

Note. BMS = Biological mother in same-sex family, BMD = Biological mother in different-sex family, NBM = Non-biological mother, BF = Biological father.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The sample of participating children ($N = 29$) consisted of 16 girls and 13 boys. The mean age was 5.86 years ($SD = 2.00$). Girls, $M = 6.44$, $SD = 2.25$, were slightly older than boys, $M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.41$, $t(25.51) = 1.88$, $p = .072$. The age difference was not statistically significant.

Frequencies, means and standard deviations for all relevant demographic variables can be found in tables 3 and 4. No statistically significant differences were found between same-sex and different-sex families with respect to child gender, $\chi^2(1, 29) = 1.36$, $p = .244$, child age, $t(27) = .85$, $p = .401$, number of children in the family, $t(27) = 1.11$, $p = .277$, the parents' relationship status, $\chi^2(1, 29) = 1.31$, p

= .288, duration of the parents' relationship, $t(27) = .591, p = .559$, parent age, $t(55) = 1.53, p = .131$, parent education, $\chi^2(4, 58) = 5.26, p = .261$, or parent income, $\chi^2(10, 58) = 16.66, p = .082$. For the four parent types, there was no statistically significant difference with respect to age, $F(3,53) = 1.40, p = .253$, or income, $\chi^2(30, 58) = 39.52, p = .114$, but the difference in level of education was statistically significant, $\chi^2(12, 58) = 21.02, p = .050$. Biological mothers in different sex families were more likely than other groups to have completed a university degree.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Participating Families

Variable	Same-sex parents			Different-sex parents		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Child gender						
Girl	7			9		
Boy	3			10		
Child age		6.30	1.49		5.63	2.22
Number of children		1.80	.63		2.11	.74
Parent age		39.20	6.28		36.84	5.12
Relationship status						
Married	10			17		
Living together	0			2		
Duration of relationship		12.50	2.92		11.84	2.81

Note. Child age and duration of relationship reported in years.

Table 4

Parents' Educational Level and Income by Parent Type and Family Type

Variable	Same-sex parents						Different-sex parents					
	Biological mother		Non-biological mother		Family type average		Biological mother		Biological father		Family type average	
	Mode	<i>n</i>	Mode	<i>n</i>	Mode	<i>n</i>	Mode	<i>n</i>	Mode	<i>n</i>	Mode	<i>n</i>
Education	Polytechnic	6	High school, Polytechnic	3	Polytechnic	9	University	12	University	9	University	21
Annual income	30000-39999 €	3	25000-29999 €, 30000-39999 €, 40000-49999 €	3	30000-39999 €	6	20000-24999 €	5	50000-59999 €	5	50000-59999 €	8

Note. Polytechnic refers to a degree from a university of applied sciences, which is a higher level vocational education in Finland.

Parenting Variables by Parent Type

Division of childcare responsibility. Responsibility for childcare was not evenly distributed between the parent types, $\chi^2(6, 58) = 28.86, p < .001$. Biological mothers in the different-sex families were more likely to report having main responsibility for childcare ($n = 12$) compared to biological fathers ($n = 1$), non-biological mothers ($n = 2$) and biological mothers in same-sex families ($n = 2$). Biological fathers were more likely to report that their partner had main responsibility for childcare ($n = 11$) compared to biological mothers in different-sex families ($n = 1$), non-biological mothers ($n = 1$) and biological mothers in same-sex families ($n = 1$). In the same-sex families, a majority of biological mothers ($n = 7$) and non-biological mothers ($n = 7$) reported an even distribution of responsibility. In the same-sex families the mode percentage of reported caretaking during the first 6 months was 60% for biological mothers ($n = 10$) and 40% for non-biological mothers ($n = 10$). In the different-sex families the modes were 70% for biological mothers ($n = 14$) and 30% for biological fathers ($n = 11$). The parent types did not differ to a statistically significant degree in how much time they currently spent with their children on weekdays, $F(3,53) = .08, p = .971$, or days off, $F(3,53) = .80, p = .502$.

Mutual activities. The four parent types did not differ in how often they engaged in doing homework, $F(3,42) = .64, p = .595$, reading, $F(3,53) = .55, p = .650$, watching TV, $F(3,53) = .24, p = .865$, talking, $F(3,53) = 1.02, p = .392$, doing household chores, $F(3,53) = .96, p = .418$, playing, $F(3,53) = 2.28, p = .090$, or doing activities outside the home, $F(3,53) = 2.73, p = .053$, with their child. They also did not differ in how often they helped their child wash up, $F(3,52) = 2.51, p = .068$, put their child to bed, $F(3,53) = 1.24, p = .305$, or offered transportation, $F(3,52) = 1.04, p = .382$.

Parenting dimensions. For the four parent types, there were no statistically significant differences with respect to rejection, $F(3,50) = 1.77, p = .165$, structure, $F(3,52) = 2.43, p = .521$, chaos, $F(3,51) = 2.26, p = .093$, autonomy support, $F(3,52) = 0.53, p = .661$, or coercion, $F(3,52) = 0.18, p = .908$. The parent types differed significantly on the dimension of warmth, $F(3,51) = 2.82, p = .048$. Biological mothers in same-sex families had the highest values on warmth, $M = 21.13, SD = 1.13$, and

biological fathers had the lowest, $M = 19.32$, $SD = 1.92$. A Tukey HSD post-hoc test showed, however, that this difference was not statistically significant ($p = .098$).

In sum, the parent types differed on division of childcare responsibility and to some extent on the parenting dimension of warmth. No differences were indicated on other parenting dimensions, time spent with child or engagement in various mutual activities with the child.

Frequencies of Statements within Categories

In the following we summarize the results from the content analysis, starting with frequencies of statements in categories in the entire sample. After this, we report these frequencies for family and parent types. An overview of the frequencies of statements within categories in the entire sample is provided in figure 1. The *playing* category was most frequently referred to in the statements ($n = 30$), whereas the category *putting to bed* was referred to least ($n = 1$). Of the higher order domains, *mutual activities* ($n = 99$) and *positive traits* ($n = 55$) were most frequent, while the categories *other* ($n = 6$) and *negative traits* ($n = 13$) were least frequently described in the statements.

Frequencies of categories within the different parent types are presented in table 5. Descriptions of same-sex parents were more likely to include references to the parent being *funny*, *doing homework* with the child and having *given birth* to the child compared to different-sex parents. Differences on all other categories were not statistically significant. Comparing to other parent types, biological fathers were more likely to be described to engage in *activities outside the home*, and biological mothers in same-sex families were more likely to be described to have *given birth* to the child. No other differences between parent types were significant.

