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# Civic Competence of Dutch Children in Female Same-Sex Parent Families: A Comparison With Children of Opposite-Sex Parents

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## Abstract

This study examined whether Dutch children reared in families headed by female same-sex parents differ in civic competence from Dutch children reared by opposite-sex parents. The participants, drawn from a national sample, included 32 children (11–13 years old) parented by female same-sex couples who were matched on demographic characteristics with 32 same-aged children parented by opposite-sex couples. The comparison revealed that children raised by female same-sex parents scored significantly higher on several civic competencies, specifically on attitudes concerning acting democratically, dealing with conflicts, and dealing with differences. These results suggest that growing up in a nontraditional family may be associated with a greater appreciation of diversity and the development of good citizenship.

## Keywords

families, LGBT issues, parenting

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A founding principle of democratic societies is a belief in individual civic responsibility. For example, in his 2012 Democratic Convention and reelection speeches, United States President Barack Obama spoke of citizenship—“a word at the very essence of our democracy, the idea that this country only works when we accept certain obligations to one another and to future generations; . . . among those [responsibilities] are love and charity and duty” (Federal News Service, 2012a, 2012b). In the social science literature, good citizenship is considered the capacity “to critically evaluate different perspectives, explore strategies for change, and reflect upon issues of justice, (in)equality and democratic engagement, [while behaving] in a socially accepted and responsible manner within a community” (Geijsel, Ledoux, Reumerman, & Ten Dam, 2012, p. 713). However, the ways in which children acquire citizenship skills in different family types have not been fully explored.

From a classical perspective on citizenship, young people (children and adolescents) are future citizens. Past investigations on citizenship have focused on the civic competencies children and adolescents will need as adults, such as an understanding of the political system, voting, and so on. However, scholars in the citizenship literature have more recently emphasized that children and adolescents are already citizens, because they participate in a wide variety of social contexts in their everyday lives, relying on an array of tools in interactions with others (peers, friends, adults other than their parents, etc.; Biesta, 2007; Lawy & Biesta, 2006; Ten Dam & Volman, 2007).

Parents are considered the principal agents in teaching young children to respect the rights of others and to distinguish right from wrong (Meyers-Walls, 2001). Several studies have also found that parents are strongly influential in their offspring's interest in public affairs, and in the extent to which offspring feel socially responsible as adults (e.g., Flanagan, Bowes, Johnson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998; McIntosh, Hart, & Youniss, 2007; Van Deth, Abendschön, & Vollmar, 2011). Researchers have begun to examine the citizenship competency of young people, such as having the capacity to empathize with others, to resolve conflicts, and to recognize the right of individuals to differ from one other (De Winter, 2004). Less is known about the citizenship competencies of offspring in various family types, such as same-sex parent families, since such comparisons have not been systematically conducted.

In 1998, Tasker and Golombok hypothesized that “children brought up by lesbian or gay parents may benefit from their personal experience of diversity within a community and may therefore be less restricted in their outlook and more able to appreciate today's multicultural society” (p. 77). Although there

is a general consensus that the family is one of the primary socializing agents during childhood (e.g., Flanagan, 2003; Gniewosz, Noack, & Buhl, 2009; McIntosh et al., 2007), Tasker and Golombok's hypothesis concerning the civic competence of children with same-sex parents has not been investigated.

Based on assumptions that children with lesbian or gay parents might be disadvantaged due to peer prejudice (for overview, see Clarke, 2001), studies on same-sex parent families have traditionally focused on children's psychological adjustment and peer relationships, rather than their acquisition of citizenship skills (see for overviews Bos, 2012; Goldberg, 2010; Goldberg & Allen, 2012). In addition, most studies were conducted on female same-sex parent families, as the lesbian baby boom preceded the gay baby boom by nearly two decades (Bos & van Balen, 2010). These investigations have found that children reared in lesbian-parent families are comparable in well-being and problem behavior to those reared by heterosexual parents (Bos & van Balen, 2008; Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2007; Brewaeys, Ponjaert-Kristoffersen, Van Steirteghem, & Devroey, 1993; Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Van Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, & Joseph, 1995; Gartrell, Deck, Rodas, Peyser, & Banks, 2005; Gartrell, Peyser, & Bos, 2011; Goldberg, 2010; Golombok et al., 2003; Patterson, 1994; Perrin, Siegel, & The Committee on Psychological Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2013; Steckel, 1987). Children's psychosocial adjustment has been shown to be associated more with the quality of parenting than with parental sexual orientation (Bos et al., 2007; Goldberg, 2010; Golombok, 2000; Perrin, 2002; Tasker, 2010; Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

A majority of the abovementioned studies comparing children in female same-sex and opposite-sex parent families relied on convenience samples. In recent years, several large-scale family surveys with nationally representative samples have included non-heterosexual family forms in their design (see for overview Russell & Muraco, 2012). The data sets of these studies allow same-sex parent households to be identified and compared with opposite-sex parent households, even though the studies did not specifically focus on lesbian or gay families. Because these surveys were based on nationally representative samples, it is also possible to draw conclusions that can be extrapolated to broader populations of same-sex parent families.

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health study; Wainright et al., 2004; Wainright & Patterson, 2006, 2008), based on a nationally representative sample of American adolescents, was one of the first studies in which it was possible to compare family types and to identify households headed by two mothers or two fathers. Wainright et al. (2004) used the Add Health data to compare offspring in female same-sex parent

households with offspring reared in father–mother families. Same-sex couples were identified in the data set through a combination of two questions asked of one parent of each participating adolescent: (a) the parent's gender and (b) whether the parent was in a marriage or a marriage-like relationship with a person of the same gender. Through these two items, adolescents in families headed by male same-sex couples ( $n = 6$ ) and female same-sex couples ( $n = 44$ ) were identified. The male same-sex couple families were excluded from Wainright's analysis because of their very small number. The remaining adolescents in opposite-sex parent families were used for a 1:1 matching with the 44 adolescents in female same-sex parent households. The matching was done based on the adolescent's gender, age, ethnicity, adoption status, learning disability status, family income, and parental educational background. Each first matching on all these variables was used as a comparison respondent.

Wainright et al. (2004) found no significant differences between the two groups of adolescents in well-being (operationalized as psychosocial adjustment, school outcomes, and romantic relationships). Wainright and Patterson (2006) later used the Add Health data to compare the adolescents in both family types on delinquent behavior and substance use, and again found no significant differences.

Rivers, Poteat, and Noret (2008) conducted a study in the United Kingdom using a similar procedure as Wainright and colleagues (2004). In this study, adolescents were asked whether they lived with a mother and her same-sex partner/girlfriend or a father and his same-sex partner/boyfriend. Of the 2,002 respondents (age range = 12–16 years), 18 reported living in a households headed by two women, and 3 in households headed by 2 men. As in the Wainright studies, adolescents reared by male couples were excluded from the analyses because of low representation. A comparable group of 18 students who reported living with two parents of the opposite sex were then selected, based on a 1:1 match on demographic variables. In keeping with the findings of Wainright et al., Rivers et al. reported that adolescents raised by female same-sex couples did not differ from those raised by opposite-sex couples in psychological functioning or experiences of victimization. However, Rivers et al. found one significant difference between the two groups of adolescents: Adolescents with female same-sex parents reported significantly less likelihood of using school-based support (from teachers or nonteaching staff) than those reared by opposite-sex couples.

Recently, investigators have begun to examine other aspects of child development associated with different family types (e.g., Van Gelderen, Gartrell, Bos, Hermanns, & Perrin, 2012), and there are now several nationally representative data sources available for procedures and analyses along

the lines of the abovementioned studies by Wainright et al. (2004) and Rivers et al. (2008; Russell & Muraco, 2012). One such data set, which includes questions on civic competence, was collected in the Netherlands—the Cohort Onderzoek Onderwijs-loopbanen (COOL; Cohort Survey of Education and Learning). The COOL data were gathered in such a way that it is possible to identify and compare children with same- and opposite-sex parents.