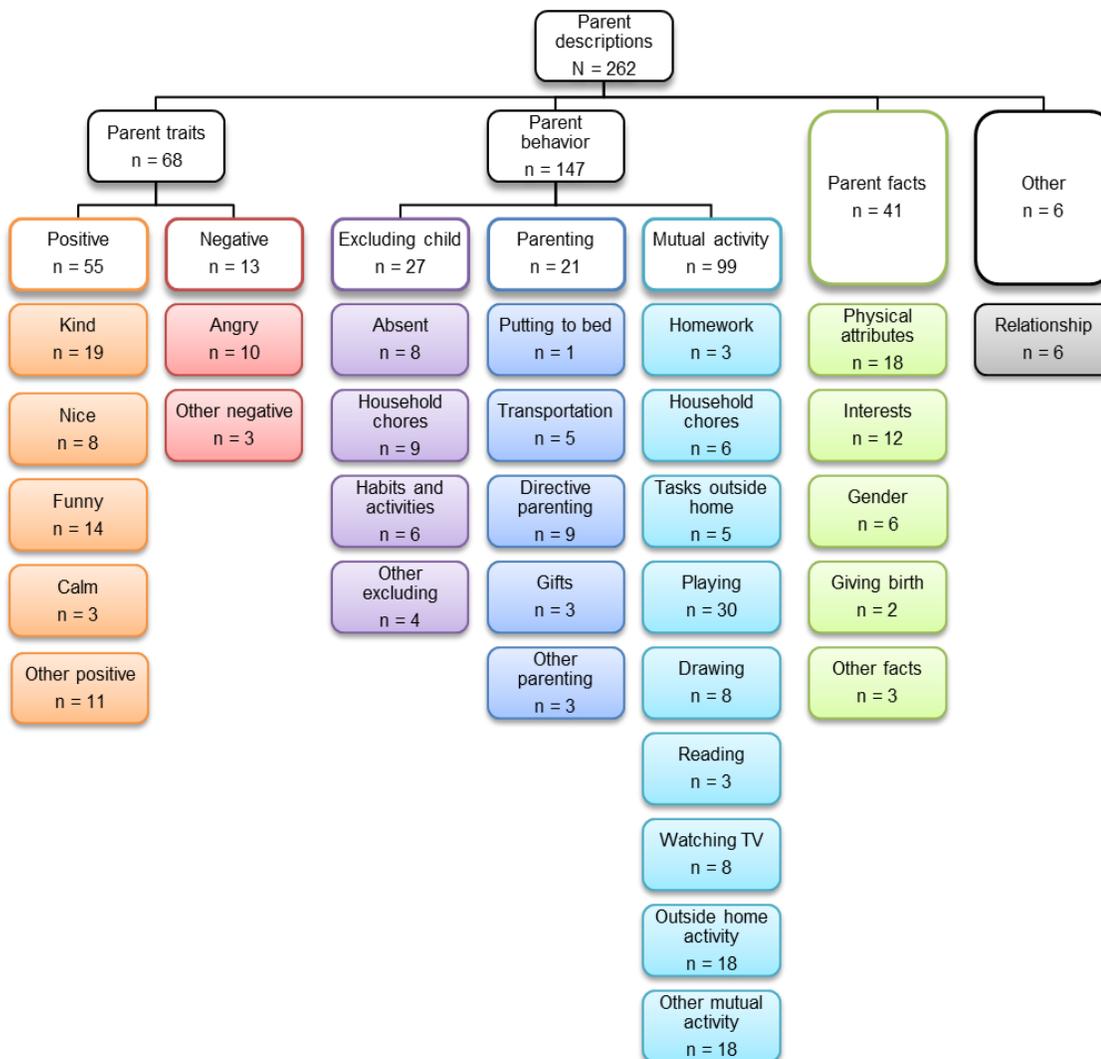


Figure 1. Flow chart used to facilitate decision making during the coding process. N = total number of observed statements, n = frequency of given category in children's descriptions in the entire sample. Color framed boxes represent domains and color filled boxes represent categories.

Table 5

Frequencies of Statements within Categories by Parent Type

Category	<u>Same-sex</u>		<u>Different-sex</u>		<u>Parent types</u>		<u>Family types</u>	
	<u>parents</u>		<u>parents</u>		χ^2	<i>p</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
	BM	NBM	BM	BF				
Kind	1	3	6	9	4.24	.237	2.26	.133
Nice	1	3	2	2	2.67	.445	.99	.320
Funny*	5	3	2	4	5.86	.119	4.19	.041
Calm	1	1	1	0	1.99	.575	1.45	.228
Other positive traits	3	3	0	5	6.70	.082	2.42	.120
Angry	1	0	3	6	5.22	.157	3.21	.073
Other negative traits	1	1	1	0	1.99	.575	1.45	.228
Absent	2	0	2	4	2.94	.401	.37	.543
Household chores without child	2	1	4	2	1.19	.755	.01	.937
Habits and activities	1	1	1	3	1.14	.768	.00	.950
Putting to bed	0	0	1	0	2.09	.554	.54	.464
Transportation	0	1	2	2	1.14	.767	.51	.476
Directive parenting	1	3	3	2	2.19	.533	.47	.494
Gifts	0	0	1	2	2.20	.532	1.67	.197
Other parenting	1	0	1	1	1.02	.796	.00	.996
Homework*	1	2	0	0	7.03	.071	6.01	.014
Household chores with child	1	2	2	1	1.54	.673	.71	.398
Tasks outside home	0	0	4	1	5.89	.117	2.88	.090
Playing	5	6	8	11	1.28	.734	.13	.717
Drawing	2	0	1	5	5.59	.133	.37	.543
Reading	0	0	3	0	6.49	.090	1.67	.197
Watching TV	0	3	3	2	4.04	.257	.04	.847
Activities outside the home*	3	0	5	10	8.84	.031	3.67	.056
Other mutual activities	4	3	6	5	.58	.901	.22	.636
Parent physical attributes	3	3	6	6	.02	.999	.02	.902
Parent interests	2	2	6	2	2.58	.462	.01	.925
Giving birth*	2	0	0	0	9.94	.019	3.94	.047
Gender	1	1	2	2	.00	.999	.00	.950

Note. BM = Biological mother, NBM = Non-biological mother, BF = Biological father. *df* = 1 for family type, *df* = 3 for parent type, *N* = 58, **p* < .05. P-values are to be interpreted with caution, because more than 20% of cells had expected values below 5.