In the present investigation, the COOL data will be utilized to compare children in same- and opposite-sex parent families on civic competence. In moving beyond the problem-oriented focus of previous research on children in same-sex parent families, the current study offers a unique opportunity to test the hypothesis formulated by Tasker and Golombok in 1998, namely, that one benefit of growing up in a nontraditional family might be a greater appreciation of diversity within society.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants were drawn from a large representative sample of children in the Netherlands who participated in the COOL school-based survey that included questions on civic competence (Driessen, Mulder, Ledoux, Roeleveld, & van der Veen, 2009; Geijsel et al., 2012; Ten Dam, Geijsel, Reumerman, & Ledoux, 2011). The data for this survey were collected in 2007/2008 from students ( $n = 11,609$ ) in 550 elementary schools. For additional details pertaining to the sample procedures, see Driessen et al. (2009), Geijsel et al. (2012), and Ten Dam et al. (2011).

One parent of each participant also completed a questionnaire concerning demographics (e.g., gender, educational level, and ethnic background of each parent) and family composition, viz. father–mother family, single-parent family, two parents of the same sex, or other. It was also asked whether it was the mother or the father who completed these questions; combining this answer with the answers on family composition made it possible to identify same- and opposite-sex parent households.

There was also a question asked of the parents about adopted, fostered, and nonresidential children. Preliminary analyses showed that none of the children with same-sex parents was adopted, fostered, or nonresidential. To match children in same-sex parent families with those in opposite-sex parent families based on demographics (child's age and gender, and both parents' ethnicity and educational level), families were excluded if there was any missing information (a nonresponse) on any demographic variable. Based on this procedure, we identified 32 families parented by female same-sex

**Table 1.** Demographic Characteristics of Sample.

Variable	Family type		Same-sex versus opposite-sex parent families
	Female same-sex parent families	Opposite-sex parent families	
No. of families	32	32	
Child's age in years ( <i>SD</i> )	11.4 (.72)	11.33 (.61)	$t < 1$ , <i>ns</i>
Child's gender			$\chi^2 < 1$ , <i>ns</i>
Female (%)	46.9	43.3	
Male (%)	53.1	56.7	
Child's ethnic background			$\chi^2 < 1$ , <i>ns</i>
Dutch/Western	93.8	93.3	
Non-Western	06.2	06.7	
Vocational or academic education (%)	31.2	36.7	$\chi^2 < 1$ , <i>ns</i>

couples and 11 headed by male same-sex couples. As the number of children with male same-sex parents was too small, these families were excluded from the final sample.

The 32 children (15 girls, 17 boys) reared in families headed by female same-sex couples were on average 11.44 years old ( $SD = .72$  years), with an age range of 11 to 13 years. In 10 of these families, at least 1 parent had received a vocational or academic diploma. Most children (93.8%) had a Dutch ethnic background.

The matching of families parented by female same-sex couples with families headed by opposite-sex parents was realized by creating a list of children from the COOL database who matched each child from a female same-sex couple household on age and gender (identified via child reports), and parental ethnicity and educational level (identified via parent reports). Using the "sort cases" option in SPSS, children in households with opposite-sex parents were sorted first based on age, and then on gender, parental ethnicity, and parental educational level. The 1:1 matching was accomplished by manually going through this list and selecting the first child whose demographic characteristics were the same as each child in a female same-sex parent household. Children with opposite-sex parents who were adopted, fostered, or nonresidential were excluded from the matching because none of the children in female same-sex parent families had such a status. This procedure was similar to the one carried out by Wainright et al. (2004) and Rivers et al. (2008) in their respective studies (Wainright & Patterson, 2006, 2008). Table 1 shows the findings of this matching.