Domains by Family Type and Parent Type

Values for the categories within each domain were computed by summing the number of statements. These values were then used for analyses of variance between the parent and family types. No significant differences were found between the family types on any of the domains (*positive traits, negative traits, excluding child behavior, parenting behavior, mutual activities* and *parent facts*). On the *positive traits* domain, same-sex parents had slightly higher values, $M = 1.2$, $SD = 1.24$, compared to different sex parents, $M = .82$, $SD = .93$, $F(1,56) = 1.78$, $p = .188$. This difference was, however, not statistically significant. A comparison between the four parent types also revealed no significant differences for the domain values. The only parent type that statistically differed on any of the domains was biological mothers in different-sex families. Biological mothers in different-sex families obtained lower values, that is, children provided less statements describing *positive traits* in this group, $M = .58$, $SD = .69$, compared to biological mothers in same-sex families, $M = 1.10$, $SD = 1.10$, non-biological mothers, $M = 1.30$, $SD = 1.42$, and biological fathers, $M = 1.05$, $SD = 1.08$. This difference was not statistically significant $F(3,54) = 1.31$, $p = .280$.

Cluster Analysis

Two-cluster solution. Means for cluster 1 ($n = 33$) and cluster 2 ($n = 25$) on each dimension are presented in figure 2. Parents in cluster 2 were described with more statements from the *mutual activities* domain, $M = 2.64$, compared to parents in cluster 1, $M = 1.00$. *Parenting behavior* was also more often described in cluster 2, $M = .64$, compared to cluster 1, $M = .15$. Furthermore, descriptions *parent facts* were also more prevalent in cluster 2, $M = .88$, compared to cluster 1, $M = .48$.

Parents were not more likely to belong to either cluster depending on family type, $\chi^2(1, 58) = 0.12$, $p = .729$, parent gender, $\chi^2(1, 58) = 0.21$, $p = .647$, or biological relatedness, $\chi^2(1, 58) = 0.47$, $p = .828$. This suggests the clustering was not based on these parent variables.

Three-cluster solution. Means for cluster 1 ($n = 21$), cluster 2 ($n = 23$) and cluster 3 ($n = 14$) on each dimension are presented in figure 2. In this solution, cluster 1 and cluster 2 were similar to the clusters in the previously presented two-cluster solution. Parents in cluster 3 were frequently described with statements from the *positive*

traits domain, $M = 2.57$. Simultaneously they had high values on the *mutual activities* domain, $M = 1.93$, similarly to parents in cluster 2, $M = 2.43$.

Biological mothers, non-biological mothers and biological fathers were not more likely to be members of any cluster, $\chi^2(4, 58) = 7.04, p = .134$. This suggests that gender and biological relatedness combined did not explain the clustering.

Four-cluster solution. Means for cluster 1 ($n = 21$), cluster 2 ($n = 16$), cluster 3 ($n = 18$) and cluster 4 ($n = 3$) on each dimension are presented in figure 2. Cluster 1, cluster 2 and cluster 3 were similar to the clusters in the three-cluster solution. Cluster 4 included parents who were frequently described with statements from the *excluding child behavior* domain, $M = 2.00$. These parents simultaneously received high values on *positive traits*, $M = 2.00$, and *mutual activities*, $M = 1.33$.

None of the four parent types were over- or underrepresented in any of the clusters, $\chi^2(9, 58) = 6.85, p = .653$. This suggests that gender, biological relatedness and family type combined did not explain the clustering.

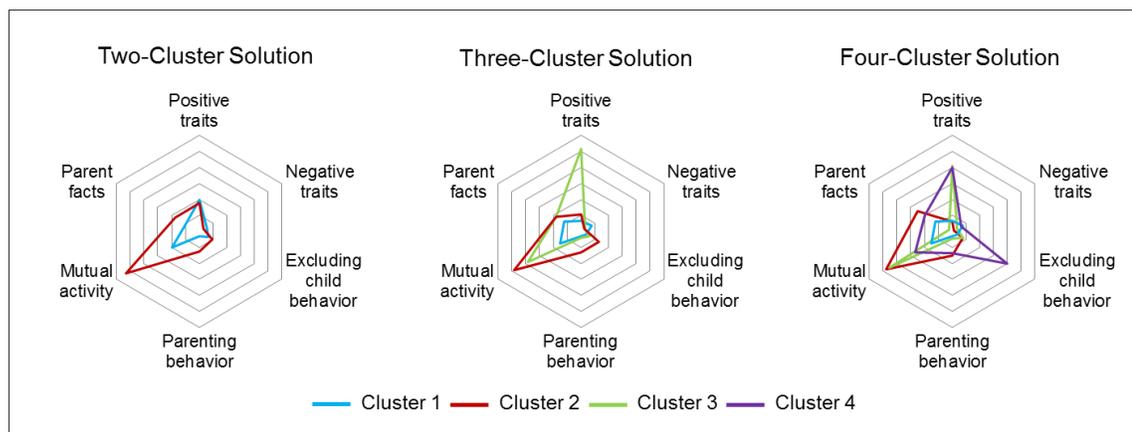


Figure 2. Cluster means for domains in the two-, three- and four-cluster solutions. Values closer to the center represent less frequent statements within the domain and values closer to the periphery represent higher frequency (scale 0–3).

Discussion

The aim of our study was to investigate the associations between family type (same-sex or different-sex parents), biological relatedness between children and their parents, and parent gender on children's mental representations of their parents. We were interested in exploring whether perceptions depend on the gender or biological relatedness of the parent or if they are more malleable and allow children to have

qualitatively similar representations of their parents, irrespective of gender, biological relatedness and family type. To do this, we interviewed children with same-sex and different-sex parents in Finland. Children's descriptions were subjected to content analysis followed by statistical analyses of differences between parent types. We did not find any systematic differences suggesting that children's mental representations would be predominantly formed by parent gender, biological relatedness or family type.

Descriptions of Parent Types

In children's descriptions of their parents, the following domains were identified: *positive traits*, *negative traits*, *excluding child behavior*, *parenting behavior*, *mutual activities* and *parent facts*. The most frequently described domain was *mutual activities*, followed by *positive traits*. Each of the six domains consisted of a number of more specific categories. With the exception of a few categories, no differences between the parent types or family types were noted in the descriptions children provided. The few differences that were found indicated that fathers were more likely to be described as engaging in *activities* outside the home, and biological mothers in same-sex families were more likely to be described as having given birth to the child. When comparing family types, descriptions of same-sex parents were more likely to include references to the parent being funny, doing homework with the child and having given birth to the child compared to different-sex parents. These findings do not form systematic patterns specific for any parent type or family type and suggest that the similarities outweigh the differences between children's perceptions of their parents.

When analyzing the descriptions on the level of higher order domains, we found no differences between the parent types or family types on most domains. The only parent type that differed on any domain was biological mothers in different-sex families, who were less frequently described as having positive traits compared to the other parent types. In fact, based on previous research suggesting children perceive biological mothers more positively compared to biological fathers and non-biological mothers (Brewaeys et al. 1997), a difference in the opposite direction was expected.