## Measures

In school, the children completed the Citizenship Competence Questionnaire (CCQ; Driessen et al., 2009; Ten Dam et al., 2011), which was included in the COOL survey. Based on a review of the literature on civic competence (see Ten Dam et al., 2011; Ten Dam, Geijsel, Reumerman, & Ledoux, 2010), the developers of the CCQ operationalized children's civic competence as (a) acting democratically (accepting and contributing to a democratic society), (b) acting in a socially responsible manner (taking shared responsibility), (c) dealing with conflicts (handling minor conflicts or conflicts of interest), and (d) dealing with differences (handling social, cultural, religious, and outward differences). For each of these areas of competence, Ten Dam et al. (2011) constructed the following subscales: knowledge (knowing, understanding, and having insight into what can best be done with respect to the specific social task), attitudes (opinions, desires, and readiness with respect to the specific social task), skills (estimate of what one can do with respect to a specific social task), and reflection (contemplation of a specific social task).

Utilizing the entire COOL data set, Ten Dam et al. (2011) carried out a confirmatory factor analysis on the CCQ. They found high reliability for the scales they had constructed, and concluded that the instrument is an effective tool for measuring children's civic competence (Ten Dam et al., 2011). However, Ten Dam et al. found no evidence for an independent "skill" component on the social task "Dealing with conflicts." Furthermore, for "Acting democratically," the confirmatory factor analyses showed two attitudes components ("desire to hear others" and "critical contribution") and two skills components ("own opinion" and "opinions of others"). To obtain a similar number of subscales for each social task, we used only "desire to hear others" for the attitude component of "Acting democratically" and "opinions of others" for the skills component of "Acting democratically." These two components focus on listening to what other children have to say, and trying to understand their opinions.

Table 2 presents more information about the scales used in the present study, including the number of items per scale, the phrasing of questions, example items, answer categories, and the Cronbach's alpha.

## Analyses

We conducted several post hoc power analyses through G-Power software (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996; Faul & Erdfelder, 1992). For a sample size of 64 respondents, these analyses revealed a power (1-beta error probability) of .97 and .98 for multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) with 4 and 3 dependent variables, respectively, and a power of .92 for the analyses of



**Table 2.** Description of Scales: Number of Items Per Scale, Phrasing of Questions, Example Statement or Item, Answer Categories, and Cronbach's Alphas.

	Number of items	Phrasing of the questions	Example of a statement/item	Answer categories	Cronbach's alphas <sup>a</sup>
Acting democratically	8	The multiple-choice questions below are not about your opinion. They focus on your knowledge, and there is only one answer correct. Please indicate the correct answer.	All children have a right to (a) an allowance, (b) choose who they want to live with, or (c) education.	Multiple choice; a correct answer (in the example it was answer "c") and in incorrect answer was coded as 0.	.67
Attitudes	3	How well does this statement apply to you?	If a student in school does not agree with something, I think he or she should have the chance to explain why he or she has another opinion.	I = does not apply to me at all to 4 = applies to me completely	.69
Skills	3	How good are you at . . . ?	. . . listening to someone's reason for making another decision regarding something that you will do or have done? . . . whether students are listened to at school?	I = not good at all to 4 = very good	.68
Reflection	6	How often do you think about . . .		I = almost never/ never to 4 = frequently	.80

(continued)

**Table 2. (continued)**

	Number of items	Phrasing of the questions	Example of a statement/item	Answer categories	Cronbach's alphas <sup>a</sup>
Acting in socially responsible manner					
Knowledge	6	The multiple-choice questions below are not about your opinion. They focus on your knowledge, and there is only one answer correct.	Imagine that you were angry with your neighbor and you yelled at him/her. What is the best thing to do now? (a) I will ask my parents if they can apologize for my behavior, (b) I am going to say "sorry" by myself to my neighbor, or (c) I am kind to my neighbor and don't talk about what happened.	Multiple choice; a correct answer (in the example answer "b") was coded as 1, and an incorrect answer was coded as 0.	.54
Attitudes	6	How well does this statement apply to you?	I think it is important that children and young people work for a righteous world.	1 = does not apply to me at all to 4 = applies to me completely	.68
Skills	5	How good are you at . . .	. . . being able to image how another will feel if you give your opinion about him or her?	1 = not good at all to 4 = very good	.76
Reflection	6	How often do you think about . . .	. . . why there are rich and poor countries?	1 = almost never/ never to 4 = frequently	.84