Based on previous research, we also expected children in both family types to describe biological mothers as spending more time with them and engaging more in caretaking tasks than both non-biological mothers and fathers (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010;

Brannen et al. 2000; Halpenny et al. 2010; Nixon et al. 2006). Our results did not support this hypothesis, as no differences between parent types were observed in these categories. Caretaking and other forms of parenting were, however, not frequent in children's descriptions.

In families with different-sex parents, we expected mothers to be described as disciplining children more than their fathers (Hazzard et al., 1983; Starrels, 1994). This prediction was also not supported by our results, as no differences between parent types were observed on directive parenting. In fact, none of the children described disciplining from any parent. Several children did say that their parents got angry with them if they did something wrong, but no differences between parent types were observed in this category either. We also predicted that fathers would be described as engaging in mutual activities more often than mothers in this family type (Brannen et al., 2000; Milkie et al., 1997; Nixon et al. 2006). This prediction gained partial support, in that children reported more activities outside the home with their fathers compared to the other parent types. When taking into account all mutual activities however, no differences between the parent types were observed. One possible reason for children not reporting more mutual activities for fathers is that we specifically asked children to describe mutual activities with both parents. Had we only asked children to describe their parents without asking about activities, children might have spontaneously reported more activities about fathers. Because we explicitly asked children if their parents differed in any way, we would, however, have expected differences to be reported if children did perceive them as large.

Clustering of Parents Based on Similarity of Descriptions

A clustering of parents into groups with similar profiles based on the description domains showed that family type, parent gender or biological relatedness did not explain the observed variation in the descriptions of parents. We chose three different cluster solutions to fully explore whether these parent variables formed children's perceptions of their parents. The clusters differed from each other in particular on the mutual activities, positive traits and excluding child behavior domains, as well as on the general number of descriptions.

If parent gender, biological relatedness and family type would have been important factors that form children's perceptions of their parents, we would have expected the grouping to be based on these parent variables. For example, if gender formed the basis of children's perceptions, we would have expected to see fathers in one cluster and all types of mothers in another. None of the parent types was, however, over- or underrepresented in any cluster in any of the three solutions, which supports the hypothesis of flexibility in children's perceptions of their parents. This suggests that the differences between the clusters are better explained by other variables or are due to random sampling error.

Parents' Perspectives on Parenting

Parents responded to survey items measuring parenting dimensions of warmth, rejection, structure, chaos, autonomy support and coercion. The only dimension where a difference between the parent types was indicated, was the dimension of warmth. Biological fathers reported the lowest amount of warmth, and therefore it could be hypothesized that gender has an effect on self-reported warmth. This difference was, however, small and not statistically significant when compared to the other parent types pairwise. The difference in warmth was also not reflected in children's descriptions, as fathers were not less positively described than the other parent types.

In accordance with previous findings (Brewaeys et al., 1997), same-sex parents reported a more even distribution of childcare responsibility compared to different-sex parents in our sample. In the different-sex families, most parents reported that the mother had more responsibility than the father, a finding that has been previously reported (Craig & Mullan, 2011). Yet, all parent types reported spending similar amounts of time with their child. Since gender differences in distribution of time with children have been observed in Finland (Official Statistics of Finland, 2014), our sample differed from the general population in this regard. We also found no differences in how often parents reported engaging in various activities with their child. This contradicts previous findings suggesting that mothers spend most of their time with the child doing caretaking tasks, whereas fathers engage more in mutual activities (Craig, 2006).

Because we found no differences between parent types on most measures of parenting, our results support Fagan and colleagues' (2014) conclusion that parenting

roles of mothers and fathers are predominantly similar. Our findings corroborate previous results suggesting mothers and fathers in different-sex families have an uneven division of childcare responsibility, but propose that children might not perceive these differences if their parents spend roughly as much time and engage in similar activities with them, as they did in our sample. It is, however, possible that the children in the current study did perceive this difference in responsibility, but chose not to discuss it in the interview.

Limitations

The most important limitation to consider when interpreting our results is the small number of participating families. Our sample size reduced the statistical power to detect differences and limited our possibilities to analyze differences on the lower level of categories. Thus, there may be differences between parent types on this detailed level that we failed to detect when combining categories to higher order domains. Despite efforts to correct for low expected values in the analyses, our data on the level of categories still did not meet suggested criteria of minimum expected values (Yates, 1934). Therefore, our results on this detailed level need to also be interpreted with caution. Moreover, we were not able to analyze interactions between child and parent gender. Differences between how girls and boys describe their parents have been observed in previous studies (e.g. Milkie et al., 1997; Starrels, 1994), and therefore including child gender in the analyses would have provided a more complete understanding of children's perceptions of their parents.

Another aspect of the current study that might have influenced the outcome is social desirability in answering questions. For example, positive trait descriptions were much more prevalent than negative ones. Many children also emphasized similarities between their parents, rather than expressing perceived differences. Many of the children in the current study might have wanted to be fair in the description of their parents. Such a will has been described by Brannen and colleagues (2000) in a study interviewing children about their parents. Social influence from peers and family members was, however, minimized through interviewing children alone.

Finally, our sample did not include all pertinent combinations of biological relatedness and parent gender, and hence the conclusions regarding the importance of

biological relatedness and gender are limited to the included family- and parent types, that is, female same-sex parents and biological different-sex parents.

Conclusions and Future Directions

We found no support for the hypothesis of children having different mental representations depending on parent gender, biological relatedness, or family type. Children's descriptions of their parents did not differ between the parent types. Parent reports indicated that the parent types were more similar to one another in their parenting than observed in previous studies, suggesting that children's perceptions are shaped primarily by parents' actual behavior rather than factors such as gender or biological relatedness. Keeping the aforementioned limitations in mind, we cannot, altogether rule out that gender and biological relatedness form children's perceptions of their parents. In order to explore the flexibility of children's mental representations further, future research should be conducted in larger samples and with inclusion of more family types, such as co-parenting fathers and different-sex couples with varying degrees of biological relatedness to their children. Furthermore, using cross-national samples would offer a broader understanding of the importance of cultural context on children's perceptions of parenting.

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Appendix A Codebook

Unit of analysis: Each statement from the child describing 1) parent traits or characteristics 2) parent behavior or habits and 3) mutual activities with parent.

Coding Categories

Parent Traits

Kind: Kind, good or helpful.

Nice: Nice or likeable.

Funny: Funny, goofy, silly or making jokes.

Calm: Calm, patient or not getting angry.

Other positive traits: Other trait descriptions of positive qualities or affects.

Angry: Angry, irritated or impatient.

Other negative trait: Other trait descriptions of negative qualities or affects.

Parent Behaviors Excluding Child

Absent: Any references to the parent being away from home for work, travel or other cause.

Household chores: Cooking, cleaning or doing other tasks done at home without the child.

Habits and activities: Habits, interests and activities parent does without the child at home.