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Number of items	Phrasing of the questions	Example of a statement/item	Answer categories	Cronbach's alphas <sup>a</sup>
Dealing with conflicts <sup>b</sup> Knowledge 7	The multiple-choice questions below are not about your opinion. They focus on your knowledge, and there is only one answer correct. Please indicate the correct answer.	You have a violent quarrel with a classmate. You subsequently realize that was your fault. What can you best do? (a) I'm going get her out of the way, (b) I'm going to say "sorry" because I wasn't right, or (c) I will act normally toward her, but I won't talk with her about our quarrel.	Multiple choice; a correct answer (in the example it was answer "b") was coded as 1, and in incorrect answer was coded as 0.	.62
Attitudes 6	How well does this statement apply to you?	If I have a quarrel with someone, I want to find out where we agree and where we disagree. ... a conflict that maybe the other person is right?	1 = does not apply to me at all to 4 = applies to me completely	.79
Reflection 8	How often do you think in ...		1 = almost never/ never to 4 = frequently	.89

(continued)

**Table 2. (continued)**

Number of items	Phrasing of the questions	Example of a statement/item	Answer categories	Cronbach's alphas <sup>a</sup>	
<b>Dealing with differences</b>					
Knowledge	6	The multiple-choice questions below are not about your opinion. They focus on your knowledge, and there is only one answer correct. Please indicate the correct answer. How well does this statement apply to you?	It is a bias if someone says: (a) men drive cars better than women, (b) there are more Turkish than Spanish people living in the Netherlands, or (c) if you don't have a diploma, it will be difficult to get a job.	Multiple choice; a correct answer (in the example answer "a") was coded as 1, and an incorrect answer was coded as 0.	.63
Attitudes	6	How well does this statement apply to you?	I think it is good to learn about other cultures.	1 = <i>does not apply to me at all</i> to 4 = <i>applies to me completely</i>	.85
Skills	4	How good are you at . . .	. . . adapting to other people's rules and habits?	1 = <i>not good at all</i> to 4 = <i>very good</i>	.67
Reflection	8	How often do you think about . . .	. . . why some girls want to wear a headscarf?	1 = <i>almost never!</i> never to 4 = <i>frequently</i>	.85

<sup>a</sup>Cronbach's alpha's are based on the full sample from the original study.

<sup>b</sup>There is no separate subscale in the CCQ for skills pertaining to dealing with conflicts.

variance (ANOVAs). For the power analyses, an effect size of  $f^2 = .35$  and an alpha of  $.05$  were used. The results of the power analyses indicated that the sample size was large enough to compare 32 children in female same-sex parent families with 32 in opposite-sex parent families on the dependent variables.

To ascertain that the matched sample in the present study was representative of the broader COOL data group, we undertook the following procedure (see also Rivers et al., 2008; Wainright et al., 2004; Wainright & Patterson, 2006, 2008): (a) using the total COOL sample of elementary school children, we calculated means scores for all dependent variables used in the present study and (b) using a MANOVA, we compared these scores for children in our selected group of opposite-sex parent families with the children in the entire COOL sample. These calculations and analyses revealed that the Wilks's  $\lambda$  showed no significant effect, Wilks's  $\lambda = 1.00$ ,  $F(16, 7215) = 1.55$ ,  $p = .073$ , leading to the conclusion that our selected group of 32 children from opposite-sex parent families had similar civic competence scores as the total COOL sample. Therefore, it was possible to compare civic competencies for the selected 32 children in opposite-sex parent families with the children in female same-sex parent families by a series of MANOVAs.