Other parent behavior excluding the child: Other behavior the parent does without the child.

Parenting Behaviors

Putting to bed: All behaviors related to putting the child to sleep, such as tucking in the child and brushing teeth.

Transportation: Picking up or taking the child from/to school/kindergarten/hobbies.

Directive parenting: Parent tells child how to behave and what to do, setting limits and disciplining the child.

Gifts: Parent gives gifts or buys the child things.

Other parenting behavior: Other descriptions of parent providing the child with something.

Mutual Activities

Homework: Helping out with homework or other related tasks.

Household chores: Parent and child do household chores, such as cooking dinner, cleaning, or other tasks, together.

Tasks outside home: Parent and child go to the grocery store or do other related task outside the home together.

Playing: Parent and child play together.

Drawing: Parent and child draw, paint or do crafting together.

Reading: Parent and child read together or parent reads to the child.

Watching TV: Parent and child watch TV or movies together at home.

Activities outside the home: Parent and child do leisure activities outside the home, such as sports, going out to eat, going to the movies or visiting other places together.

Other mutual activities: Explicit statement indicating that one parent generally spends more time with the child than the other, or examples of other mutual activities.

Parent Facts

Parent physical attributes: Descriptions of physical attributes, such as appearance or voice.

Parent interests: Descriptions of things the parent likes. These interests are not habits, but rather various preferences or tastes, such as favorite food.

Giving birth: References to that the parent has given birth to the child.

Gender: References to the gender of the parent.

Other parent facts: Information about the parent that is not related to parenting and do not fit the trait categories.

Other

Relationship: Descriptions of the parent or the relationship to the parent that does not fit the trait descriptions.

Coding Values

Traits and Behaviors

1 = Category used in the description of the parent.

0 a) = Category was *not* used in the description.

b) = Category was used to describe parent, but child expressed the other parent is *more* like this.

c) = Category was used to describe what the parent is *not* like. An exception to this rule are the categories *angry* and *calm*, for which the opposite category is chosen (i.e. not angry = *calm* and not calm = *angry*).

Mutual Activities

1 a) = Child and parent engaged in activity together.

b) = Child describes activity but it is unclear whether the parent is engaged or not.¹

c) = Child is engaged in the given activity and parent does something else simultaneously. In this case, also score 1 for parent behavior on the activity the parent is engaged in alone.

0 a) = Activity not mentioned

b) = Child and parent engage in the activity, but not as *often* as the child and the other parent do.

c) = Child and parent do *not* engage in the activity.

Parent Facts

1 = Category used in the description of the parent.

0 = Category was *not* used in the description.

Other

1 = Category used in the description of the parent.

0 a) = Category was *not* used in the description.

b) = Category was used to describe parent, but child expressed the other parent is *more* like this.

c) = Category was used to describe what the parent is *not* like.

¹ This due to the wording of the question “What do you usually do together with [parent]?” resulting in answers formulated as “I do [activity]”. It thus remains unclear if the child is answering the question correctly or talking about what they do alone. The first interpretation is to be used unless a misunderstanding is evident.

Procedure

1. Read through the interview carefully.
2. Identify all relevant units of analysis.
3. Go through these one by one.
4. Choose a fitting category on the *coding form*, and score using the coding values described above.
5. Move on to the next unit, and be prepared to revise a previous scoring according to the guidelines.
6. Use the column *final* to mark the final score.
7. After scoring a parent within a given category, fill in the accurate row number in the *row* column to indicate where in the transcript the statement was found.
8. In cases where a fitting category is difficult to determine, first consult the chart of higher order categories for support in decision-making.
9. If a relevant statement does not fit any of the primary categories (aligned to the left in the form), score as the higher order category (in italics on the form). Use the notes at the bottom to list the content of these descriptions.
10. If a relevant statement does not fit any of the higher order descriptions, choose from the examples in the *other* category and score as usual. If the *relationship* category is chosen, also write down the specific description of the relationship.
11. If a relevant statement does not fit any of the *other* category examples, write down the description in the list and score as usual.

Appendix B Coding Form

Participant ID: _____

Coder: _____

Table B1

Coding Form for Categories

<i>Category</i>	<i>P1</i>	<i>Final</i>	<i>Row</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>Final</i>	<i>Row</i>
PARENT TRAITS						
<i>Positive</i> ¹						
Kind						
Nice						
Funny						
Calm						
<i>Negative</i> ²						
Angry						
PARENT BEHAVIOR						
<i>Excluding child</i> ³						
Absent						
Household chores						
Habits and activities						
<i>Parenting</i> ⁴						
Putting to bed						
Transportation						
Directive parenting						
Gifts						
<i>Mutual activities</i> ⁵						
Homework						
Household chores						
Tasks outside the home						
Playing						
Drawing						
Reading						
Watching TV						
Activities outside the home						

<i>Category</i>	<i>P1</i>	<i>Final</i>	<i>Row</i>	<i>P2</i>	<i>Final</i>	<i>Row</i>
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PARENT FACTS⁶

Parent physical attributes

Parent interests

Giving birth

Gender

OTHER

Relationship:

1 =

2 =

3 =

4 =

5 =

6 =

Swedish summary

Barns beskrivningar av sina föräldrar i familjer med samkönade eller olikkönade föräldrar

Forskning om relationen mellan barn och föräldrar har tytt på skillnader mellan hur barn och föräldrar uppfattar föräldrarnas beteende (Bögels & Melick, 2004; Gaylord, Kitzmann, & Coleman, 2003; Tein, Roosa & Michaels, 1994). Trots detta har majoriteten av forskningen på social kognition inom familjer fokuserat på föräldrars uppfattningar om sina barn, och således är vår förståelse av barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar mera bristfällig (Bugental & Johnston, 2000).

Barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar bidrar till att förklara sambandet mellan föräldraskap och barnets utveckling (Bugental & Johnston, 2000). Uppfattningen om familjemedlemmar formas genom kognitioner som organiserar inkommande information (Bugental & Johnston, 2000). Könsscheman påverkar vår sociala kognition genom att styra vilka egenskaper som förknippas med olika personer och påverka vilka drag som uppmärksammas hos personer (Bem 1981). Könsscheman kunde således också påverka barns uppfattningar om sina egna föräldrar. Redan i tidig spädbarnsålder lär sig barn att skilja mellan manliga och kvinnliga egenskaper (Cornell, 1974; Fagan, 1976, Poulin-Dubois, Serbin, Kenyon & Derbyshire, 1994). Spädbarn föredrar också ansikten som representerar samma kön som deras primära omsorgsgivare (Quinn, Yahr, Kuhn, Slater & Pascalis, 2002).