To assess differences between children with same-sex and opposite-sex parents on civic competence, a series of MANOVAs were carried out: one with all four "acting democratically" subscales as dependent variables; and one each with the four "acting in a socially responsible manner" subscales, the three "dealing with conflicts" subscales, and the four "dealing with differences" subscales as dependent variables. In all the MANOVAs, family composition (1 = *female same-sex parent family*; 2 = *opposite-sex parent family*) was included as the independent variable. When the Wilks's  $\lambda$  in a set of MANOVAs was significant, separate ANOVAs were carried out for the variables that were included in that set of analyses. The threshold for statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$  (two-tailed).

According to the developers of the CCQ (Ten Dam et al., 2011), civic competence scales can also be organized by creating the subscales knowledge, attitudes, skills, and reflection, independent of the social tasks. We also conducted a MANOVA for these subscales with family composition as independent variable.

## Results

### *Acting Democratically, Acting in a Socially Responsible Manner, Dealing With Conflicts, and Dealing With Differences*

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for the four components of civic competence (knowledge, attitudes, skill, and reflection) for each

**Table 3.** Means (Standard Deviations) for Civic Competence, Separately for Children in Female Same-Sex Parent Families and Children in Opposite-Sex Parent Families.

	Female same-sex parent families	Opposite-sex parent families	F	p	$\eta^2_p$
Acting democratically; Wilks's $\lambda = .82$ , $F(4, 55) = 2.99$ , $p = .026$					
Knowledge <sup>a</sup>	0.83 (0.16)	0.83 (0.18)	0.00	1.00	.00
Attitudes <sup>b</sup>	3.31 (0.50)	3.01 (0.44)	6.14	.016	.10
Skills <sup>b</sup>	2.99 (0.69)	2.79 (0.57)	1.49	.227	.03
Reflections <sup>b</sup>	2.48 (0.53)	2.11 (0.51)	7.73	.007	.12
Acting in a socially responsible manner; Wilks's $\lambda = .88$ , $F(4, 55) = 1.85$ , $p = .132$					
Knowledge <sup>a</sup>	0.77 (0.28)	0.83 (0.21)	0.84	.364	.02
Attitudes <sup>b</sup>	3.18 (0.49)	3.01 (0.38)	2.50	.119	.04
Skills <sup>b</sup>	3.03 (0.58)	2.77 (0.41)	3.83	.055	.06
Reflections <sup>b</sup>	2.30 (0.70)	1.92 (0.64)	4.83	.032	.08
Dealing with conflicts; Wilks's $\lambda = .82$ , $F(3, 58) = 4.25$ , $p = .009$					
Knowledge <sup>a</sup>	0.72 (0.24)	0.74 (0.23)	0.11	.742	.00
Attitudes <sup>b</sup>	3.01 (0.53)	2.60 (0.53)	9.15	.004	.13
Reflections <sup>b</sup>	2.60 (0.66)	2.31 (0.63)	3.10	.083	.05
Dealing with differences; Wilks's $\lambda = .82$ , $F(4, 55) = 3.11$ , $p = .022$					
Knowledge <sup>a</sup>	0.76 (0.21)	0.80 (0.20)	0.41	.525	.01
Attitudes <sup>b</sup>	3.00 (0.57)	2.52 (0.49)	12.30	.001	.18
Skills <sup>b</sup>	3.11 (0.45)	2.88 (0.44)	03.85	.054	.06
Reflections <sup>b</sup>	2.12 (0.72)	1.85 (0.52)	02.69	.107	.04
Summary of subscales across the social tasks; Wilks's $\lambda = .80$ , $F(4, 55) = 3.35$ , $p = .016$					
Knowledge <sup>a</sup>	0.78 (0.17)	0.79 (0.16)	0.19	.665	.00
Attitudes <sup>b</sup>	3.13 (0.44)	2.78 (0.34)	11.50	.001	.17
Skills <sup>b</sup>	3.04 (0.50)	2.82 (0.43)	3.56	.064	.06
Reflection <sup>b</sup>	2.37 (0.57)	2.05 (0.49)	5.17	.027	.08

Note. There is no subscale for skills in the SCQ pertaining to dealing with conflicts.

<sup>a</sup>Minimal-maximal score = 0–1.

<sup>b</sup>Minimal-maximal score = 1–4.

social task (acting democratically, acting in a socially responsible manner, dealing with conflicts, and dealing with differences).

*Acting democratically.* The MANOVA with the subscales regarding acting democratically (knowledge, attitudes, skills, and reflections) as dependent variables showed a significant effect for family composition, Wilks's  $\lambda = .82$ ,  $F(4, 55) = 2.99$ ,  $p = .026$ .

As shown in Table 3, ANOVAs revealed that children in two-mother families scored significantly higher than those with opposite-sex parents on the scale that measured attitudes toward wanting to hear everyone's voice. Children in female same-sex parent families also scored higher on "reflection on acting democratically" than their counterparts with opposite-sex parents (see also Table 3).

*Acting in a socially responsible manner.* Regarding the MANOVA on the four social responsibility subscales (knowledge, attitudes, skills, and reflections), no significant multivariate main effect was found for family type, Wilks's  $\lambda = .88$ ,  $F(4, 55) = 1.85$ ,  $p = .132$ . This finding indicates that there were no significant differences between the two family types in the children's knowledge, attitudes, skills, and reflection on the social tasks of acting in a socially responsible manner.

*Dealing with conflicts.* For dealing with conflicts, only three subscales were included as dependent variables in the MANOVA because there is no separate subscale in the CCQ for skills in this social task. A main effect was found for family type, Wilks's  $\lambda = .82$ ,  $F(3, 58) = 4.25$ ,  $p = .009$ . Separate ANOVAs on the subscales indicated that the multivariate main effect for family type was localized in "attitudes regarding dealing with conflicts": Children with female same-sex parents had higher scores on this subscale than children with opposite-sex parents, indicating that children in the former households were more willing to consider the standpoint of their peers and more willing to collaborate on an acceptable solution when they disagreed (see Table 3).

*Dealing with differences.* The MANOVA with the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and reflection subscales in the social task of dealing with differences showed a multivariate main effect for family type, Wilks's  $\lambda = .82$ ,  $F(4, 55) = 3.11$ ,  $p = .022$ . In the ANOVAs, the main effect for family type was localized in "attitudes regarding dealing with differences": Children in families with two female parents scored higher on this subscale than children in opposite-sex parent families (see Table 3). This finding indicates that children with female same-sex parents have a more positive attitude toward differences, and are more willing to learn about other people's opinions and lifestyles, than children with opposite-sex parents.

### *Knowledge, Attitudes, Skill, and Reflection*

We also analyzed the total scores on each competence by calculating the mean scores on all knowledge, attitudes, skills, and reflection subscales

(see Table 3). We then performed a MANOVA for these subscales in order to investigate any significant differences between children with same- and opposite-sex parents. This revealed that Wilks's  $\lambda$  showed a significant effect, Wilks's  $\lambda = .80$ ,  $F(4, 55) = 3.35$ ,  $p = .016$ . As shown in Table 3, a set of four ANOVAs revealed that the multivariate main effect for family type was localized in "attitudes" and "reflection": children with female same-sex parents scored significantly higher on the overall subscale "attitudes" (thoughts and desires) than their counterparts with opposite-sex parents. For the overall subscale "reflection," children in female same-sex parent families also scored higher than children in opposite-sex parent families.

## Discussion

In the present study, we investigated the hypothesis formulated by Tasker and Golombok in 1998 that growing up in a nontraditional family might be associated with a greater appreciation of diversity within society. This assumption was examined by comparing civic competence in children raised in female same-sex parent and opposite-sex parent households. Our results revealed that children raised in families with two mothers scored significantly higher on attitudes with respect to acting democratically, dealing with conflicts, and dealing with differences. The current investigation provides the first empirical evidence in support of Tasker and Golombok's hypothesis.