I flera undersökningar har skillnader mellan mammors och pappors föräldraskap observerats. Mammor tillbringar mera tid med sina barn, har ett större ansvar för barnen (Craig, 2006; Craig & Mullan, 2011; Raley, Bianchi & Wang, 2012), har bättre kunskap om föräldraskap och utvecklar närmare relationer till sina barn (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010) jämfört med pappor. Andra resultat visar att det också finns likheter mellan mammors och pappors föräldraroller (Antfolk, Karlsson, Söderlund & Szala, 2017; Fagan, Day, Lamb & Cabrera, 2014).

I familjer där båda föräldrarna är kvinnor är den ena mamman ofta barnets biologiska förälder, medan den andra mamman inte är biologiskt släkt med barnet (Lofquist, 2011). I dessa familjer har föräldrarna en jämnare ansvarsfördelning jämfört med olikkönade föräldrar (där den ena föräldern är en man och den andra en kvinna)

visavi föräldraskap och förvärvsarbete. Den biologiska mamman tenderar trots detta ha ett större ansvar för barnomvårdnad jämfört med den icke-biologiska mamman. De icke-biologiska mammorna tillbringar dock mer tid med sina barn jämfört med pappor i familjer med olikkönade föräldrar (Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall & Golombok, 1997). Familjer med två pappor har studerats mindre än familjer med två mammor, men resultaten från de studier som har genomförts har antytt att dessa pappors föräldraskap mer liknar föräldraskapet hos kvinnopars föräldraskap än olikkönade pars föräldraskap (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010).

Braewaeyns med flera (1997) studerade barns uppfattningar om samkönade och olikkönade föräldrar och fann att barn i båda familjetyperna riktade lika mycket positiva känslor gentemot sina biologiska mammor. Barnen uttryckte färre positiva känslor gentemot icke-biologiska mammor och biologiska pappor, och dessa föräldratyper associerades sinsemellan med lika positiva känslor.

Den övervägande majoriteten av forskningen om barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar har endast studerat barn med olikkönade föräldrar. I dessa familjer upplever barn att de får mer närhet och ömhet av sina mammor jämfört med pappor (Starrels, 1994). Samtidigt rapporterar barn fler negativa beteenden beträffande mammor än pappor (Hazzard et al., 1983). I kvalitativa studier har barn uttryckt att mammor ger instrumentell och emotionell omvårdnad, medan pappor värdesätts mer för speciella talanger och gemensamma aktiviteter (Brannen, Heptinstall & Bhopal, 2000; Milkie, Simon & Powell, 1997). Barn uttrycker jämställda värderingar då de beskriver hur föräldraroller borde se ut, men beskriver samtidigt en traditionell könsindelning mellan sina egna föräldrar (Halpenny, Nixon & Watson, 2010; Nixon, Greene & Hogan, 2006).

Målet med den här studien var att undersöka barns uppfattningar om sina samkönade föräldrar och jämföra dessa med barns uppfattningar om olikkönade föräldrar. Vi var också intresserade av huruvida förälderns kön och graden av biologiskt släktskap mellan barnet och föräldern påverkar uppfattningarna, eller om uppfattningarna är mer formbara, så att barn kunde skapa kvalitativt likartade uppfattningar om sina föräldrar oavsett familjetyp, förälderns kön och biologiskt släktskap till barnet.

Baserat på tidigare forskning formades följande hypoteser beträffande barnens beskrivningar av sina föräldrar:

1. Inom familjer kommer beskrivningarna av föräldrarna att skilja sig sinsemellan.
 - i)* Mammor beskrivs som att de tillbringar mer tid med barnen och disciplinerar barnen mer än pappor i olikkönade familjer, *ii)* pappor beskrivs som att de deltar mer i gemensamma aktiviteter och arbetar mer än mammor i olikkönade familjer och *iii)* biologiska mammor i båda familjetyperna beskrivs mer positivt och beskrivs som att de deltar mer i omvårdnadsuppgifter jämfört med pappor och icke-biologiska mammor.
2. Likheter mellan föräldratyper kommer att följa en av följande prediktioner. *i)* Alla typer av mammor liknar varandra och skiljer sig från pappor på grund av kön, *ii)* alla biologiska föräldrar liknar varandra och skiljer sig från icke-biologiska föräldrar på grund av biologiskt släktskap, *iii)* samkönade föräldrar liknar varandra och skiljer sig från olikkönade föräldrar på grund av familjetyp, *iv)* biologiska mammor liknar varandra och skiljer sig från både pappor och icke-biologiska mammor på grund av kön och biologiskt släktskap eller *v)* alla fyra föräldratyper ses som distinkta från varandra på grund av kön, biologiskt släktskap och familjetyp.

Metod

Studien beviljades etiskt tillstånd av den etiska nämnden vid Åbo Akademi innan datainsamlingen inleddes. Deltagarna ($N = 29$) bestod av 19 barn med olikkönade föräldrar och 10 barn vars båda föräldrar var kvinnor. Alla deltagande barn var det äldsta barnet från föräldrarnas nuvarande parförhållande och var för närvarande 4–12 år gamla. De deltagande barnen rekryterades genom bekvämlighetsurval genom att kontakta intressegrupper och använda snöbollsurval.

Datainsamlingen genomfördes genom en strukturerad intervju. I intervjun ombads barnen beskriva vardera föräldern, vad de gör tillsammans med föräldern och huruvida föräldrarna är olika i något avseende. Information om olika aspekter av föräldraskap och demografiska variabler samlades in av föräldrarna genom en nätenkät. Enkäten fylldes i före testningen. Testsessionen inleddes genom att delge föräldrarna och barnet information om undersökningen. Föräldrarna gav därefter sitt informerade

samtycke för sitt barn att delta i studien och tillåtelse att banda in intervjun på en ljudspelare. Barnen intervjuades i ett avskilt rum. Efter intervjun delgavs familjen information om studiens frågeställning, och eventuella frågor besvarades av testledaren.

Intervjuerna transkriberades och anonymiserades så att föräldrarnas kön inte var igenkännbart. En innehållsanalys genomfördes i två steg. I det första steget söktes väsentliga beskrivningar i texten, som sedan ordnades i kategorier baserat på likheter i innehållet i beskrivningarna. Detta resulterade i 31 kategorier (*snäll, trevlig, rolig, lugn, andra positiva egenskaper, arg, andra negativa egenskaper, frånvarande, hushållsarbete utan barnet, vanor och aktiviteter, nattning, transport, direktivt föräldraskap, gåvor, andra föräldraskapsbeteenden, hemläxor, hushållsarbete med barnet, ärenden utanför hemmet, lek, ritning, läsning, TV, aktiviteter utanför hemmet, andra gemensamma aktiviteter, föräldrarnas fysiska egenskaper, föräldrarnas intressen, har fött barnet, föräldrarnas kön*) i sex överordnade domäner (*positiva egenskaper, negativa egenskaper, beteende som exkluderar barnet, föräldraskapsbeteende, gemensamma aktiviteter och fakta om föräldern*). I det andra steget utvärderades kategoriseringens tillförlitlighet genom en mellanbedömarprocedure, där överensstämmelsen mellan två bedömare räknades ut. Proceduren baserades på Neuendorfs (2011) riktlinjer för innehållsanalys. Den slutliga överensstämmelsen var utmärkt (Cohens $\kappa = 0,79$) enligt riktlinjer av Banerjee, Capozzoli, McSweeney and Sinha (1999). Tre kategorier som inte nådde tillfredsställande mellanbedömaröverensstämmelse exkluderades från analyserna.