A strength of the present study is that it is drawn from a national survey of children's civic competence (COOL survey) that was not designed to compare children in different family types. One concern regarding previous studies on lesbian families is that most are based on convenience samples (see for overview Bos, 2012; Russell & Muraco, 2012). In contrast, the present study drew children with female same-sex parents from a national sample.

We were fortunate that the COOL survey contained several questions about family composition that allowed us to identify children in same- and opposite-sex parent families. The 32 children in female same-sex families were matched with 32 in opposite-sex parent families that were randomly selected from the entire COOL database. Before conducting the analyses, we verified that the selected children in opposite-sex families were representative of the broader COOL data group. As such, the differences in civic competence between the children in female same-sex and opposite-sex parent families are unlikely due to the selection methodology.

As in other investigations based on population surveys (Rivers et al., 2008; Wainright et al., 2004, Wainright & Patterson, 2006, 2008), our sample demonstrated more diversity in parental education than was found in previous studies on lesbian families drawn from convenience samples. For example, in



the present study, only one third of the two-mother households included a parent who had received a vocational or academic diploma—a much lower percentage than found in other Dutch studies of lesbian families that were recruited through the lesbian/gay community (Bos, 2004; Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2004).

In the current study, the children in two-mother families may have scored significantly higher on attitudes in four areas of civic competence because they had a greater awareness of their minority status from an early age that enhanced their understanding of how people handle social, cultural, religious, and other differences. It is also possible that mothers in same-sex parent families draw on their own experience of minority status to teach their children about civic competence.

We did not find significant differences between children in female same-sex parent and opposite-sex parent families on knowledge and skills regarding the different social tasks of civic competence. The acquisition of such knowledge and skills may be age-dependent. The children in the present study ranged in age from 11 to 13 years old. More differences on the knowledge and skills dimensions of civic competence might be found if the studied groups consisted of adolescents, since adolescence is a time when the offspring of same-sex parents develop a keener awareness of their minority status alongside their growing sense of confidence in their ability to effect change (Bos & Gartrell, 2010; Golombok & Tasker, 1996; Rivers et al., 2008).

There are several limitations of the present study that also deserve mention. First, the present study was carried out in the Netherlands, and as such we cannot generalize the findings to the civic competence of children raised in other countries. Second, we do not know the sexual identity of the parents, nor do we know whether the children were born within the parents' current relationship. Nevertheless, growing up in a two-mother family confers minority status to the involved children. Another limitation is the relatively small sample used for comparing children in female same-sex and opposite-sex parent households, even though our power analyses found that the sample size was more than adequate.

A final limitation is that the children with two mothers were predominantly Dutch or Western in ethnicity, with insufficient representation of ethnic minority children. Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black, and Burkholder (2003) have shown that multiple minority identities present their own unique challenges and opportunities. To the extent that children with female same-sex parents in the current study may have benefitted from parental education about acceptance and inclusiveness, future studies may find that children with multiple minority identities demonstrate even higher scores on civic

competence. Moreover, as more children reared by same-sex parents enter the school system, it will be possible to track civic competence in larger samples that include different ethnicities as well as family constellations, such as those reared by male same-sex parents, bisexual parents, and transgender parents.

## Conclusion

The findings from the current study contribute to the existing literature on same-sex parent families by addressing a new topic that has not previously been studied in this population, namely, civic competence. Building upon the pioneering work of Wainright and Patterson (2006, 2008) in the United States and Rivers et al. (2008) in the United Kingdom, the current investigation is the first of its kind in the Netherlands to use a school-based survey to match children in same- and opposite-sex parent households in a nationally representative sample. Our study revealed that female same-sex parent families create a particularly favorable environment for the development of good citizenship, specifically concerning children's attitudes regarding acting democratically, dealing with conflicts, and dealing with differences. In a society where children in all family types are required to negotiate and make decisions about a broad range of options in a complex society (Roberson, 2012), the acquisition of civic competence skills prepares young people to face the challenges of everyday life in a competent and confident manner.

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