De statistiska analyserna genomfördes i programmet IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (Version 24.0; IBM Corp., 2016). I analyserna användes t-test, variansanalyser och Chi-square-test för att jämföra frekvenser av kategorier i olika föräldragrupper. K-means-klusteranalyser användes för att gruppera föräldrarna i kluster enligt likheter i beskrivningarna. Klustreringen grundades på föräldrarnas värden på de sex olika domänerna. Analysen genomfördes som en tvåklusterlösning följt av analyser med tre- och fyrklusterlösningar. Klusterlösningarna valdes för att undersöka huruvida föräldrarna beskrevs olika baserat på kön (mammor och pappor), biologiskt släktskap (biologiskt släkt och inte släkt), familjetyp (samkönade föräldrar och olikkönade föräldrar), kön och biologiskt släktskap (biologiska mammor, icke-biologiska mammor och biologiska pappor) och slutligen kön, biologiskt släktskap och familjetyp

(biologiska mammor i olikkönade föräldrapar, biologiska mammor i samkönade föräldrapar, icke-biologiska mammor och biologiska pappor).

Resultat

Samplet bestod av 29 barn, varav 16 var flickor och 13 pojkar. Medelåldern var 5,86 år, och ingen statistiskt signifikant ålderskillnad förekom mellan flickorna och pojkarna. De samkönade och olikkönade familjerna skiljde sig inte signifikant på någon demografisk variabel (barnets kön, barnets ålder, föräldrarnas civilstånd, längden av föräldrarnas förhållande, förälderns ålder, förälderns utbildning eller förälderns inkomst). Bland de fyra föräldratyperna skiljde sig endast biologiska mammor i olikkönade par från de tre övriga föräldratyperna, i och med att de oftare hade avlagt en universitetsexamen.

De fyra föräldratyperna skiljde sig i avseende på självrapporterat omsorgsansvar för barnet och självuppskattad nivå av värme i föräldraskapet. Biologiska mammor i olikkönade familjer rapporterade oftare än de andra föräldratyperna att de hade huvudansvar för barnomsorg i familjen, medan biologiska pappor rapporterade oftare än de andra grupperna att partnern hade huvudansvaret. Majoriteten av mammorna i samkönade familjer rapporterade en jämn ansvarsfördelning. Föräldrarna skiljde sig på nivån av värme så att biologiska mammor i samkönade familjer rapporterade högst nivå medan biologiska pappor rapporterade lägst nivå av värme. Föräldratyperna skiljde sig inte med avseende på andra föräldraskapsdimensioner eller tiden föräldrarna uppskattade sig tillbringa med barnet. Likaså skiljde sig inte föräldrarna i avseende på hur ofta de deltog i diverse aktiviteter med sitt barn.

Av de 31 observerade kategorierna var *lek* den mest använda kategorin i beskrivningarna ($n = 30$), medan *nattning* var den minst frekvent förekommande kategorin ($n = 1$). Bland de överordnade domänerna var *gemensamma aktiviteter* ($n = 99$) och *positiva egenskaper* ($n = 55$) mest frekvent hänvisade till. Kategorierna *övrigt* ($n = 6$) och *negativa egenskaper* ($n = 13$) användes minst.

Samkönade föräldrar beskrevs oftare med kategorierna *rolig, gör hemläxor och har fött barnet* jämfört med olikkönade föräldrar. Inga andra skillnader mellan familjetyperna framkom. Jämförelser mellan föräldratyperna antydde att biologiska pappor oftare än de andra familjetyperna beskrevs med kategorin *aktiviteter utanför*

hemmet. Biologiska mammor i samkönade familjer beskrevs mer sannolikt än de andra familjetyperna med kategorin *har fött barnet*. Inga andra skillnader mellan föräldrattyperna framkom.

Inga signifikanta skillnader mellan familjetyperna framkom på nivån av överordnade domäner. På domänen *positiva egenskaper* fick samkönade föräldrar något högre värden än olikkönade föräldrar, men skillnaden var inte statistiskt signifikant. Jämförelser mellan föräldrattyperna påvisade heller inga statistiskt signifikanta skillnader. Biologiska mammor i olikkönade familjer hade något lägre värden på domänen *positiva egenskaper* än de andra familjetyperna, men skillnaden var inte statistiskt signifikant.

Klusteranalysen med en tvåklusterlösning resulterade i två kluster, där föräldrarna i det ena klustret hade högre värden på domänerna *gemensamma aktiviteter*, *föräldraskapsbeteende* och *fakta om föräldern*. Föräldrarnas sannolikhet att höra till någotdera klustret påverkades inte av familjetypp, föräldrarnas kön eller biologiskt släktskap. I treklusterlösningen ingick två kluster som liknade de ovanbeskrivna klustren, samt ett tredje kluster som hade höga värden på *positiva egenskaper* och *gemensamma aktiviteter*. Biologiska mammor, icke-biologiska mammor och biologiska pappor var inte överrepresenterade i något kluster. I fyraklusterlösningen ingick tre kluster som liknade de ovanbeskrivna klustren, samt ett fjärde kluster med föräldrar som hade hög frekvens av beskrivningar från domänerna *beteende som exkluderar barnet*, *positiva egenskaper* och *gemensamma aktiviteter*. Ingen av de fyra föräldrattyperna var överrepresenterad i något av klustren. Ingen av klusterlösningarna var således baserad på familjetypp, föräldrarnas kön eller biologiskt släktskap.

Diskussion

Målet med ifrågavarande studie var att utforska inflytandet av familjetypp (samkönade eller olikkönade föräldrar), biologiskt släktskap mellan förälder och barn, och föräldrarnas kön på barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar. För att göra detta intervjuade vi barn med samkönade och olikkönade föräldrar. Vi fann inga systematiska skillnader som skulle antyda att barns uppfattningar skulle vara formade av familjetypp, föräldrarnas kön eller biologiska släktskap med barnet.

Följande domäner framkom i barnens beskrivningar av sina föräldrar: *positiva egenskaper, negativa egenskaper, beteende som exkluderar barnet, föräldraskapsbeteende, gemensamma aktiviteter och fakta om föräldern*. Varje domän bestod av ett antal mer specifika kategorier. Med undantag av några enskilda kategorier, framkom inga skillnader mellan de fyra föräldratyperna eller de två familjetyperna. Familje- och föräldratyperna skiljde sig inte heller på de överordnade domänerna. Baserat på tidigare forskning förväntade vi oss att biologiska mammor skulle beskrivas i positivare termer än de andra föräldratyperna (Brewaeys et al. 1997). Vidare förväntade vi oss att biologiska mammor, oftare än de andra föräldratyperna, skulle beskrivas tillbringa mer tid med barnet och delta mer i omvårdnaden av det (Biblarz & Stacey, 2010; Brannen et al. 2000; Halpenny et al. 2010; Nixon et al. 2006). Ingen av dessa hypoteser fick stöd av resultaten.

I familjer med olikkönade föräldrar förväntade vi oss att mammor skulle beskrivas straffa sina barn oftare än pappor (Hazzard et al., 1983; Starrels, 1994). Denna hypotes fick inte stöd, eftersom inga skillnader mellan föräldratyperna framkom i beskrivningarna. Vidare förväntade vi oss att pappor i dessa familjer skulle beskrivas delta i gemensamma aktiviteter oftare än mammor (Brannen et al., 2000; Milkie et al., 1997; Nixon et al. 2006). Denna hypotes fick delvis stöd, i och med att barn beskrev fler aktiviteter utanför hemmet tillsammans med pappor jämfört med de andra föräldratyperna. Då alla gemensamma aktiviteter beaktades, framkom dock inga skillnader mellan föräldratyperna.

Föräldrarna klustrerades i grupper baserat på likheter i beskrivningarna. Resultaten från klusteranalysen visade att familjetyp, förälderns kön eller biologiska släktskap till barnet inte förklarade de observerade likheterna och skillnaderna mellan grupperna. Ifall dessa variabler formade barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar, hade vi väntat oss en klusterindelning baserad på variablerna. Således antyder resultaten att skillnaderna mellan klustren förklaras bättre av andra variabler eller slumpmässigt samplingsfel.

I samklang med resultat från tidigare studier (Brewaeys et al., 1997), rapporterade samkönade föräldrar en jämnare ansvarsfördelning av omvårdnad av barn jämfört med olikkönade föräldrar. I familjer med olikkönade föräldrar rapporterade de

flesta föräldrarna att mamman hade mer ansvar än pappan, vilket även rapporterats i tidigare forskning (Craig & Mullan, 2011). Könsskillnader i mängden tid föräldrar tillbringar med sina barn har tidigare identifierats i Finland (Finlands officiella statistik, 2014), och könsskillnader i vilka aktiviteter föräldrar tar del av med sina barn har noterats internationellt (Craig, 2006). Däremot framkom i denna studie inga skillnader mellan föräldratyperna i avseende på hur mycket tid de tillbringar med sina barn, samt vilka aktiviteter de tar del av tillsammans.

Den viktigaste begränsningen att beakta i tolkningen av resultaten av denna studie är att antalet deltagare var litet. Storleken på urvalet minskade vår statistiska styrka att identifiera skillnader och begränsade möjligheterna att analysera skillnaderna på kategorinivå. Vidare hade vi inte möjlighet att analysera interaktioner mellan barnets och förälderns kön, variabler som tidigare visat sig påverka barns beskrivningar av sina föräldrar (Milkie et al., 1997; Starrels, 1994). Slutligen innehöll vårt urval inte alla väsentliga kombinationer av biologiskt släktskap och kön, och således begränsas slutsatserna om inflytandet dessa variabler har till de inkluderade familje- och föräldratyperna, det vill säga kvinnliga samkönade föräldrar och biologiska olikkönade föräldrar.

Vi fann inget stöd för att barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar skulle vara beroende av familjetyp, förälderns kön eller biologiska släktskap till barnet. Föräldrarnas uppskattningar av sitt föräldraskap påvisade fler likheter mellan föräldratyperna jämfört med resultat från tidigare forskning. Således antyder resultaten att barns uppfattningar formas mer av föräldrarnas beteende än deras kön eller biologiska släktskap till barnet. Med de ovannämnda begränsningarna i åtanke, kan vi emellertid inte fullständigt utesluta att variablerna kunde forma barns uppfattningar. Framtida forskning med större urval och fler familjetyper med varierande grad av biologiskt släktskap skulle gynna en fullständigare förståelse av barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar.

PRESSMEDDELANDE

Barns beskrivningar av sina föräldrar i familjer med samkönade eller olikkönade föräldrar påverkas inte av familjetyp, föräldrarnas kön eller biologiska släktskap till barnet

Pro-gradu avhandling i psykologi

Fakulteten för humaniora, psykologi och teologi vid Åbo Akademi

Resultaten från en pro-gradu avhandling vid Åbo Akademi tyder på att barns beskrivningar av sina föräldrar inte skiljer sig mellan familjer med samkönade kvinnliga föräldrar och olikkönade föräldrar. I studien undersöktes huruvida familjetyp, föräldrarnas kön och biologiska släktskap till barnet påverkar barnens beskrivningar av sina föräldrar. Resultaten tyder på att barns uppfattningar om sina föräldrar inte formas av familjetyp, föräldrarnas kön eller biologiska släktskap till barnet. Undersökningen utfördes av pro gradu-skrubent Heidi Martelin under handledning av postdoktoral forskare Jan Antfolk.

Sammanlagt deltog 29 familjer med barn i åldern 4–12 år i den föreliggande undersökningen. Datat för studien samlades in genom intervjuer med barnen och genom en nätbaserad enkät, som riktades till föräldrarna. Beskrivningarna av de olika föräldratyperna jämfördes genom innehållsanalys, följd av statistiska analyser.

Resultaten från studien tyder inte på några systematiska skillnader mellan hur barn beskriver biologiska mammor i olikkönade familjer, biologiska pappor i olikkönade familjer, biologiska mammor i samkönade familjer och icke-biologiska mammor i samkönade familjer. Vidare förekom fler likheter mellan föräldratypernas uppskattningar av sitt föräldraskap jämfört med resultat från tidigare forskning. Således antyder resultaten att barns uppfattningar formas mer av föräldrarnas beteende än deras kön eller biologiska släktskap till barnet. Studien var den första av sitt slag som jämfört barns beskrivningar av samkönade och olikkönade föräldrar med öppna frågor och kvalitativa metoder.

Ytterlig information fås av:

Heidi Martelin

Pro gradu-skrubent i psykologi

Psykologi/Åbo Akademi

heidi.martelin@abo.fi, 050-5326996

Jan Antfolk

Postdoktoral forskare i psykologi

Psykologi/Åbo Akademi

jan.antfolk@abo.fi